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# Psychosocial Hazards and Occupational Well-Being Deficit in the Gig Economy: A Mediated Model of Emotional Exhaustion

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## Abstract

**Background**: The gig economy has transformed modern employment by increasing flexible and customer-oriented work opportunities. However, workers in such environments often face psychosocial hazards such as customer pressure, emotional demands, and workplace stress, which can negatively affect their occupational well-being. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the impact of customer-related psychosocial hazards on occupational well-being deficit by analyzing the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. It also explores the influence of occupational self-efficacy, occupational behavior, and occupational social support. **Methods:** A quantitative research design was adopted using a sample of 330 respondents, and data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The study assessed reliability, validity, direct effects, mediation, and moderation relationships among the constructs. **Results:** The findings revealed that customer-related psychosocial hazards significantly increase emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was found to strongly influence occupational well-being. Occupational social support reduced emotional exhaustion, while occupational self-efficacy showed a significant positive relationship with exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion significantly mediated the relationship between psychosocial hazards, self-efficacy, social support, and occupational well-being. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that emotional exhaustion is a critical mechanism linking workplace hazards to employee well-being in the gig economy. Reducing psychosocial risks and strengthening workplace support systems can improve employee well-being and organizational sustainability.

**Major Findings:** Psychosocial hazards positively affect emotional exhaustion and Emotional exhaustion plays a strong mediating role between workplace factors and well-being deficit.

**Keywords:** Emotional Exhaustion, Gig Economy, Occupational Self-Efficacy, Occupational Social Support, Occupational Well-Being Deficit, Psychosocial Hazards

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## 1. Introduction

A nature of work in contemporary organization's job has changed. Employees working in customer-related service occupations face both task and interpersonal/emotional demands. Difficult customer interactions, pressures, and efforts to control emotions become customer-related psychosocial hazards, causing substantial psychological stress and posing threats to employee well-being and health[1]. Numerous studies within the field of occupational health have demonstrated that persistent psychosocial demands at work cause burnout, emotional depletion, and reduced effectiveness of functioning of employees, especially when these demands involve sustained emotional labor and interpersonal control. Thus, there is a need to get a clearer understanding of the influence of customer-related psychosocial hazards on the results and well-being of employees.

One of the major results that should be examined here is the emotional exhaustion of workers. Emotional

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exhaustion is viewed as the core aspect of burnout syndrome an employee feels emotionally overextended and exhausted because of the inability to meet work demand[2]. When workers face constant stresses caused by difficult customer interactions, their emotional resources become depleted and they are no longer able to cope with new stresses efficiently. Such process is especially true for those occupations when people should maintain positive display, control their frustration and solve customer's problems in a limited time period. In the literature, emotional exhaustion is known not only as the direct result of stresses but as a mediating variable of influence of workplace demands on other results (for example, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intentions and occupational well-being).

The present research is based on the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R), which helps understand the way work conditions influence employee health and motivation[1]. According to the JD-R theory, each occupation includes both job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the job aspects that require physical, cognitive or emotional efforts and involve psychological cost. In turn, job resources are elements of the work environment which can help employees to achieve their objectives, to reduce work demands and increase opportunities for their personal development and well-being[3,4]. Customer-related psychosocial hazards can be considered as job demands in the present study, since they involve continuous emotional regulation, coping and resilience efforts. Prolonged exposure to such demands causes emotional exhaustion and reduces employee well-being[3].

Apart from job demands, according to the JD-R theory, it is possible to mention the importance of job resources. They can buffer the negative effects of workplace hazards and contribute to employee resilience. In the present study, occupational social support will be viewed as a major social job resource. Social support from co-workers, supervisor and organization itself involves emotional reassurance, practical support and feeling of inclusion and reduces the impact of stresses on the psychological condition[5]. It has been proved many times that the supportive work environment decreases the level of burnout and improves psychological state of workers[6]. In highly emotionally demanding jobs, the support becomes especially important, since employees not only need it but also require some assistance for efficient performance.

