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The role of personal resources in the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion[3]

Streszczenie

Celem badań było określenie roli afektywnych dyspozycji psychicznych (tj. inteligencji emocjonalnej oraz pozytywnej i negatywnej afektywności) w relacji stresory w pracy – wyczerpanie emocjonalne. Pod uwagę wzięte zostały trzy rodzaje stresorów w pracy (tj. konflikty interpersonalne, ograniczenia organizacyjne i obciążenie pracą), a także podstawowy komponent wypalenia – wyczerpanie emocjonalne. Przewidywano, że: (1) stresory w pracy będą bezpośrednio wiązać się z wyczerpaniem emocjonalnym, przy kontroli pozytywnej i negatywnej afektywności; (2) zależność ta będzie buforowana przez inteligencję emocjonalną. Badania przeprowadzono w grupie 153 pracowników, których praca wymagała bezpośrednich kontaktów z klientami oraz pracy zespołowej. Wyniki pokazały, że pracownicy doświadczający częstszych konfliktów interpersonalnych, ograniczeń organizacyjnych i obciążenia w pracy cechowali się wyższym poziomem wyczerpania emocjonalnego. Zależność ta wystąpiła niezależnie od efektu pozytywnej i negatywnej afektywności. Inteligencja emocjonalna moderowała negatywny efekt konfliktów interpersonalnych – ale nie ograniczeń organizacyjnych i obciążenia w pracy – na wyczerpanie emocjonalne. Dodatnią relację między konfliktami interpersonalnymi i wyczerpaniem emocjonalnym zaobserwowano wśród pracowników z niskim poziomem inteligencji emocjonalnej. W grupie pracowników z wysokim poziomem inteligencji emocjonalnej relacja ta była nieistotna statystycznie. Uzyskane wyniki wyjaśniane są z perspektywy modelu wymagania w pracy – zasoby.

Słowa kluczowe

stresory w pracy, wyczerpanie emocjonalne, inteligencja emocjonalna, pozytywna i negatywna afektywność.

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Abstract

Our study was designed to examine an individuals' affective traits (i.e., dispositional affectivity and emotional intelligence) and job stressors (i.e., interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload and organizational constraints) on emotional exhaustion. One hundred and fifty-three employees participated in our study. All of them worked in teams and their job required face-to-face contacts with clients. Our main hypothesis was that emotional intelligence acts as a moderator in the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion. The results indicate that employees who report more interpersonal conflicts at work, greater quantitative workloads and greater organizational constraints also report more symptoms of emotional exhaustion. Moreover, the results show that all three stressors were significant as predictors of emotional exhaustion beyond the employee's dispositional affectivity. The moderating effect of emotional intelligence was observed in the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and emotional exhaustion. The relationship between interpersonal conflicts and emotional exhaustion was observed only among employees who were low in emotional intelligence. In contrast, interpersonal conflicts and emotional exhaustion were unrelated among employees who were high in emotional intelligence. The results are discussed from the Job Demands–Resources model perspective.

Keywords

job stressors, emotional exhaustion, emotional intelligence, dispositional affectivity

Introduction

In recent years occupational stress has received extensive theoretical and research attention. Research demonstrates that job stress is the second most significant (after back pain) health complaint among workers (Hellgren, Sverke & Naswall, 2008). Analyses of job conditions in European Union countries, conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, showed that nearly 30% of employees suffer from occupational stress as a result of demanding work conditions (Eurofound, 2012). Researchers point out that this trend is growing. The problem of occupational stress is a real burning issue for Poles. According to the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), more than 30% of Polish workers aged 50 and over reported experiencing highly stressful work environments. In contrast, only 8.5% of respondents residing in Germany (and only 4.1% residing in Denmark) reported experiencing highly stressful conditions in their work life (Wahrendorf & Siegrist, 2014). Occupational stress has been linked to low productivity, low work engagement, and increased rates of counterproductive work behaviours (Cox, Griffiths, & Rial-Gonzales, 2000). One adverse consequence of occupational stress is job burnout.

