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Examining the Impact of Working Conditions on Job Performance, Emotional Exhaustion and Work-life Balance of Social Workers in Health-Providing Institutions in Vadodara, Gujarat

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Abstract
Social workers are essential to India's healthcare system, providing psychosocial support, advocacy, and rehabilitation, yet they often face excessive demands, limited resources, and emotional exhaustion that compromise their performance. This research applied the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework to observe how working conditions influence job performance among social workers in Vadodara, Gujarat, with emotional exhaustion and work-life balance as mediators. A cross-sectional design was adopted, and data was collected from 182 social workers across public hospitals, private institutions, and non-governmental organizations, of which 176 valid responses were analyzed. Hypothesized correlations were tested using structural equation modeling, and the validity and reliability of the constructs were demonstrated. Findings revealed that poor working conditions significantly increased emotional exhaustion, while favourable conditions enhanced both work-life balance stability and job performance. Mediation analysis showed that emotional exhaustion negatively influenced performance, whereas work-life balance exerted a positive effect. The model explained 39% of change in emotional exhaustion, 44% in work-life balance, and 46% in job performance. The research concludes that psychosocial work environments play a central role in shaping social workers' effectiveness. Enhancing organizational support, maintaining manageable caseloads, and promoting work-life balance are practical strategies to reduce strain and sustain productivity. These results broaden the scope of JD-R theory's applicability to the Indian setting and offer helpful guidelines for institutional and legislative changes.
Keywords: *Job Demands-Resources model; Emotional exhaustion; Work-life balance; Job performance; Social workers*

INTRODUCTION

Social workers now play a very significant role in healthcare delivery in India, with responsibilities that extend beyond merely treating the ill to supporting patients, advocating for their needs, facilitating rehabilitation, and promoting community health [1]. Their presence is especially important in public hospitals and non-governmental health institutions, where they act as intermediaries between medical personnel, families, and patients. However, social workers face many challenges, including excessive workload, lack of institutional support, and poor recognition of professional roles. These conditions heighten stress and emotional exhaustion, reducing both well-being and the quality of services delivered [1,2]. The increasingly complex nature of healthcare further amplifies these challenges, as social workers are often required to manage emotionally demanding cases involving terminal illness, mental health issues, and poverty-related vulnerabilities.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that chronic exposure to high job demands is significantly correlated with exhaustion and burnout, both of which are major obstacles to effective performance in helping professions [3]. At the same time, a lack of job resources, including managerial support and recovery opportunities, increases strain and leaves social workers vulnerable to job dissatisfaction and disillusionment [4]. In India, these issues are particularly pressing because most studies have focused on nurses and physicians, leaving the experiences of social workers largely unexplored. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model offers a helpful structure for comprehending these dynamics by conceptualizing working conditions as comprising both the job resources and the job demands. Job resources are supporting elements like autonomy, supervisory care, and training that help employees reach goals, lessen stress, and promote growth, whereas job demands are elements of work that call for consistent effort, such as workload, role uncertainty, and emotional strain [5]. The JD-R model has been widely used in healthcare and organizational studies to explain outcomes including burnout, engagement, and performance [6].

Recent studies confirm the resilience of the JD-R model. Job demands indicate burnout, while job resources dramatically improve engagement and performance, according to meta-analytic research [3]. Similarly, research integrating positive psychology with JD-R demonstrates that resilience and optimism amplify the benefits of

resources and lessen the negative consequences of demands [2]. These results emphasize the significance of interventions that target both sides of the work environmentreducing demands and enhancing resources. Within healthcare contexts, evidence has shown that job resources strongly influence organizational commitment through engagement in high-demand settings [4], while burnout mediates the impact of demands on performance. Social support mitigates the adverse consequences of demands [5]. Collectively, these findings emphasize that resource availability is crucial for preventing stress and fatigue while sustaining productivity.