Occupational self-efficacy is another factor considered in the present research. Self-efficacy can be defined as the beliefs about one's capabilities for handling challenges and successful performance of task[3]. In the occupational setting, self-efficacy means that people can cope with workplace demands effectively, persist in difficult situation and feel confident under pressure[3].

Finally, occupational well-being can be considered as the next result of interest in the study. Occupational well-being involves the positive functioning, comfort and health of employees in the work context[5]. This measure is important because it indicates the quality of employee's working life and is linked to performance, retention, customer service quality and organizational sustainability[7].

## 1.1 Theoretical Background

The current research is built largely on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model[1]. As per the model, all work-related features can be broadly grouped into either job demands or job resources. The former refers to work characteristics that require effort and result in physical or psychological stress while the latter help employees to attain work-related goals and decrease demands, facilitate development, and improve the well-being of employees.

In line with this approach, psychosocial hazards associated with customers can be viewed as job demands because they are associated with efforts to regulate emotions and pay attention. Such demands when intensive or continuous tend to result in emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, occupational social support serves as a job resource because it may help avoid strain and create an opportunity for recovery from it. Occupationally related self-efficacy is considered personal resource as it allows people to feel confident enough in their ability to cope with job-related problems[7].

The research also involves implicit application of the Conservation of Resources theory[8] according to which stress arises when one loses his/her valuable resources or feels under threat of losing them. Emotional exhaustion should thus be viewed as a result of resources depletion. As a result of repeated exposure to psychosocial hazards, employees lose emotional and cognitive resources that ultimately result in an occupational well-being deficit.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Psychosocial Customer-Related Hazards and Occupational Stress

Psychosocial hazards related to customers have become an increasingly popular topic in research on service jobs and jobs requiring considerable people contact. These types of hazards appear when workers are exposed to stressful interpersonal interactions, such as hostile behavior, verbal abuse, unrealistic expectations of customers, emotional pressure, complaints, and persistent requests for emotional regulation[9]. While physical hazards are usually easy to notice, psychosocial hazards may be as harmful as the former because they accumulate over time and gradually deplete psychological resources. Workers in occupations involving interaction with demanding customers need to not only resolve issues and problems of customers but also regulate their own emotions and maintain a professional image regardless of how unpleasant the interaction is. All of that may lead to increased stress and more emotional exhaustion[4].

It is well known in the occupational stress literature that repeated exposure to difficult interpersonal interactions increases the risk of burnout and decreases worker functioning. Particularly, in the case of service jobs, workers do not always have the possibility to avoid stress-provoking interactions and, besides, are supposed to stay polite and composed, which increases the strain. These aspects make customer-related psychosocial hazards a good indicator of well-being and a variable allowing to analyze workplace demands[2,4].

## 2.2 Emotional Exhaustion as a Core Outcome

Emotional exhaustion is commonly seen as the main component of burnout syndrome and the earliest indicator of overexertion and excessive demands placed by work[2]. This condition is characterized by feeling exhausted, depleted, and incapable of recuperation from work stress. In case of jobs involving customer-related interactions, exhaustion appears due to repeated efforts needed to regulate emotions, pay attention and behave properly during interactions. With time, this exhaustion limits the possibilities of workers to be attentive and energetic.

There is no doubt that previous studies have revealed a correlation between emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction, reduced productivity, absenteeism, and poor occupational well-being[7]. Being an element of the stress process, emotional exhaustion becomes both an outcome and a mediating mechanism through which occupational demands affect employee outcomes. Thus, it becomes relevant for the current study.