The job stressors-job burnout link has been recognized in a variety of theoretical models, including the Job Demands-Control model (Karasek, 1979), the Job Demands-Control-Support model (Johnson & Hall, 1988), the Effort-Reward Imbalance model

(Siegrist et al., 2004), and the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). However, these models may have limitations in capturing the new, complex, and often context-specific determinants of job stress and occupational well-being. In an attempt to meet this criticism, a new model of work stress has recently been introduced: the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

The JD-R model as a theoretical framework for the current study

According to the JD-R model, each occupation contains specific risk factors which, in the absence of sufficient resources, may lead to job burnout. Indeed, studies show that each occupation has its unique risk factors related to job burnout (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopolou, 2007). However, irrespective of the occupational activities we engage in at work, job burnout develops from great job demands and a shortage of job resources. Job demands refer to "physical, social or organizational job aspects that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). They include role stress, bad work conditions, time pressure, job monotony, workload, interpersonal conflicts, and organizational constraints. Job resources are related to "physical, social and organizational aspects of the job, the same physical, psychological, social or organizational job aspects that may: be functional in achieving work-related goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; and stimulate personal growth and development" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501).

In the initial stage of research on the JD-R model, investigators emphasized the beneficial role of organizational resources (e.g., social support, job control and feedback). Later, researchers paid more attention to personal resources (Xanthopolou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Given that personal resources are defined in terms of resiliency and control, one may expect them to buffer the negative effects of job demands on job burnout. This reasoning has found support in quite a few studies (e.g., Brenninkmeijer, Demerouti, Le Blanc, & Van Emmerik, 2010; Van den Broeck, Van Ruysseveldt, Smulders, & De Witte, 2011). For example, Xanthopolou et al. (2007) demonstrated that self-efficacy and optimism minimize the link between job demands (i.e., emotional dissonance, workload, organizational changes) and exhaustion. Brenninkmeijer et al. (2010) observed that the detrimental effects of interpersonal conflict and workload on exhaustion were more pronounced in employees who had a strong prevention focus (i.e., those who were concerned with obligations and responsibilities). Schaufeli and Taris (2014), in their review of research on the JD-R model, listed several personality factors which can act as moderators in the link between job stressors and job burnout. According

to Schaufeli and Taris (2014) emotional competencies (e.g., emotional intelligence) may play a crucial role diminishing the influence of work stressors on burnout. The aim of our study is to examine (1) the relationship between job demands and job burnout and (2) the buffering effect of emotional intelligence on the job demands-job burnout effect.

The Job Stressors-Job Burnout link

Job burnout has been defined as a response to chronic occupational stressors (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Although the concept of burnout was originally restricted to human service professionals, a number of studies have demonstrated that burnout also occurs in occupations outside the human service sector (e.g., Chirkowska-Smolak & Kleka, 2011; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Job burnout is described as a state of emotional depletion associated with negative attitudes towards work and a tendency to treat people with whom one works in a cynical, detached and mechanical manner. Furthermore, if this process continues, it evokes feelings of professional inadequacy and leads to a decreased sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Job burnout is devastating for both workers and organizations, as it is linked to health impairment, absenteeism, high turnover rates and lower job performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Therefore, it is important to identify job characteristics which contribute to increased levels of job burnout. Different kinds of job stressors are taken into account in research on job burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Three were analysed in the present study – interpersonal conflicts at work, organizational constraints and workload (Spector & Jex, 1998).

Interpersonal conflict at work refers to how well an individual gets along with others at work (e.g., "How often are others rude and nasty towards you and/or how often do they yell at you?") and is considered to be a social stressor (Spector & Jex, 1998). It is defined as a negative interpersonal encounter characterized by a contentious exchange, hostility or aggression. It may be an isolated incident or recurrent and enduring acts of violence which can be a manifestation of mobbing. Interpersonal conflicts at work may range from minor disagreements between co-workers to physical violence towards others. The conflict may be overt (e.g., being rude to coworkers) or may be covert (e.g., spreading rumours about coworkers). The Stress Incident Report (SIR), an open-ended method used by Keenan and Newton (1985) to collect stressful incidents that occur at work shows that seventy-four percent of the reported incidents were caused by social interactions with superiors, subordinates, or colleagues. There exists some cross-cultural evidence for the prevalence of interpersonal conflict at work as a significant source of stress. For example, in a study conducted by Narayanan, Menon and Spector (1999),

American and Indian clerical workers considered 11 possible stressor categories. The results showed that interpersonal conflict was the third most cited source of stress in the U.S. sample and the fourth most cited source in the Indian sample. Another cross-cultural study found that among American employees, supervisors were the main source of conflict. In turn, Chinese employees more often came into conflicts with other co-workers (Liu, Spector, & Shi, 2007).

