Investigating the Relationship between Job Resources and Job Burnout with Regard to the Factor of Equity

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This study aimed to investigate the relationship between job Burnout and job resources while taking into account the factor of equity. This field research is an applied research in terms of purpose. It is descriptive in nature following correlational method. Population of the study included the entire staff of 150 at health and care network in Shahinshahr, Isfahan, established in 2014. Through the Cohen, Morgan, and Kerjcie table, 113 individuals were selected through non-probability sampling. In this study, the data were collected through a standard questionnaire and reliability and validity of the questionnaires were confirmed by experts in the field. Data were analyzed by Pearson’s correlation, multivariate regression analysis, and Amos path analysis. The results of the regression analysis and path analysis confirmed the relationship between job resources and job Burnout, job resources and equity, as well as the relationship between equity and job Burnout. It was concluded that equity operated as a mediator.

Keywords: Job resources, job Burnout, equity

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, significant advances in technology and industries have resulted in a wave of stress which has damaged the health of individuals. In different organizations, many factors can lead to stress. These factors may ultimately cause burnout, which is a psychological process resulting from high occupational stress and presents in the form of emotional fatigue, personality metamorphosis, and lowered sense of accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; obtained from Zargaran Moghadam,
2011). According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), in high-stress situations, employees with higher levels of resources are better able to cope with job pressures and thus experience less fatigue (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Zargaran Moghadam, 2011). Job resources refer to physical, mental, social, or organizational attributes of a job which allow goals to be attained and job demands to be met (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2003). Various job resources, including clarity of duties, growth opportunities, support and guidance, job control, and performance feedback, lead to higher levels of engagement (Bakker et al., 2003; Hakanen et al., 2005) and prevent mental fatigue (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Zargaran Moghadam, 2011). Furthermore, equity theory, presented by Adams, is predicated on the assumption that individuals prefer to be treated fairly (Moorhed/Greffin, 2010: 140-141). According to this theory, equity is determined using a very simple comparison of one’s inputs and outputs to those of others (Ahmadi, 2007: 121). If compared to job demands, the resources of a job are perceived to be equal, then a sense of justice is generated; otherwise, employees feel that they are being treated unjustly (Lazarus & Falkman, 1984) and may experience burnout (Hu, 2013). Employees determine the extent to which they become engaged as a response to the resources they receive from the organization. If the organization is unable to provide its members with adequate resources, they are very likely to quit their jobs and lose commitment (Saks, 2006). Historically, burnout was believed to be caused by excessive encounters with human beings. Physicians and health workers are among those who report high levels of burnout because they are responsible for the health of the entire population, which extremely overwhelming. Since burnout leads to fatigue and stress, the person’s entire life including waking hours, are affected (Hershenson & Power, 1995). Research on the mediating role of equity in the relationship between job resources and burnout is lacking. In this study, we aim to address this relationship and explore the role of equity.

Job burnout

The term burnout was first coined in the 1970s by Freudenberger to describe the gradual emotional depletion and loss of motivation he observed among people who had volunteered to work for aid organizations in New York. The volunteers had worked with great dedication and enthusiasm for several months prior to the onset of these symptoms (Längle 2003). On the basis of his observations, Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout as “a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one’s professional life,” and he referred to “the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one’s devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results.” Thus, individuals who burn out from their work deplete their energetic resources and lose their dedication to work. During the same time period, Maslach and colleague esinterviewed human -services workers in California to find out how they were coping with client-related stressors (Maslach & Jackson 1981). The human-services workers used the term burnout and indicated that they experienced feelings of exhaustion, had developed negative attitudes toward their clients, and often felt that they lacked the professional competence needed to help their clients (Schaufeli et al. 2009b). On the basis of the interviews, Maslach and Jackson defined burnout as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally drained by one’s contact with other people, and it is the central strain dimension of burnout. Depersonalization refers to a negative or excessively detached response toward these people, who are the recipients of one’s service or care. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one’s feelings of competence and successful achievement at work (see also Maslach & Jackson 1984, Maslach & Leiter 2008). Originally, scholars assumed that burnout was a response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work (Etzion 1984, Maslach et al. 2001). Although research has confirmed that burnout is a slow process of progressive loss of energy and enthusiasm (Kant et al. 2004, Leiter & Maslach 2006), the idea that burnout is exclusively found in the human-services sector was rejected, and researchers have adapted the first conceptualizations of burnout to make it applicable to workers in various occupations. For instance, in the Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey (MBI-GS), Schaufeli et al. (1996)
replaced the depersonalization component with cynicism, which reflects a distant attitude toward work in general and not necessarily toward other people. Furthermore, the authors replaced the concept of reduced personal accomplishment with reduced professional efficacy, referring to social and nonsocial aspects of occupational accomplishments. Other scholars have developed alternative measures to assess burnout, most notably the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; Demerouti et al. 2003, Demerouti et al. 2010) and the Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure (SMBM; Shirom & Melamed 2006). Whereas the OLBI assesses the dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement, the SMBM assesses the dimensions of physical fatigue and cognitive weariness.