Work design literature further supplements the JD-R perspective by demonstrating that well-structured jobs not only improve productivity but also enhance health and well-being [7]. Future-oriented research has stressed that workplace conditions should be designed to maximize engagement and flexibility, aligning with JD-R's principle of balancing demands and resources [8]. Studies also show that social workers experiencing poor work-life balance and inadequate support are more susceptible to burnout, underlining the risks of psychosocial stress when balance and resources are lacking [9]. Despite strong international evidence, empirical studies on Indian social workers remain limited. While job demands have consistently been linked to strain in other professions, their specific effects on Indian social workers have not been thoroughly examined [10]. Furthermore, research shows that organizational support mitigates the demand-strain connection, highlighting the significance of contextual variables in influencing employee outcomes [11].

Altogether, these findings underscore a critical research gap in the Indian healthcare sector regarding how working conditions affect social workers' emotional exhaustion, work-life balance, and work performance. In the present study, working conditions were operationalized in accordance with the JD-R framework and included both job demands (e.g., time pressure, workload, role conflict) and job resources (e.g., supervisor support, training opportunities, autonomy). These two aspects were measured separately and treated as first-order constructs, while also modelled jointly as a second-order construct representing overall working conditions.

Objectives

1. To analyze the association between working conditions (job demands and job resources) and emotional exhaustion among social workers in Vadodara.
2. To observe the influence of working conditions on balance between work and life and job performance.
3. To evaluate how work-life balance and emotional exhaustion mediate the link between job performance and working circumstances.

Hypotheses

- H1: Bad working situations are positively associated with emotional exhaustion.
- H2: Favorable working circumstances are positively linked with work-life balance and work performance.
- H3: The link between job performance and working circumstances is mediated by work-life balance and emotional exhaustion.

There is conceptual and empirical evidence to support the theories put out in this investigation. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, which explains how excessive job demands like workload and role ambiguity deplete employees' psychological resources and cause burnout, is consistent with H1, which asserts that unfavorable working conditions are positively associated with emotional exhaustion [1]. Meta-analytic findings further confirm that poor working conditions are reliable predictors of exhaustion across professional contexts [3]. H2 is based on the JD-R motivational pathway, which shows that resources like autonomy and organizational support improve motivation and results. It implies that pleasant working circumstances are positively correlated with work-life balance and job performance [2]. Empirical research also demonstrates that supportive environments improve employee engagement and performance [4]. Lastly, H3 represents the dual pathways of the JD-R model, where resources improve outcomes through balance and engagement and demands hinder outcomes through exhaustion. It suggests that work-life balance and emotional exhaustion affect the interaction between working conditions and job performance [1]. Evidence among social workers further validates this mechanism, showing that poor balance and high exhaustion significantly explain how working conditions translate into performance outcomes [9].

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

A cross-sectional research approach was employed in this study to investigate the connections among job performance, work-life balance, emotional weariness, and working conditions at a certain moment in time. The nature of the design provided us with the possibility to collect data on study variables with standardised scales to test our hypothesized relationships.

Study Setting

The research was done within the health-providing institutions in Vadodara, Gujarat. These were the state hospitals, private healthcare institutions and non- governmental service providers so that variety of organizational backgrounds were captured.

Study Participants

The social workers who have been actively employed in the health-providing institutions in Vadodara were taken as the study population. Respondents were considered eligible provided that they were working as social workers in an institution that related to health, and had a significant work experience in the present job of at least six months. Persons not in direct contact with social work practice, as well as those persons who refused to sign consent were not allowed to participate. A stratified sampling procedure was used to achieve diversity across various kinds of institutions.

Sample Size Determination

The number of participants was determined by following methodological recommendations for using structural equation modeling (SEM) in cross-sectional research to ensure a representative sample size. A minimum of 10 participants per estimated parameter is typically recommended and since the model covers a large number of constructs; a sample size of around 150 respondents was considered adequate. To provide further justification, the mandatory sample was estimated using Cochran's formula:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where n_o is minimum required sample size, Z is 1.96 at 95% confidence level, p is 0.5 (assumed for maximum variability) and e is margin error

With a margin of error of 0.08, the calculation produced:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{(0.08)^2} \approx 150$$

Since the number of social workers in Vadodara's health institutions is finite, the finite population correction was applied:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \left(\frac{n_0 - 1}{N}\right)}$$

This adjustment confirmed that a sample of 150-200 participants would be adequate. Accordingly, the final target sample size was set at approximately 180 respondents, balancing methodological rigor with feasibility of data collection.