Organizational constraints are "situations or things that prevent employees from-translating ability and effort into high levels of job performance" (Spector & Jex, 1998, p. 357). In other words, organizational constraints are situational inhibitors of performance and have been categorized as hindrance stressors. They can be divided into interpersonal constraints (e.g., conflicting commands of superiors) and job context constraints (e.g., inadequate training; Liu, Nauta, Li, & Fan, 2010). Using open-ended methodology, Liu, Spector and Shi (2007) found that organizational constraints were the most often mentioned stressor for both American and Chinese employees. Peters and O'Connor (1985) listed eleven sources of organizational constraints: job related information, budgetary support, required support, materials and supplies, required services and help from others, task preparation, time availability, work environment, scheduling of activities, transportation, and job-relevant authority. Cross-cultural studies showed that these various constraints in organizations are perceived as an important source of stress by American, Indian and Chinese employees (Narayan et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2010).

Workload is listed as one of the most common stresses. It can be measured by the one's clock-in hours, productivity rates, or even the mental demands of the work we perform. In our study, quantitative workload is provided, which is measured by the volume of work that employees are required to perform during a given time period (Spector & Jex, 1998). Numerous research studies have confirmed that excessive (quantitative) workload has a direct negative effect on employees' health, including their susceptibility to job burnout (Häusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010).

The relationships between these three job stressors and occupational stress have been widely studied and the bulk of research demonstrates that these three aforementioned job stressors are positively related to job burnout (e.g., Baka & Cieślak, 2010; Brenninkmeijer et al., 2010; Derbis & Baka, 2011). For example, in a Polish study (Baka & Cieślak, 2010), job burnout correlated with interpersonal conflict at work ($r = 22$; $p < 0.001$), organizational constraints ($r = 0.43$; $p < 0,001$) and workload ($r = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$).

Based on the cited study, we expect to see a positive relationship between the three job stressors and job burnout. Due to our interest in intrapersonal effects of job stressors we decided to focus on emotional exhaustion, which refers to feelings of fatigue and being emotionally overextended by a stressful work environment. Moreover, emotional

exhaustion is considered the core of the job burnout syndrome (Shirom, 2005; Cordes, Dougherty, & Blum, 1997). Therefore, we predict a positive relationship between the three job stressors and emotional exhaustion. However, there are suggestions that dispositional affectivity may create a spurious correlation between job stressors and emotional exhaustion. For example, some researchers have suggested that employees high in positive affectivity are likely to perceive their job environment in a more positive light, whereas negative affectivity is conducive to a negative view of one's job environment (e.g., Brief, Burke, George, Robinson, & Webster, 1988; Payne, 1988). Consequently, employees high in negative affectivity may perceive their working environment as more stressful than those low in negativity. Furthermore, dispositional affectivity can also been linked to emotional exhaustion. Research studies have consistently demonstrated that negative affectivity is significantly related to higher levels of emotional exhaustion, whereas high positive affectivity is linked to a reverse pattern (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Overall then, there is strong evidence that dispositional affectivity may influence reports concerning both the predictor (job stressors) and the criterion variables (emotional exhaustion) which are under study here. Therefore, in order to clarify this issue, we hypothesize that the job stressors-emotional exhaustion link exists *beyond* the dispositional affectivity of the employee. Thus, we predicted the following: Job stressors are positively related to emotional exhaustion, beyond dispositional positive or negative affectivity *(Hypothesis 1)*.

The moderating role of emotional intelligence

We need to remember that stressful events are an inevitable part of work. Most employees are constantly subjected to various stressful situations at work. Therefore, attention should be paid to factors that may mitigate the negative effect of job stressors on occupational stress and burnout. Therefore, an additional aim of our study was to examine whether employees' trait emotional intelligence (EI) acts as a moderating variable in the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion. The rationale for this hypothesis was grounded in research which shows that trait EI is protective against stress. For example, Szczygieł and Bazińska (2013) noted that employees who reported high rates of negative emotions experienced at work also reported more symptoms of emotional exhaustion; however, this effect was observed only among employees who were low in trait EI. There is also evidence that employees who are high in trait EI report fewer symptoms of burnout and fewer somatic complaints than those who are low in trait EI (Mikolajczak, Menil, & Luminet, 2007; Ogińska-Bulik, 2005). Therefore, it is very likely that employees high in trait EI are more likely than their low-in-trait-EI counter-