**Job Resources**

Job resources are physical, psychological, social, and organizational characteristics of the job that are effective in achieving the working goals, and reduction of job demand. They facilitate working goals motivating personal improvement, learning, and development. Hobfoll (1998) discusses four types of resources: objectives, conditions, energy, and characteristics. Target resources are significant due to their physical nature and ability to maintain their existence (such as food and water) or because of their scarcity (e.g. diamond). Conditional resources are significant situations like seniority. Energy resources are desirable because they can be exchanged with other valuable resources (like money, time and effort). And finally, personal characteristics are resources helping in response to stress and its recovery (Hobfoll, 2001). Wang (2007) described resources as the ability to fulfill the requirements including physical, cognitive, motivational, financial and social resources. Clearly, in the organizational framework, employees are expected to apply some of their resources (like time and effort) in exchange for others (like money, situation, and self-confidence). The organizations providing sufficient resources for the personnel, probably receive more resources from them. This is because organizational resources provide some tools through which individual resources can be increased.

Resources are desirable per se and are also a means to achieve other resources (Wang, 2007). Job resources may be at different levels of the organization (such as salaries, job opportunities, job security), social relations and interpersonal (supervisor and peer support, job team), organization of work (role clarity, participation in decision making) and duty (performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy and freedom of action) (Bakker & Leiter, 2010), (Isa Khani, 2013).

In this study, to understand job resources, the frameworks used by Hu (2013), is applied and therefore the components of job resources are as follows:

**Job control:** Job control is concerned with the control over the decision-making process, which means, the ability to make decision and opportunity to exercise control over the work in order to accomplish it (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

**Growth opportunities:** It is the very potential ability of individuals to succeed, and according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is located below the need of self-actualization. Need for growth is one of the main aspects of the content motivate theories, which in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, are two levels above the classification (self-actualization and respect) focused on the needs of growth and development. Moreover, in Herzberg two-factor theory, it is among provocative topics and according to the Alderf's theory of ERG, it is presented as one of the three factors rising along with biological and belongingness needs (Ahmadi, 2006, p. 108).

**Clarity of duty:** House, Rizzo and Keller in their studies have found that when employees’ responsibility, supervisors’ expectations and standards of reward and punishment is not clear, the employees would be dissatisfied with their jobs. According to this theory, clarity of roles and responsibility, administrative expectations, assessment criteria, and continuous and exact informing of the assessment results, increased job satisfaction and made employees value their jobs. Furthermore, it can be concluded that one of factors of low job satisfaction and organizational status can be ambiguities in some of their tasks and uncertainty of reward and punishment measures such as promotion, transfer, etc. (Ahmadi, 2005).

**Equity**
In theories of social exchange, equity is basically a social process or an interpersonal comparison (Huki, 1997). In the theory of equity, every one compares the result of his work with others, feeling equity or inequity. Results and inputs of the person and others are based on the personal assumptions. Age, gender, level of education, social experience, organizational status, and the degree of effort of the individual are all, examples of inputs. The results include factors such as salary, status, organizational level, reward, and promotion. When an individual feels inequity in comparison with others, he tries to reach equity. The effort to reach equity is a sign of work motivation. The strength of this motivation is directly related to the inequity level perceived by individuals. To reach equity, individual shows different behaviors and changes the results or data. Based on this theory, individuals naturally seek equity, even when they feel positive inequity. Moreover, those who feel negative inequity, for example, they work more than others, but were paid less, try to reach the equity by less work or reduction in quality (Alvani, 2008, p. 163).