## 2.3 Occupational Well-Being Deficit in Demand-Provoking Work Contexts

Occupational well-being Deficit is a concept describing the erosion of health, balance, satisfaction and psychological functioning in workers' occupational roles[7]. In other words, it encompasses both the absence of strain and positive functioning in work roles. In case of occupations with high demands, well-being is threatened by permanent interpersonal strain, emotional labor and workload intensity. In case of the necessity to maintain effort in stressful conditions without the possibility to recuperate, well-being becomes compromised.

In literature, the occupational well-being deficit is often explained by burnout processes, including emotional exhaustion[2]. The higher the level of exhaustion, the worse the employee feels about his/her work, thereby expanding the deficit. Due to that, it becomes necessary to examine the predictors of emotional exhaustion in order to understand the occupational well-being deficit more broadly.

## 2.4 Occupational Social Support as a Protective Resource

Occupational social support is one of the most studied job resources in occupational health literature. This support includes emotional, informational and instrumental help provided by supervisors, co-workers and organizations[5,10]. Social support is believed to have protective qualities since it helps employees feel valued and less lonely and reduces the negative effects of stress[5,8]. In stressful emotionally demanding workplaces, social support helps workers with dealing with customer interactions.

From the Job Demands-Resources approach, social support helps to buffer the effects of high demands and prevents employees from exhaustion. Social support improves coping with difficulties, facilitates the process of recovery and reduces the perception that employees are left alone with the job demands. As a result, it is often associated with lower levels of burnout and better well-being. Consequently, social support is one of the key resources that needs to be taken into account in the current

study as a protective factor that can prevent employees from exhaustion.

## 2.5 Occupational Self-Efficacy as a Personal Resource

Occupational self-efficacy is a variable referring to workers' beliefs in their abilities to perform work tasks successfully[11].

Self-efficacy is an important personal resource that determines how job demands are perceived and how much effort is spent to cope with them. Workers with high self-efficacy tend to be more ready to face stressors, adapt to changes and overcome obstacles.

Despite the fact that this construct is considered as positive, its impact in cases of high-demanding customer-related occupations may be controversial. Workers with high self-efficacy may tend to take challenging tasks and spend much effort, thus, exposing themselves to high levels of emotional strain in challenging situations. This makes it necessary to examine the impact of self-efficacy as a potential resource in the broader model including both demands and resources.

## 2.6 Occupational Behaviour and Work Strain

Occupational behaviour is a variable referring to the way of performing work roles, responding to expectations and managing job demands[6]. In service jobs, this includes compliance with organizational standards, emotional regulation, attentiveness and persistence in stressful conditions. While such behaviours may allow to provide better services, they may also involve additional effort if employees have to suppress their negative emotions or continue performing in stress.

In the literature, occupational behaviours are often said to have protective qualities, but this depends on specific working conditions. In demanding customer-related environments, occupational behaviours may become a source of additional efforts, since workers have to constantly adapt their behaviour to customer and organizational demands. Thus, there is a high probability that some behaviours increase the risk of emotional exhaustion.

## 2.7 Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediating Mechanism

Nowadays, there is a rapidly growing body of evidence showing that emotional exhaustion is not only an outcome but also a mediator of effects of workplace conditions on well-being[8]. According to this theory, employees encounter stresses and resources and their experience of emotional depletion becomes the next step and affects their occupational well-being.

Thus, the mediating role becomes particularly important for the current study because it helps to explain how customer-related psychosocial hazards, self-efficacy, occupational behaviour and social support may affect well-being through the same psychological pathway. Instead of assuming the direct effects, the literature suggests the process approach according to which emotional exhaustion becomes the mediating mechanism.

## 2.8 Research Gap and Summary

While there is abundant literature on burnout, social support, self-efficacy and occupational well-being deficit, fewer studies explore these concepts in one integrated model based on customer-related psychosocial hazards. Particularly, the literature lacks the data on how personal and social resources interact with workplace demands in terms of emotional exhaustion and the occupational well-being deficit. The current study fills in this gap offering a model that involves job demands, personal and social resources simultaneously.