parts to be able to reduce the likelihood of emotional exhaustion caused by work stressors. Consequently, we expected to find that the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion to be weaker among those high in trait EI, and thereby we stated a moderating hypothesis: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion, in such a way that the relationship is stronger among those lower in emotional intelligence than those higher in emotional intelligence (*Hypothesis 2*). Given that we take into account three job stressors, we hypothesize that trait EI moderates the relationship between interpersonal conflict (*H2a*), quantitative workload (*H2b*), and organizational constraints (*H2c*). Notably, in our study, we controlled for dispositional affectivity in order to ensure that this relationship was not driven by the affective disposition of the employee. Therefore, these were our research hypotheses:

H1: Job stressors are positively related to emotional exhaustion, beyond dispositional positive affectivity (PA) and negative affectivity (NA).

H2: Emotional intelligence buffers the negative effects of job stressors on exhaustion.

H2a: Emotional intelligence buffers the negative effects of interpersonal conflict at work on exhaustion.

H2b: Emotional intelligence buffers the negative effects of organizational constraints on exhaustion.

H2c: Emotional intelligence buffers the negative effects of excessive workload on exhaustion.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty-three employees participated in our study. In terms of participants' background, 59 were banking customer service representatives, 45 were administrative staff who have direct contact with clients, 31 were retail sales assistants, and 18 were restaurant service workers. All worked in teams and their job required face-to-face contacts with clients. Among them, 90 (58.8%) participants were women, 63 (41.2%) were men. The participants were on average 39 years old (SD = 8.80). Their average tenure was approximately 16 years and ranged from one to 40 years. Of all the respondents, 42.5% reported they had a university degree, whereas 57.5% reported being high school or vocational school graduates.

Measures

Job stressors

Job stressors were measured with three scales: Interpersonal Conflicts at Work Scale (ICAWS), Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) and Quantitative Workload Inventory (QWI) developed by Spector and Jex (1998). Polish versions of the scales were adapted by Baka and Bazińska (2016). The ICAWS includes four items, the OCS eleven, and the QWI five items. All the questionnaires include five-point scales (1 = fewer than once a month or never, 5 = a few times daily). Validation studies conducted by the authors resulted in the following reliability coefficients for the scales: $\alpha = 0.74$ for the ICAWS, $\alpha = 0.85$ for the OCS and $\alpha = 0.81$ for the QWI (Spector & Jex, 1998). Scale validity, determined by correlating such factors as state and trait anxiety, depression, frustration, negative affect and level of personal achievement, absenteeism and job satisfaction, was found to be satisfactory (Spector & Jex, 1998).

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was assessed with the subscale of the Polish version (Pasikowski, 2000) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS, Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) which was designed for professionals in the human services. This nine-item scale measures how often one feels emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. All items were scored on a seven-point rating scale, ranging from 0 "never" to 6 "every day" and the score is calculated by summing up the item scores.

Trait emotional intelligence

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF; Petrides & Furnham, 2006; Polish adaptation Szczygieł, Jasielska, & Wytykowska, 2015) was used to measure trait emotional intelligence. The TEIQue–SF is derived from the full form of the TEIQue (see Petrides, 2011, for a comprehensive description of the factors and subscales) and comprises 30 items rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). A trait emotional intelligence score is calculated by summing up the item scores and dividing them by the total number of items.

Dispositional affectivity

PA and NA were measured using the Positive Affectivity Negative Affectivity Schedule (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegan, 1988). PANAS is a 20-item scale which consists of 10 positive and 10 negative adjectives describing emotional states. Participants were asked, "To what extent do you generally feel this way, on average, across all situations?" We used a Polish adaptation of the PANAS (Brzozowski, 2010). Participants indicated their answers on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). For each subscale, scores range from 10 to 50 points.

Procedure

We collected data from September to December in 2014 and from May to October in 2015. Participants were recruited by psychology students who volunteered to participate in this project. Each student was instructed how to recruit participants, defined for the purpose of this study as full-time employees of the service sector whose work requires working in teams. Participants were asked face-to-face to take part in our study. Employees who expressed interest in it completed questionnaires on demographics, job stressors, emotional exhaustion, trait EI and dispositional affectivity. After filling in the questionnaires, participants placed them in sealed envelopes which the experimenters then collected approximately one week after distributing them. Participants were assured that the collected data would be kept confidential and would only be used for research purposes.