Job Resources and Job Burnout

The JD-R model assumes that resources prevent mental fatigue. In high-stress situations, employees with vast resources are better able to fulfill their duties, while simultaneously deal with stress, which is why they experience less fatigue (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Previous studies demonstrate that resources impact the level of stress experienced by employees as well as their responses to this stress (Kim, 2008). Job resources such as training, support, and fair rewards enable employees to overcome stresses caused by their jobs and manage their circumstances. This in turn leads to lower tendencies for negative behavior (Adibi & Golparvar& Masahebi, 2012).

According to the JD-R model, job control relates to control over the working process i.e. decision-making ability or the opportunity to exert control over one’s work. The highest level of stress is caused by high demands while having very little control. In two studies by Bakker et al., it was shown that occupations where one has almost no control over one’s decisions are associated with high degrees of burnout. In another study, titled “The Role of Job Autonomy and Control in Predicting Burnout”, job control was found to mediate the adverse effects of job demands only when employees were highly autonomous (Jahanbakhsh& Arizi Samani, 2009). In a study titled “Job Demand, Control, and Burnout among Police Officers”, which was conducted on 223 police officers in Norway, the authors reported that both job demands and job control are related to burnout (Martinussen at al., 2007). Studies show that employees in flat organizations are more satisfied with their jobs, while being less fatigued. This may be due to the fact that employees, through the organizational structure, are forced to make more decisions, which makes their jobs meaningful. This in turn enhances the feelings of autonomy, responsibility, assuredness, control, and ownership. In general, organizational structures which allow employees to make more decisions are known to cause less burnout (Rapaport, 1991; obtained from Emami, 2010). Regarding the explanation above, the first hypothesis about the significant relationship between job resources and job burnout is examined.

Hypothesis 1: Job resources have relationship with job burnout.

Job resources and equity

When employee efforts are effective and there is a balance between their inputs and outputs, they feel equity. However, when their efforts do not make expected result and working efficiency against demands is insufficient, they will feel inequity. Employee health is related to the balance between data and job (job demand) and achieved rewards in the job (job resources). Due to lack of balance more effort and less reward can be expected, which threaten health (Hu, 2013). Employees who receive less benefit, have insufficient job resources compared to the job demand, and those who receive more benefit, have access to the job resources. When available job resources is sufficient compared to the demands, the balance and equity is established in this situation (Lazarus&Falkman, 1984). Samavatian (2008) in research indicated that, there is a significant relationship between equity perception and type of employment, level of income and employees' residence. According to the above theoretical and empirical issues, the relationship between job resources and equity in the target population is examined.
Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between job resources and equity.

**Equity and job Burnout**

Social Exchange Theory explains that employees constantly seek a balance between their inputs and outputs. Those who feel that there is an imbalance will experience harmful stress. Lack of equity leads to negative emotions and behaviors whereas equity creates positive ones (Lazarus & Farkman, 1984). Robinson et al. (2004), who studied over ten thousand insurance workers in England, propose a number of drivers for job engagement, among which equal behavior is fourth. In long-term, existing resources may lead to other resources being obtained, which ultimately allows a vast collection of resources to be constructed with many positive outcomes such as health, and ways of preventing stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Lack of equity leads to negative emotions and behaviors whereas equity creates positive ones (Lazarus & Farkman, 1984). Buunk and Schaufeli (1999) argue that imbalance between inputs and outputs causes the release of emotions which in turn causes burnout. They believe that wasting energy without gaining anything creates both emotional fatigue and the desire to reestablish the balance. Emotional fatigue and depression are signs of job burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). Other studies have confirmed the relationship between perceived injustice and burnout (Hu, 2013).

Hypothesis 3: Equity has relationship with job burnout.

Literature indicated the relationship between job resources and job burnout, the relationship between job resources and equity and the relationship between equity and job burnout. Therefore in this research it is suggested that:

Hypothesis 4: equity has a mediation effect on the relationship between job resources and job burnout in the target population.