In summary, the literature suggests that customer-related psychosocial hazards increase emotional exhaustion, while occupational social support and occupational self-efficacy may influence the way in which workers experience and cope with those demands. Emotional exhaustion becomes a key mediating mechanism in these processes, ultimately brings the occupational well-being deficit.

## 2.9 Hypothesis Development

### *2.9.1 Direct Relationships*

The present study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, which posits that demanding work conditions deplete employees' psychological resources and contribute to emotional exhaustion, while personal and organizational resources help individuals cope with workplace challenges. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that psychosocial hazards such as excessive customer demands, emotional labor, role stress, and workplace pressures are significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. Employees exposed to persistent psychosocial stressors are more likely to

experience fatigue, stress, and burnout symptoms, which exacerbate their occupational well-being deficit[6,12].

Emotional exhaustion has also been identified as a critical determinant of occupational well-being. Research suggests that exhausted employees experience lower levels of psychological health, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished workplace engagement. Emotional exhaustion often serves as a central mechanism through which adverse workplace conditions increase the employee well-being deficit[2].

In contrast, the relationship between occupational behaviour and emotional exhaustion remains less conclusive. While certain behavioural patterns may influence stress perceptions and coping mechanisms, empirical findings regarding their direct impact on emotional exhaustion remain inconsistent[13].

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1:** Customer-related psychosocial hazards positively influence emotional exhaustion.

**H2:** Emotional exhaustion significantly influences occupational well-being deficit.

**H3:** Occupational behaviour significantly influences emotional exhaustion.

*2.9.2 Resource-Based Relationships and Moderating Effects*

Personal resources play an important role in determining how employees respond to workplace stressors. Occupational self-efficacy reflects an individual's confidence in managing job-related demands and challenges. Prior research suggests that self-efficacy influences stress appraisal, emotional regulation, and coping behaviour. Individuals with higher self-efficacy generally demonstrate greater resilience and improved psychological adjustment in demanding work environments[11,14].

Similarly, occupational social support has been recognized as a valuable organizational resource that helps employees cope with workplace stress. Support received from supervisors, colleagues, and the organization reduces psychological strain and lowers the likelihood of emotional exhaustion. Employees who perceive higher levels of workplace support generally report better psychological outcomes and lower occupational stress[15].

The buffering hypothesis further suggests that social support may weaken the adverse impact of workplace stressors on emotional exhaustion. Although empirical findings regarding such moderating effects remain mixed across occupational settings, several studies have reported that supportive work environments can mitigate the negative consequences of demanding job conditions[7].

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H4:** Occupational self-efficacy significantly influences emotional exhaustion.

**H5:** Occupational social support negatively influences emotional exhaustion.

**H6:** Occupational social support moderates the relationship between customer-related psychosocial hazards and emotional exhaustion.

**H7:** Occupational social support moderates the relationship between occupational behaviour and emotional exhaustion.

### *2.9.3 Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion*

Emotional exhaustion has frequently been conceptualized as a mediating mechanism linking workplace stressors and resources with employee well-being outcomes. Existing literature indicates that adverse job demands increase emotional exhaustion, which increases the occupational well-being deficit and psychological health. Likewise, personal and organizational resources influence well-being through their effects on emotional exhaustion[2,8].

Studies have further demonstrated that self-efficacy and social support contribute to improved well-being by reducing stress and emotional depletion. Consequently, emotional exhaustion serves as a key explanatory pathway through which workplace conditions affect the occupational well-being deficit[11].

Based on these arguments, the following mediation hypotheses are proposed:

**H8:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between customer-related psychosocial hazards and occupational well-being deficit.

**H9:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between occupational self-efficacy and occupational well-being deficit.

**H10:** Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between occupational social support and occupational well-being deficit.