Results

Preliminary results

There were no significant differences between the four occupational groups in the major variables measured. Hence, the occupational groups were combined for the analyses reported in our paper. Before treating all participants as one sample, t-tests were performed on all variables using gender as the independent variable. Two significant difference emerged. Results showed that female participants reported higher rates of NA than male participants: $t(151) = 2.30$, $p < .05$, $M = 19.02$ ($SD = 6.28$) and $M = 16.81$ ($SD = 5.17$), respectively. Furthermore, compared to females, male participants were older: $t(151) = 2.30$, $p < 0.05$, $M = 37.43$ ($SD = 87.98$) and $M = 40.71$ ($SD = 9.60$), respectively. Previous research suggests that a variety of socio-demographic variables such as gender, age and job tenure may be associated with the perception of burnout symptoms (e.g., Maslach et al., 2001). Therefore, in order to exclude any spurious effects and make sure that the effects of burnout are examined above and beyond socio-demographic variables, we statistically controlled for these factors. The inclusion of socio-demographic variables had essentially no influence on the observed relationships, and they were eventually dropped from the models and it was decided to treat the group as one sample. Table 1 contains the means, standard deviations, internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's α) and intercorrelations of all the variables measured.

Table 1.

Internal-consistency reliability (Cronbach's α), means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among all study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional exhaustion	(.84)						
2. Interpersonal conflict	.37***	(.76)					
3. Quantitative workload	.40***	.27**	(.83)				
4.Organizational constraints	.39***	.35***	.35***	(.79)			
5. Emotional intelligence	−.36***	−.23**	−.29***	−.26**	(.94)		
6. Trait negative affectivity	.42***	.27**	.21**	.23**	−.20*	(.87)	
7. Trait positive affectivity	−.30***	−.22**	−.11	−.11	.22**	−.31**	(.77)
M	18.36	6.58	15.42	17.68	4.95	18.11	33.07
SD	8.99	1.56	4.51	5.37	.60	5.93	7.12

Note. Diagonal values are the internal consistency estimates for each scale.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (all two-tailed significance tests)

As shown in previous studies, trait EI was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion; it was also negatively correlated with job stressors. NA was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion, job stressors and trait EI.

Do job stressors predict emotional exhaustion beyond dispositional affectivity of the employee?

As predicted, job stressors, that is, interpersonal conflict, quantitative workload and organizational constrains were positively related to emotional exhaustion (see Table 1). As a more conservative test of these relationships, H1, which stated that job stressors are related to emotional exhaustion beyond dispositional affectivity, was tested with two multiple-regression analyses. The results revealed that both NA and PA, which were entered in the first step of the regression equation, were significantly related to emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = -.19$, $p < .01$, respectively), explaining 19.9% of the variance. Beyond these control variables, job stressors explained an additional 14.4% of the unique variance. The results showed that all three stressors were significant as predictors of emotional exhaustion: interpersonal conflict ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), quantitative workload ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$), and organizational constraints ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H1 was fully supported.

Does EI moderate the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion?

H2 stated that trait EI would moderate the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion. We predicted that the positive relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion is weaker among employees who are high rather than low in trait EI. To test this hypothesis, we performed a moderated hierarchical multiple re-

gression analysis. First, we examined whether trait EI moderates the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and emotional exhaustion (*H2a*). The variables were entered into the regression equation in three steps. The control variables were entered in the first step. In the second step, we entered the "main effects" (interpersonal conflicts and trait EI). Finally, interpersonal conflicts x trait EI product term variable was entered in the third step. Interpersonal conflicts and trait EI were centered prior to creating the interaction term, allowing the beta-weight of the interaction term to be more directly interpretable (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken. 2003). The results revealed that the interaction of interpersonal conflicts and IE term was significant ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .01$) and accounted for a significant portion of the variance in emotional exhaustion ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .01$; see Table 2).

Table 2.