Study Measures

The information was gathered by a structured questionnaire made up of validated measures that were modified from earlier research. Likert scales with five points, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), were used to measure each concept. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm, which describes the construct as consisting of both job demands and job resources, was followed in evaluating working conditions. Five questions were used to measure job demands in order to capture these two elements (e.g., workload, time pressure, role conflict) [10]. Six questions were used to quantify job resources, such as autonomy, supervisor assistance, and training opportunities [4]. Both dimensions were regarded as first-order constructs in the study, and they were combined to create a second-order construct that represented general working circumstances. The combined scale's reliability coefficient was deemed adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). Nine questions from the emotional fatigue subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is often used in burnout research, were utilized to evaluate emotional exhaustion [1]. A sample item is, *"I feel emotionally drained from my work."* The Cronbach's alpha for this construct was 0.88. Six items were used in the assessment of work-life balance [9]. These items measured the extent to which participants could balance their personal and professional responsibilities. A sample item is, *"I am able to balance the demands of my work and my personal life."* Internal consistency was strong ($\alpha = 0.84$). Job performance was measured with five items [4]. The items reflected perceived effectiveness, task accomplishment, and productivity at work. A sample item is, *"I am able to accomplish my work tasks efficiently."* The Cronbach's alpha

for this construct was 0.86. Cronbach's alpha values for all metrics were higher than the suggested cutoff point of 0.70, indicating internal consistency.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were fully respected in the course of the study. There was no mandatory participation, and participants had to give their consent before they could participate in the study. Anonymity of responses was provided as one way of ensuring we treated the information with confidentiality and nothing that identified them was collected. The participants were also free to quit the research whenever they wanted without repercussion.

Study Analysis

The data analysis was done in several steps. The respondents' demographic and occupational characteristics were described using descriptive statistics. Reliability coefficients were used to judge consistency within the constructs. Concept validity was assessed through the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The bidirectional predicted links between work-life balance, job performance, emotional exhaustion, and working circumstances were then tested using a number of structural equation models. The indirect effects were evaluated using bootstrapping-based mediation analysis, and moderation was evaluated when it was theoretically justified. Model adequacy evaluation was based on conventional fit indices

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

182 social workers from Vadodara's health-providing institutions participated in the survey, resulting in a 91% response rate. After screening for incomplete responses, 176 valid cases were retained for study. 62% of the respondents were female, and their average age was 34.7 years (SD = 6.5). The majority (58%), who worked in public hospitals (41%), commercial healthcare facilities (36%), and non-governmental organizations (23%), had two to ten years of work experience. Table 1 displays the demographic and occupational information of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic and occupational characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Female	109 (62)
	Male	67 (38)
Age (years)	Mean (SD)	34.7 (6.5)
Experience	< 2 years	29 (16)
	2-10 years	102 (58)
	> 10 years	45 (26)
Institution type	Public hospital	72 (41)
	Private institution	64 (36)
	NGO	40 (23)

As shown in Table 1, the sample was diverse with regards to gender, experience, and institutional type. Figure 1 further illustrates the distribution of participants across institution types.