## 3. Research Methodology

A quantitative research design was used to investigate the interrelationships between psychosocial hazards concerning customers, occupational self-efficacy, occupational behaviour, occupational social support, emotional exhaustion, and occupational well-being. Data

were collected over a period of three months from Jan 2026 to Mar 2026. The study targeted gig workers in Delhi NCR and nearby regions. A total of 330 valid responses were collected using a structured questionnaire. The data collection process involved conducting surveys in a work setting characterized by the associated psychosocial challenges.

### 3.1 Data Analysis Technique

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis was conducted via SmartPLS 4[16,17]. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its appropriateness for models predicting outcomes, dealing with complex mediation models, and situations in which distributional assumptions are not satisfied.

### 3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated against four criteria: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Outer loadings were considered when evaluating indicator reliability. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was established using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was estimated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion[15].

### 3.3 Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated based on path coefficients, bootstrapping, multicollinearity detection, effect sizes, and explanatory power. Values of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were computed to identify multicollinearity. R-squared.

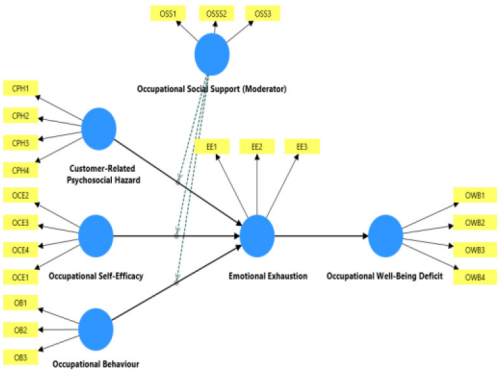



**Figure 1.** Proposed model.

(coefficient of determination) was applied to compute the model explanatory power. Mediation hypotheses were tested via bootstrapping indirect effects. Fit of the model was additionally estimated using SRMR and other indices[18,19]. Figure 1 is proposed model which is based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theories. It explains how Customer-Related Psychosocial

Hazards (CPH), Occupational Self-Efficacy (OSE), Occupational Behaviour (OB), and Occupational Social Support (OSS) influence Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Occupational Well-Being Deficit (OWB).

In this framework, CPH, OSE, and OB directly affect EE, while EE directly influences OWB. OSS acts as both a supportive resource reducing EE and a moderating factor between CPH–EE and OB–EE. Further, EE serves as a mediating mechanism linking workplace demands and resources with OWB.

## 4. Data Analysis

The research model was evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS oftware[17]. PLS-SEM is suitable for this study because it can handle complex models that include direct, indirect and moderating effects. It also does not require strict normal distribution of data.

The analysis was carried out in two steps as per standard guidelines. First, the measurement model or outer model was tested to check reliability and validity of constructs. After that, the structural model or inner model was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships between variables[16,18].

### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed by checking indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

As shown in Table 1, indicator reliability is found satisfactory because all outer loadings are above 0.708. It means constructs explain more than 50 percent variance of their indicators.

Internal consistency reliability is checked using Cronbach alpha and Composite Reliability. All constructs show good values above 0.70. Cronbach alpha values are between 0.787 to 0.867. Composite Reliability values are between 0.876 to 0.909.

Convergent validity is also confirmed because Average Variance Extracted values are above 0.50 for all constructs. It shows that constructs are capturing enough variance from their items.

Discriminant validity was assessed mainly using the Fornell-Larcker criterion[15] as shown in Table 2. The results indicate that the square root of AVE for each construct, which is shown in bold on the diagonal, is higher than its highest correlation with other constructs in the model. This confirms good discriminant validity.

It means each latent construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model. So, all constructs are measuring different concepts in a proper way.

## 4.2 Structural Model Assessment

Before testing the structural relationships, the inner model was checked for multicollinearity issue. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictor constructs were found between 1.874 and 3.852. These values are lower than the recommended limit of 5.0. Therefore, multicollinearity was not found to be serious problem in the model.