Regression of interpersonal conflicts and trait emotional intelligence on emotional exhaustion

Model	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β
Step 1: Control	.20***				
Negative affectivity			.46	.11	.30***
Positive affectivity			−.11	.09	−.09
Step 2: Main effects	.30***	.10***			
Interpersonal conflict			.75	.45	.13
Emotional Intelligence			−3.65	1.05	−.25**
Step 3: Interaction	.33***	.03**			
Interpersonal Conflict x Emotional Intelligence			−1.52	.58	−.20**

Note. All coefficients are reported for the final step.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

To further examine if the interaction matches the hypothesis, we plotted the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and emotional exhaustion comparing people who scored more than 1 standard deviation above and below the average level of trait IE (see Figure 1). The interaction form was consistent with our predictions. Further, following guidelines suggested by Aiken and West (1991), a simple slopes analysis was conducted for participants who scored one standard deviation below and above the mean on EI. As predicted, interpersonal conflicts were positively related to emotional exhaustion among employees who were low in trait EI ($\beta = .47$, $p < .05$). In contrast, interpersonal conflicts and emotional exhaustion were unrelated among employees who were high in trait EI ($\beta = .05$, $p = .79$). In other words, interpersonal conflicts only increase emotional exhaustion for employees low (vs. high) in trait EI. Thus, H2a was supported.

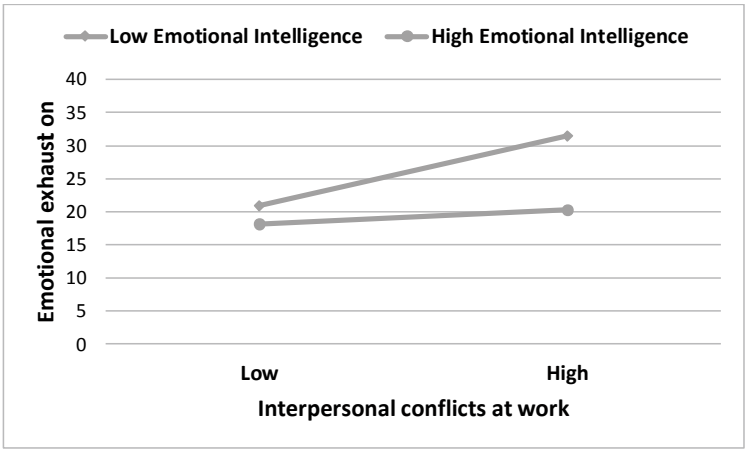

Figure 1. Experience of emotional exhaustion as a function of interpersonal conflicts at work and trait emotional intelligence. Low interpersonal conflicts are defined as mean –1 standard deviation from the mean; high interpersonal conflicts are defined as mean +1 standard deviation. Note that this high/low split is for illustrative purposes here only; the moderation analyses conducted use all variables as continuous variables.

H2b stated that trait EI would moderate the relationship between quantitative workload and emotional exhaustion, in such a way that the positive relationship between quantitative workload is stronger among persons lower in trait EI than those higher in trait EI. In testing this hypothesis, the interaction term was insignificant ($p = .287$) and did not account for a significant portion of the variance for emotional exhaustion scores (see Table 3). Instead, quantitative workload had a direct positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and trait EI and had a direct negative relationship with emotional exhaustion. Thus, H2b was not supported.

Table 3.

Regression of quantitative workload and trait emotional intelligence on emotional exhaustion

Model	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β
Step 1: Control	.20***				
Negative affectivity			.43	.11	.28***
Positive affectivity			−.17	.09	−.14
Step 2: Main effects	.32***	.12***			
Quantitative workload			.54	.14	.27***
Emotional Intelligence			−2.78	1.08	−.19*
Step 3: Interaction	.32***	.00			
Quantative workload x Emotional Intelligence			−.24	.23	−.07

Note. All coefficients are reported for the final step.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

H2c stated that trait EI would moderate the relationship between organizational constraints and emotional exhaustion, in such a way that the positive relationship between organizational constraints is stronger among employees low (vs. high) in trait EI. In testing this hypothesis, the interaction term was not significant (p = .127) and did not explain any additional variance in emotional exhaustion beyond the main effects and did not account for a significant portion of the variance for emotional exhaustion scores (see Table 4). Instead, both organizational constraints and trait EI had a direct relationship (positive and negative, respectively) with emotional exhaustion. H2c was not supported.

Table 4.