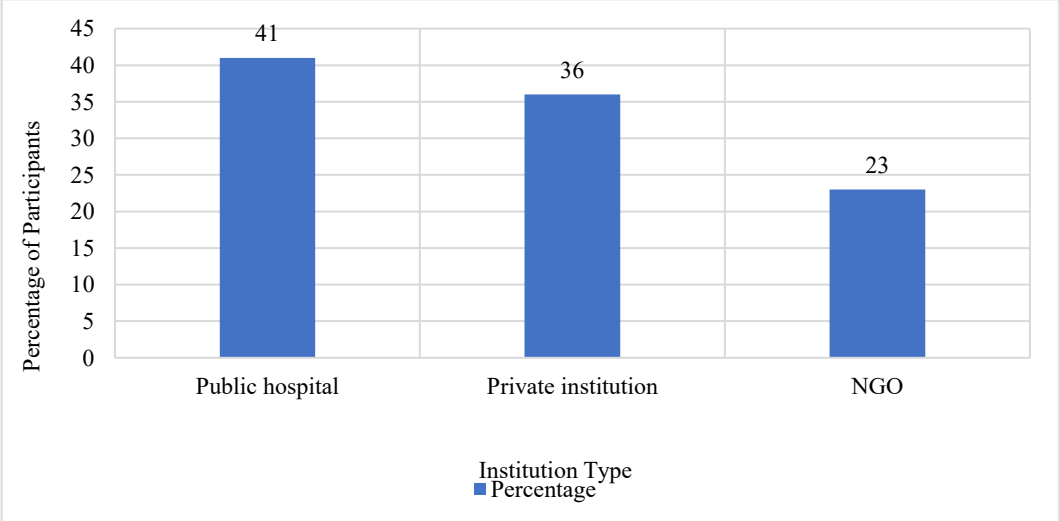

Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by Institution Type

The data specifies that public hospitals accounted for the majority of responders, with private institutions and non-governmental organizations following closely behind.

Reliability and Validity of Measures

All constructions have Cronbach's alpha values above the 0.70 limit: working conditions (0.81), emotional exhaustion (0.88), work-life balance (0.84), and job performance (0.86), representing strong inner consistency. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated an acceptable fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.11$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05. Convergent validity was confirmed by average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.52 to 0.64 and composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70 for all constructs. Because the square root of the AVE values was greater than the correlations between the constructs, discriminant validity was fulfilled. Each construct's validity and reliability results are compiled in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability and validity results

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Working conditions	0.81	0.83	0.54
Emotional exhaustion	0.88	0.89	0.62
Work-life balance	0.84	0.85	0.58
Job performance	0.86	0.88	0.64

As seen in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity, confirming that the measurement model was sound. Figure 2 visually represents these values across constructs.

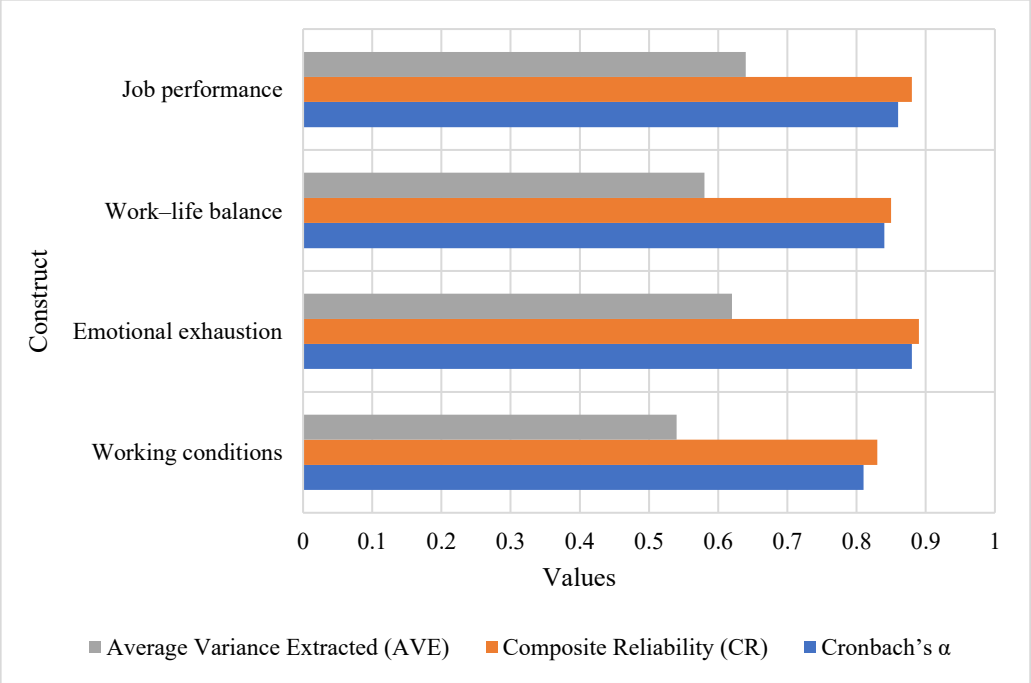

Figure 2. Reliability and validity results of study construct

The figure highlights that all values met or exceeded recommended thresholds, reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model.