The explanatory power of the model was examined through the coefficient of determination ($R^2$). The Figure 2 shows that the model explained 68.7% variance in Emotional Exhaustion ($R^2$ = 0.687). It also explained 46.0% variance in Occupational Well-Being Deficit ($R^2$ = 0.460). These values indicate that the model has moderate to strong predictive ability.

## 4.3 Analysis of Direct Structural Paths

The empirical results show very strong and significant relationships in the occupational model. First Customer-Related Psychosocial Hazards have strong positive effect on Emotional Exhaustion (β = 0.530, t = 11.046, p < 0.001). This result confirms that when customer related psychological pressure increase then emotional exhaustion also increases in employees.

Occupational Self-Efficacy also show significant positive relation with Emotional Exhaustion (β = 0.360, t = 5.608, p < 0.001). This indicates that self-belief in job capability is also

linked with higher emotional exhaustion in this context. Occupational Behaviour however not show significant impact on Emotional Exhaustion (β = 0.065, t = 1.113, p = 0.266). So, this path is not statistically significant.

Emotional Exhaustion is a very important factor for Occupational Well-Being Deficit. It shows strong positive and significant effect (β = 0.679, t = 19.952, p < 0.001). This means that exhaustion increases the well-being deficit, thereby harming overall worker well-being. For organizational support, the direct effect of Occupational Social Support is negative and significant

**Table 1.** Construct reliability and convergent validity

| Construct | CPH | EE | OB | OSE | OSS | OWB |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CPH | 0.842 | | | | | |
| EE | 0.789 | 0.838 | | | | |
| OB | 0.648 | 0.610 | 0.859 | | | |
| OSE | 0.776 | 0.755 | 0.748 | 0.812 | | |
| OSS | 0.593 | 0.464 | 0.635 | 0.591 | 0.876 | |
| OWB | 0.791 | 0.679 | 0.785 | 0.772 | 0.621 | 0.845 |

**Table 2.** Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

| Construct | Items | Outer Loadings | Cronbach's Alpha (α) | Composite Reliability (ρc) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CPH | CPH1 | 0.816 | 0.863 | 0.907 | 0.710 |
| | CPH2 | 0.831 | | | |
| | CPH3 | 0.902 | | | |
| | CPH4 | 0.819 | | | |
| EE | EE1 | 0.837 | 0.787 | 0.876 | 0.702 |
| | EE2 | 0.884 | | | |
| | EE3 | 0.791 | | | |
| OB | OB1 | 0.812 | 0.821 | 0.894 | 0.737 |
| | OB2 | 0.902 | | | |
| | OB3 | 0.860 | | | |
| OSE | OSE1 | 0.836 | 0.827 | 0.886 | 0.660 |
| | OSE2 | 0.836 | | | |
| | OSE3 | 0.758 | | | |
| | OSE4 | 0.817 | | | |
| OSS | OSS1 | 0.882 | 0.850 | 0.908 | 0.768 |
| | OSS2 | 0.900 | | | |
| | OSS3 | 0.846 | | | |
| OWB | OWB1 | 0.837 | 0.867 | 0.909 | 0.714 |
| | OWB2 | 0.827 | | | |
| | OWB3 | 0.865 | | | |
| | OWB4 | 0.852 | | | |

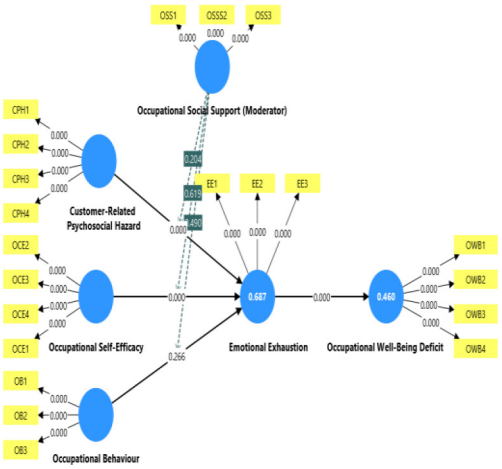



**Figure 2.** Structural model assessment.

on Emotional Exhaustion (β = -0.101, t = 2.186, p = 0.029). This suggests social support help to reduce emotional exhaustion among employees but effect is small.