Regression of organizational constraints and trait emotional intelligence on emotional exhaustion

Model	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β
Step 1: Control	.20***				
Negative affectivity			.46	.11	.30***
Positive affectivity			−.11	.09	−.09
Step 2: Main effects	.30***	.10***			
Organizational constraints			.75	.45	.13
Emotional Intelligence			−3.65	1.05	−.25**
Step 3: Interaction	.33***	.03**			
Organazational Constrains x Emotional Intelligence			−1.52	.658	−.20**

Note. All coefficients are reported for the final step.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to examine the combined effect of job stressors and trait IE on burnout. We controlled for the dispositional affectivity of participants, as dispositional tendencies toward positive or negative emotions could create spurious correlations between the variables studied here. Indeed, our findings demonstrate that dispositional affectivity is an important factor in the burnout process and should not be ignored. We found that both NA and PA were significant predictors of emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). However, our study demonstrates that job stressors significantly predict emotional exhaustion beyond the dispositional affectivity of employees. This means that job stressors lead to an increase in burnout rates regardless of the employees' general and stable emotional characteristics.

We predicted that trait EI moderates the relationship between job stressors and burnout. This prediction was supported only in relation to interpersonal conflicts at work. Our study demonstrates that the unfavourable effect of interpersonal conflicts on burn-

out was observed only among employees who were low in trait EI. In contrast, interpersonal conflicts and burnout were unrelated among employees who were high in trait EI. This demonstrates that when confronted with difficult interpersonal situations, employees who were high in trait EI experience less occupational stress than their low-in-trait-EI counterparts. This suggests that employees high in EI have better emotional skills at their disposal and are, therefore, better prepared to deal with unpleasant interpersonal situations. This favourable effect of trait EI has already been demonstrated by Mikolajczak, Nelis, Hansenne, and Quoidbach (2008), who showed that trait EI promoted the use of adaptive emotion-regulation strategies (e.g., positive reappraisal) and prevented the choice of maladaptive emotion-regulation strategies (e.g., self-blame) when experiencing negative emotions. There is also evidence that, when confronted with stressful situations, individuals high in trait EI are more likely to utilize coping styles that are generally regarded as adaptive (e.g., task-focused coping) rather than coping styles that are generally regarded as maladaptive (e.g., emotion-focused coping) (Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007). Furthermore, Mikolajczak, Roy, Luminet, Fillee, and de Timary (2007) have demonstrated that individuals high in trait EI, in comparison to their low-in-trait-EI counterparts, showed significantly less reactivity to a stressful event at both physiological (i.e., salivary cortisol) and psychological (i.e., mood deterioration) levels. In general, the results partially support the notion of the JD-R model and provide further insight into emotional intelligence as a personal resource which fosters employees' mental health.

The moderating hypothesis was not confirmed in relation to organizational constraints and workload. The lack of interactional effects between these two variables could have been caused by certain methodological shortcomings. One such shortcoming was suggested by Van der Doef & Maes (1999) who argued that the interactional effects between an independent variable and a moderator occur more often when both variables refer to similar specificity. For example, we can expect emotional resources to reduce the effect of emotional stressors rather than other types of stressors. Interpersonal conflict at work is one of the most detrimental social stressors; therefore it is related to strong negative emotions. Employees high in EI cope with this stressor more effectively. In contrast, organizational constraints and workload are more organizational in nature; therefore it is likely that another type of resource (for example organizational resources-job control or social support) may minimize their negative impact on occupational stress. This is consistent with the matching principle proposed by De Jonge and Dormann (2003) who suggested that resources are likely to moderate the demands-outcomes relationship the most when the demands, resources, and psychological outcomes match each other, that is, when they are all on the same level, for example, they are all emotional features (De Jonge & Dormann, 2003). The next possible reason for these inconsistent

findings regarding the postulated interaction effect results from the fact that the research samples were heterogeneous occupationally. Some authors state that there exists too much diversity in job characteristics or working conditions because of the wide variety of jobs and occupations studied (De Jonge & Kompier, 1997). The likelihood of uncovering interaction effects in a strongly heterogeneous group is reduced due to the diversity of individual occupations and the variety that exists in job characteristics, working conditions and instrument specificity.

Our study has several limitations. Firstly, there was an unequal sex ratio in the sample – almost 60% of the participants were female. Therefore, the obtained data may apply to men to a lesser extent than they do to women. What is more, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow us to draw any conclusions about causality. According to the JD-R model, job burnout results from long-lasting job stressors and lack of personal and organizational resources. Therefore, it is very important to capture the process's dynamic character . Future research needs to apply a cross-lagged approach in order to clarify the direction of the relationships between job stressors, job resources and negative outcomes. They should also take into consideration the interactional effect of personal and organizational resources – that is, emotional intelligence and organizational climate. Maybe these two resources operate in concert in reducing job stress.

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