Correlations

In the structural analyses, Working conditions was modeled as a second-order latent factor composed of two first-order dimensions: job demands and job resources. Accordingly, Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the second-order Working conditions construct. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables are shown in Table 3 (N = 176). Working conditions correlated positively with emotional exhaustion ($r = .47$, $p < .001$) and job performance ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), and negatively with work–life balance ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$). Emotional exhaustion correlated negatively with work–life balance ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$) and job

performance (r = -.41, p < .001). These associations were in the expected directions and are visualized in Figure 3.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Working conditions	3.42	0.67	1			
Emotional exhaustion	3.11	0.72	0.47***	1		
Work-life balance	3.38	0.70	-0.36**	-0.42***	1	
Job performance	3.56	0.65	0.39***	-0.41***	0.46***	1

*Note: * means* $p < .05$ *(significant), ** means* $p < .01$ *(more significant), *** means* $p < .001$ *(highly significant)*

As shown in Table 3, all correlations were significant and in the expected directions. Figure 3 further visualizes these relationships in a heatmap format.

	Working conditions	Emotional exhaustion	Work-life balance	Job performance
Working conditions	1	0.47	-0.36	0.39
Emotional exhaustion	0.47	1	-0.42	-0.41
Work-life balance	-0.36	-0.42	1	0.46
Job performance	0.39	-0.41	0.46	1

Figure 3. Correlation matrix of study variables

As shown in Figure 3, red shades reflect stronger positive correlations, green indicates negative associations, and yellow represents moderate values. The heatmap determines that while work-life balance has the largest positive correlation with job performance, working conditions have a negative correlation with work-life balance and a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion and job performance.

Structural Model Testing

The hypothesized structural model, with working conditions specified as a second-order factor, demonstrated satisfactory fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.19$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.065, SRMR = 0.048.

- H1: Poor working conditions (higher demands, lower resources) significantly predicted emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$).
- H2: Favorable working conditions significantly predicted work-life balance ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and job performance ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$).
- H3: Emotional exhaustion negatively predicted job performance ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$), but work-life balance positively predicted job performance ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$).

Overall, the model described 39% of variance in emotional exhaustion, 44% in work-life balance, and 46% in job performance. Table 4 provides the path coefficients for the structural model.

Table 4. Structural model results

Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Working conditions → Emotional exhaustion	0.49	0.07	7.02	<0.001
Working conditions → Work-life balance	0.43	0.06	6.89	<0.001
Working conditions → Job performance	0.32	0.09	3.56	0.001
Emotional exhaustion → Job performance	-0.38	0.08	-4.75	<0.001
Work-life balance → Job performance	0.41	0.07	5.86	<0.001

As indicated in Table 4, all hypothesized paths were statistically significant. The standardized path coefficients for the tested structural model are displayed in Figure 4.