But all interaction effects are not significant in this model. The moderating effect of Support × Psychosocial Hazards on Emotional Exhaustion is not significant (β = 0.076, t = 1.270, p = 0.204). Same result for Support × Occupational Behaviour (β = 0.040, t = 0.691, p = 0.490). Also Support × Occupational Self-Efficacy is not significant (β = -0.035, t = 0.497, p = 0.619). So, moderation effect of social support is not supported in this study. Table 3 and table 4 shows direct and indirect hypotheses testing.

## 4.4 Mediation Analysis (Specific Indirect Effects)

To examine the mediating role of Emotional Exhaustion (EE) between workplace factors and Occupational Well-Being Deficit (OWB), the specific indirect effects were analyzed. The bootstrapping results show that EE significantly mediates the relationship between Customer-Related Psychosocial Hazards (CPH) and OWB. The indirect effect is 0.360, with a t-value = 9.186 and p < 0.001, indicating strong and significant mediation.

Similarly, Occupational Self-Efficacy (OSE) also affects OWB through EE. The indirect effect is 0.244, with a t-value = 5.714 and p < 0.001, showing a significant mediation effect.

Further, Occupational Social Support (OSS) influences OWB through EE. The indirect effect is -0.069, with a t-value = 2.206 and p = 0.027. The negative indirect effect indicates that greater occupational social support is associated with lower emotional exhaustion. Which in turn reduces occupational well-being deficit.

However, in the case of Occupational Behaviour (OB), the indirect effect was not significant (p = 0.278), indicating that mediation through EE is not supported.

## 4.5 Model Fit Evaluation

In PLS-SEM model fit is checked by comparing Saturated Model and Estimated Model as suggested in PLS-SEM literature[19]. The saturated model considers all correlations between constructs while estimated model focus on structural path relations only. For checking model fit we generally use SRMR and also exact fit measures like d_ULS and d_G. These indicators are commonly recommended for PLS-SEM model evaluation. They help to see if model is close to observed data or not.

If SRMR is low, it indicates a good model fit. Similarly, d_ULS and d_G values represent the discrepancy between the proposed model and the observed data. Lower values in these indices indicate better model fit, as suggested in structural equation modelling guidelines[18].

The model fit summary is presented in Table 5 below.

The model's goodness of fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) index. The saturated model produced an SRMR value of 0.074, which is within the acceptable threshold of 0.08, as suggested by Hair *et al*[16]. This indicates that the proposed model shows an acceptable fit with the observed data.

**Table 3.** Structural Path Coefficients and Direct Hypotheses Testing

| Direct Structural Relationship | Path Coefficient (β) | t-Statistic | p-Value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CPH → EE** | 0.530 | 11.046 | <0.001 | Supported |
| **EE → OWB** | 0.679 | 19.952 | <0.001 | Supported |
| **OB → EE** | 0.065 | 1.113 | 0.266 | Not Supported |
| **OSE → EE** | 0.360 | 5.608 | <0.001 | Supported |
| **OSS → EE** | -0.101 | 2.186 | 0.029 | Supported |
| **OSS × CPH → EE** | 0.076 | 1.27 | 0.204 | Not Supported |
| **OSS × OB → EE** | 0.04 | 0.691 | 0.49 | Not Supported |

**Table 4.** Structural path coefficients and indirect hypotheses testing

| Indirect Pathway | Indirect Effect (β) | t-Statistic | p-Value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CPH → EE → OWB | 0.36 | 9.186 | <0.001 | Significant |
| OB → EE → OWB | 0.044 | 1.086 | 0.278 | No Mediation |
| OSE → EE → OWB | 0.244 | 5.714 | <0.001 | Significant |
| OSS → EE → OWB | -0.069 | 2.206 | 0.027 | Significant |
| OSS × OB → EE → OWB | 0.027 | 0.687 | 0.492 | No Mediation |