**METHOD**

**Instruments and population size**

The present study is an applicative survey and a correlational descriptive research regarding the nature and method of the research. The statistical population was 150 employees of Health and Care center in Shahin shahr, Isfahan in 2014. Based on the Kerjcie, Morgan, and Cohen's table, 113 persons were drawn to take part in this study. The sample was selected through non-probability sampling. The questionnaire was considered as the main data collection tools. Other tools for data collection were as follows:

1. **Job resources index:** to measure the job resources, a 13- item questionnaire derived from questionnaire on the experience and evaluation of work (QEEW) by Zheng (2010) and Hu (2013) was used.

2. **Job burnout Index:** Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS), which includes nine items on burnout. (Hu & Schaufeli, 2011).

3. **Equity index:** a 14-item questionnaire of perception of equity derived from theory of equity by Adams and the third volume of 12-volumed book by Moghimi and Ramezani. All the questions are set in form of a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Content validity of the research was investigated and confirmed by experts in the field. In order to determine the reliability of the research, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the main variables. It was 0.849 for job resources, 0.909 for job burnout, and 0.87 for equity. In this study, the normality of the variables was confirmed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In order to determine the relationship between variables using SPSS software, Pearson correlation coefficients between variables were determined. And finally, path analysis was carried out using Amos5 software to investigate the effect of variables on each other and to explore the direct and indirect relationship between variables.

**FINDINGS**

**Correlation analysis**

Table 1 shows the correlation between variables along with mean and standard deviation. As shown, the relationships among the variables are as follows:
1) The relationship between job resources and burnout: Resources are negatively related to burnout. In other words, increasing resources prevent job burnout.

2) The relationship between job resources and equity: Job resources and equity of employment are positively correlated, which means that more job resources result in a sense of equity.

3) The relationship between equality and burnout: Equality and burnout are negatively related. In other words, if employees perceive equality they are less likely to experience burnout.

Correlations only reveal the relationship between variables. In order to understand direct and indirect perception and also the effect of mediation variables, further analysis by path analysis is required.

**TABLE 1 HERE**

**Path Analysis**

In the present study, the path analysis of Amos5 software was used to test the hypothesis and suggested models. The result shown at Table 2 indicated that job resources have direct effect and also indirect effect, through equity, on job burnout while indirect effect is -0.052 more than direct effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that equity has mediation effect on the relationship between job resources and job burnout through which the main hypothesis is supported.

**TABLE 2 HERE**

**Conclusion and Discussion**

In this paper, we focused on the relationship between job burnout and equity, both theoretically and empirically, by considering the mediating role of equity. Correlation and path analyses revealed a significant relationship job resources and burnout (H1), job resources and equity (H2), and equity and burnout (H3). Furthermore, the mediating role of equity in the relationship between burnout and job resources was also confirmed. The findings of this study are in line with those of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Hu (2013), Rapaport (1991; obtained from Emami, 2010), Lazarus and falkman (1984), Robinson et al. (2004), Buunk and Schaufeli (1999), Schaufeli and Taris, (2005), Abidi (2012), Samavatian (2008), and Jahanbakhsh. All these authors studied the impact of job resources on burnout and found that job resources prevent burnout and the relationship between the two is mediated by equity. Moreover, job resources are able to affect burnout both directly and indirectly through equity. Managers and authorities at health centers may organize training programs to teach employees how to become more involved and prevent burnout. If employees are allowed to choose their methods and schedule in their environment and feel that they can participate in choosing their own standards of evaluation, they will experience much lower degrees of fatigue and burnout. If employees have only one direct supervisor, then they will not be forced to work with conflicting requests, which reduces confusion and weakens the structure of burnout in the organization. This ultimately improves efficiency and effectiveness. This was a case study in an organization, which considered the employees of the entire organization. Therefore, we recommend that the study be carried out in other settings to help generalize the findings. Further, other job resources such as self-efficacy, and communication should also be included in the models of other studies.

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APPENDIX

Fig 1. The conceptual model of the present study

![Diagram of the conceptual model]

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Job Resources</td>
<td>3.6208</td>
<td>0.60155</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.791</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>3.3869</td>
<td>0.68390</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Job burnout</td>
<td>2.6903</td>
<td>0.93334</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation at 0.05 is significant. (Mutual)

Table 2. Direct and indirect relationship between variables

<table>
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<th>equity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
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<td>-----</td>
</tr>
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<td>-0.052</td>
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