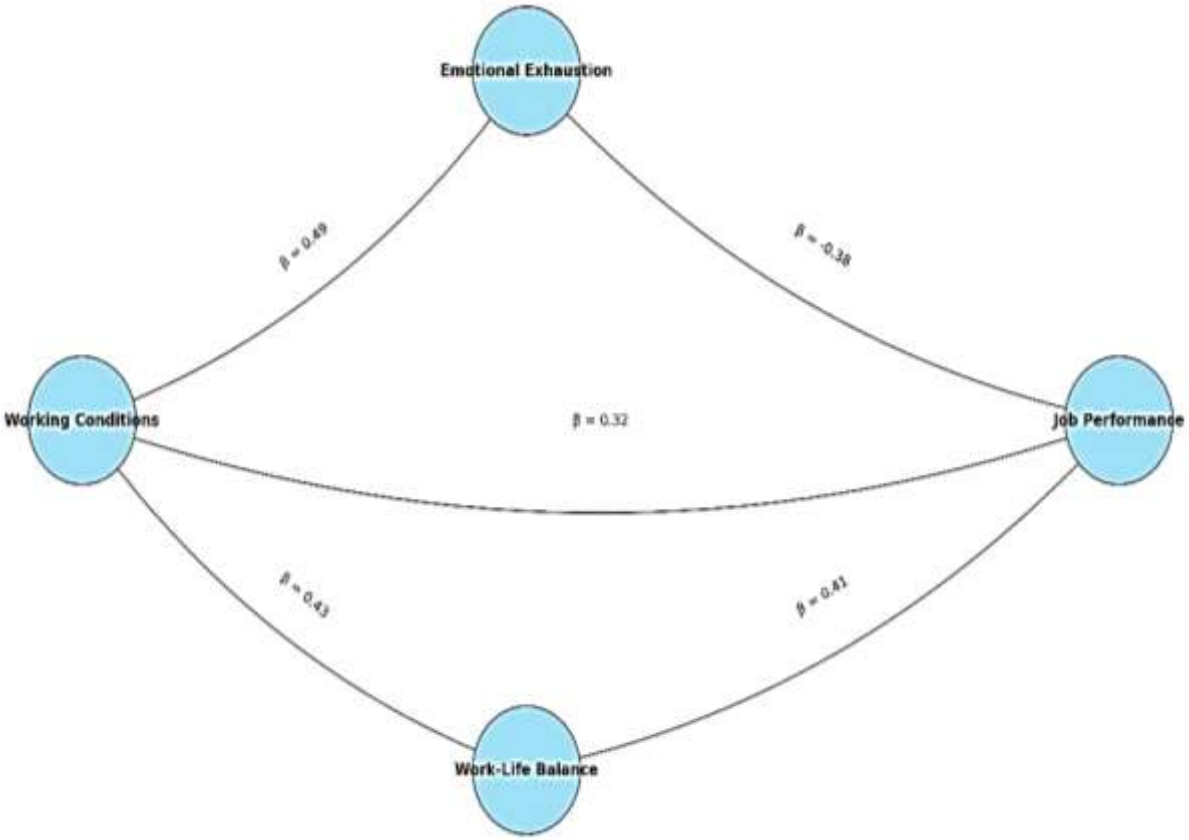

Figure 4. Mediation Model of Working Conditions, Emotional Exhaustion, Work-Life Balance, and Job Performance

This illustration depicts the direct as well as indirect connections between job performance, work-life balance and emotional exhaustion.

Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples indicated significant indirect effects:

- Working conditions → Emotional exhaustion → Job performance: β = -0.19, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.10].
- Working conditions → Work-life balance → Job performance: β = 0.21, 95% CI [0.12, 0.31].

These findings confirm that both emotional exhaustion and work-life balance partially mediate the connection among working conditions and job performance. Table 5 presents the outcomes of the mediation study.

Table 5. Mediation analysis results

Indirect Path	β	95% CI (LL-UL)	p-value
Working conditions → Emotional exhaustion → Job performance	-0.19	-0.29 to -0.10	<0.001
Working conditions → Work-life balance → Job performance	0.21	0.12 to 0.31	<0.001

The results in Table 5 confirm that both mediators were significant in explaining the indirect effects, reinforcing the partial mediation model.

Hypotheses Testing Results

- H1: *Poor working conditions are positively associated with emotional exhaustion.*
  Supported. Structural model results showed that unfavourable working conditions significantly predicted higher levels of emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$).
- H2: *Favourable working conditions are positively linked with work-life balance and job performance.*
  Supported. Working conditions were positively linked with both work-life balance ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and job performance ($\beta = 0.32$, $p = 0.001$).
- H3: *Emotional exhaustion and work-life balance mediate the connection between working conditions and job performance.*
  Supported. Mediation analysis confirmed significant indirect effects via emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.19$, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.10]) and work-life balance ($\beta = 0.21$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.31]). Both mediators partially explained the link between working conditions and job performance.