**Table 5.** Model fit summary

| Metric | Saturated Model | Estimated Model |
|---|---|---|
| SRMR | 0.074 | 0.128 |
| d_ULS | 1.273 | 3.781 |
| d_G | 0.819 | 1.043 |
| Chi-square | 1542.825 | 1746.672 |
| NFI | 0.722 | 0.685 |

## 5. Discussion

Firstly, the results show the importance of customer-related psychosocial hazards as sources of strain. There was a positive relationship between hazards and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that working in a customer-facing job and experiencing complaints and hostilities regularly drains psychological resources of workers[20]. The implication of the findings is that psychosocial risks at work affect employee well-being not as an additional factor to consider but as the actual source of strain and stress that reduces psychological resources of employees.

Secondly, the results demonstrate the importance of the link between emotional exhaustion and the occupational well-being deficit. It appears that emotional exhaustion is the main mediating variable that connects workplace stress and occupational well-being of employees from a practical point of view, the employees who are emotionally exhausted will experience a higher deficit, meaning they will not be satisfied, balanced, and functional. The finding shows the importance of tracking this deficit beyond mere workload because of the influence of emotional costs of working conditions.

It is noteworthy that occupational social support also has its role in mitigating the occupational well-being deficit. Its negative association with emotional exhaustion implies that the support provided by fellow workers and supervisors allows coping with stress and prevents employees from becoming emotionally drained. This finding also demonstrates the importance of supportive work environments that can help employees avoid isolation and lower the well-being deficit[21]. Though the moderating effect was insignificant, the direct effect still proves the importance of social support. Thus, the protective effect of a supportive workplace is not related only to the changing of the stress-deficit link but also to the reduction of the exhaustion level.

One of the interesting and surprising findings was the positive relationship between occupational self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion. Though self-efficacy is a positive personal resource, it appeared that the high level of self-efficacy does not necessarily protect employees from emotional exhaustion in the presence of stress. There is a hypothesis that employees with high self-efficacy will try to cope with problems on their own and do everything needed to succeed. As a consequence, they will feel emotionally more exhausted, indirectly expanding the well-being deficit. Moreover, the positive weak relationship between occupational behaviour and emotional exhaustion can mean the same thing – to behave appropriately requires more effort in case of workplace stress[22].

The findings of mediation analysis proved the assumption that emotional exhaustion is the main mediator between workplace characteristics and employee well-being deficit. Customer-related psychosocial hazards, occupational self-efficacy, and social support affected the well-being deficit indirectly through emotional exhaustion. Thus, it is not enough to consider the direct effect of workplace on well-being. The level of emotional exhaustion affects the employee well-being as well and it means that interventions aimed at reduction of exhaustion will be effective in minimizing this deficit.

To conclude, it is necessary to consider both stressors and supportive variables. To reduce the occupational well-being deficit, it is required to decrease customer-related psychosocial hazards, strengthen occupational social support and monitor exhaustion level of employees. The study also suggests taking into account the context when analyzing self-efficacy and occupational behaviour of employees.

## 6. Conclusion

The current research investigates how customer-related psychosocial hazards, occupational self-efficacy, occupational behaviour, and occupational social support affect emotional exhaustion and occupational well-being deficit. The findings indicate that psychosocial hazards significantly accelerate emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion serves as the most critical determinant of the occupational well-being deficit and acts as an essential explanatory mediating mechanism within the study's integrated framework.

This study makes an important contribution to the field of occupational health because it reveals the role played by the combination of environmental risks and resources when it comes to the well-being deficit of employees in customer-oriented jobs. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of emotional exhaustion as one of the key mechanisms by which these variables act.

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