DISCUSSION

The present research examined the roles of working conditions on job performance among social workers in health-providing institutions in Vadodara, emotional exhaustion and work-life balance acting as mediators. The findings showed the effects of poor working conditions that contribute to emotional exhaustion to a considerable degree, whereas good working conditions promote balance between life and work; and job performance. These findings are consistent with the Job expectations -Resources (JD-R) paradigm, which contends that stress brought on by high expectations leads to strain and burnout whereas adequate resources increase motivation and engagement [11,12]. The mediation study also showed that while work-life balance improves job performance, emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on productivity at the workplace. Bootstrapped indirect effects via emotional exhaustion and work-life balance confirmed partial (not full) mediation, as the direct path from working conditions to performance remained significant ($\beta = 0.32$, $p = 0.001$). This highlights that the JD-R has two pathways, demands more through health-impairing processes and demands through motivating pathways [2]. Operationally, working conditions were modelled as a second-order construct (job demands and job resources), which clarifies the co-occurrence of a positive direct effect on performance (resources-driven) and a negative indirect effect via exhaustion (demands-driven). Critically, the model reported almost a half of the variation in job performance, which illustrates the significance of psychosocial work factors that impact the outcomes of social workers. The positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and working conditions is consistent with research on other health care professions, including social workers, where excessive expectations have also been linked to burnout and poor performance [13,14]. As per our finding, past studies have shown that work-family conflict increases strain when demands exceed resources and that when there is insufficient balance between personal and professional life, people become exhausted [15].

Consistent with the current findings, research has underlined how professional identity and job embeddedness can buffer burnout in nurses, concluding that optimum working conditions have a protective effect against burnout [16]. Similarly, evidence revealed that after the pandemic, healthcare workers under high demand conditions experienced increased burnout but sufficient resources, including institutional support, had a positive impact on well-being and productivity [17]. Additionally, the results of the other industries show that organizational climate and HRM practices influence the job strain to increase or diminish. Workplace violence and absence of safety measures demonstrate how working conditions that are not conducive endangers performance and health [18]. The findings of this research paper can also be compared with the conclusion that high-quality working conditions and a psychosocially safe climate are also paramount in retaining social workers, as they pay direct attention to engagement, satisfaction, and long-term organizational commitment [19].

This research has limits yet it was possible to make some significant advances. First, it only had cross-sectional design, so it cannot be used to make causal inferences; longitudinal research is needed to ascertain directionality. Second, the self-report measures were used to collect data that could be biased by manifesting social desirability and the common method bias. Third, only one city in India (Vadodara) was studied, that may not be generalizable to other setting with varying institutional structures and resource supply. Lastly, although emotional exhaustion and work-life balance were identified as mediators, other possible reasons such as organizational justice, leadership style, or even professional identity were not part of the study and should be considered in the future studies.

These results have an important practical and theoretical implication. In order to practice, the findings indicate that organizational support and decrease in caseloads combined with the availability of psychosocial resources

can address exhaustion and bolster social worker performance. Interventions and trainings conducted to facilitate work-life balance would also benefit as protection strategies. Theory-wise, the findings provide an expansion to JD-R implementation on Indian social workers who have been underrepresented in the literature compared to nurses and physicians. Future study may be longitudinal or mixed methods to obtain dynamic changes in demands and resources. Comparative research among regions, and occupational groups would also do much in enriching knowledge. Moreover, the possibility of including such emerging issues as workplace violence, pandemic-related strain, and digital workload could lead to more complete visions into the changing state of the societal work practice.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at the impact of work-related conditions on social workers' job performance in Vadodara's healthcare facilities, with a focus on the mediating effects of work-life balance and emotional exhaustion. The findings highlight that adverse working conditions, characterized by excessive demands and inadequate resources, significantly increased emotional exhaustion, while favourable conditions were strongly linked with higher work-life balance and improved performance. These findings support the Job Demands-Resources model's dual route, where demands undermine health and resources enhance motivation. The intervention analysis further discovered that emotional exhaustion acted as a negative mediator, reducing performance, whereas work-life balance functioned as a positive mediator, enhancing outcomes. Together, these mechanisms described nearly half of the change in job performance, underscoring the central function of psychosocial work environments in determining the efficacy of social workers. Practically, the study emphasizes the importance of supportive institutional frameworks, manageable caseloads, and interventions to strengthen work-life balance in improving both well-being and productivity of social workers. The study expands JD-R applicability to the Indian environment from a theoretical standpoint, a domain where social workers are less studied compared to other healthcare professionals. While limited by its cross-sectional design and dependence on self-reports, the research offers a valuable basis for future longitudinal and comparative research. Overall, the evidence suggests that enhancing organizational resources and addressing job demands are crucial strategies for sustaining social workers' performance and ensuring quality healthcare delivery.

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