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## WORK-RELATED BURNOUT AS A PREDICTOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN PHARMACEUTICAL SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Kashif Ali & Saleem Abbas<sup>\*</sup>

University of Management and Technology, Sialkot

### ABSTRACT

*The main objective of the current study was to investigate the predictive relationship of work-related burnout with psychological distress among pharmaceutical representatives. For the current study a sample of 201 participants including 100 males and 101 females ( $M=27.55, SD=4.96$ ) who were working in the different pharmaceutical companies in Punjab were selected through purposive sampling technique. The personnel information form and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al., 2002) were administered individually to collect the data. The t-test was employed to test the assumption of the study. The results of linear regression analysis reveal that work-related burnout didn't predict psychological distress among pharmaceutical representatives. The potential implications and further avenues for future research are suggested.*

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**Keywords:** Work-Related Burnout, Psychological Distress, Pharmaceutical, Sale Representative

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<sup>\*</sup> Correspondence Address: Dr. Saleem Abbas; Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot-Pakistan.  
E-mail: saleemabbas@skt.umt.edu.pk.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The major objective of the present was to investigate the relationship between work-related burnout and psychological wellbeing among the pharmaceutical sales representatives in Pakistan. Work related burnout and mental health issues among medical health professionals is common phenomena and prevailed globally with large numbers. Medical health professional especially and particularly faced many of the work related issues which are associated with the mental health issues due to their nature of job.

According to Kaschka et al. (2011) Burnout is not a new phenomenon, it is found in different countries, cultures, and among people working in different organization. This is often occurred in the reaction to chronic work stress. Maslack (1996) theory of Burnout explained the Burnout as a three dimensional phenomenon, which includes exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy. Deshpande et al. (2019) showed that Burnout affects Job performance, although the causes may vary according to the nature of job and other factors i.e frequent travelling due to sale target and meeting the goals.

According to Kessler (2003) Psychological Distress refers to as the painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated depression and anxiety (Salvagioni et al., 2017). This Psychological distress often leads to severe mental health conditions if remains untreated mental health, job happiness, and general well-being of pharmaceutical sales reps can all suffer from work-related psychological distress. By marketing and selling medications to healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical sales agents contribute significantly to the healthcare business. Their job satisfaction may be impacted by the demands of their position, though. Pharmaceutical sales reps' performance, mental health, and general well-being can all be affected by how satisfied they are at work. To enhance their work performance and general well-being, pharmaceutical sales agents must therefore grasp the aspects that affect job satisfaction.

Many of the studies reveals that numerous elements, including work requirements, work resources, and organizational support, affect pharmaceutical sales representatives' job satisfaction. For instance, research has shown that workplace demands, such as workload and job insecurity, are negatively associated with job satisfaction, whereas job resources, like social support and job control, are positively connected to job satisfaction (Morgeson et al., 2015; Rhoades et al.,

2002; Bourne et al., 2021). In order to promote and sell medications to healthcare professionals, sales agents are a vital component of the pharmaceutical industry

It is noteworthy that (Zhang et al., 2021) sale representative job is very much difficult and sometime takes long hours to complete their assigned task and expectations from their boss, put extra pressures on them. As Judge et al. ( 2001 ) showed that if the worker experience high level of burnout, he or she may also suffer from psychological distress (anxiety and depression) , which further lead to low level of productivity, and general well- being of employees. Meeusen et al., (2019) also reported the relationship of burnout with lack of adequate resources at job place and also social support for the employees.

A large scale study that was conducted in Pakistan showed that 16.4 % and 2.5% Sales representatives were suffering from Major depression and severe major depression respectively on PHQ-8 score. They also reported that insufficient time for the family and unsatisfactory behavior of the managers was the associated factors (Atif et al., 2016).

Burnout at work is characterized by emotional weariness, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2009). In the fast-moving and high-pressure world of today's work environment, taking care of employees' health and happiness is extremely important. Specifically, in the pharmaceutical field, pharmaceutical sales representative has a vital job. They're responsible for promoting and selling pharmaceutical products to healthcare professionals. Their job includes building relationships, hitting sales goals, and staying informed about medical developments. But they also have to deal with the stress and competition in the pharmaceutical market. Unfortunately, the demands of their job might lead to work-related burnout, emotional strain, and could negatively affect how satisfied they are with their work and how happy they feel overall. It is well documented by different researchers (Han et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2020; Simionato et al., 2019;& Grow et al., 2019) ) that burnout has an important role in the development of worker's psychosocial well –being, and also leads to occupational hazard in the society. Both the individuals and the organization have to bear this cost because it not only leads to psychological distress of the employee, but also can have negative effects on the organization.

Work-related burnout is a multifaceted construct considered by emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement. It arises from

chronic work-related stressors and is known to impact employee well-being negatively. In the context of pharmaceutical sales representatives, the nature of their work, which involves meeting sales targets, managing customer relationships, and navigating a dynamic and competitive industry, can contribute to increased levels of burnout. Exploring the prevalence and levels of work-related burnout among pharmaceutical sales representatives is critical to understanding the extent of the problem and identifying potential interventions to alleviate its impact (Khammissa et al., 2022).

Systematic review and meta-analysis (Koutsimani et al., 2019) showed the relationship between burnout, depression, and anxiety. They clarify that there is a relationship between burnout-depression and also burnout with anxiety. They suggested doing further studies to assess the causal relationships between these variables. Considering this gap in research the present research is aim to investigate the predictive relationship of work related burnout with psychological distress among pharmaceutical representatives.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

The population of the current study is 201(n=100male, n=101female) working as Pharmaceutical Sale Representatives in Punjab. Convenient sampling method is used to collect the sample.

The requirements for being included or excluded were predetermined and established before carrying out this research, as they were necessary guidelines and steps for the study. The criteria for inclusion encompassed the specific qualities or attributes of participants that were vital to the current study's design. To ensure accuracy in sampling, individuals who met the following criteria were selected for this study:

- Only the pharmaceutical sales representatives were included in the current study.
- Only Pakistani companies' pharmaceutical sales representatives were included in the present study and there were no non-national Companies employees as part of the present study.

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- Only the employees who are doing a job in the sales department of a pharmaceutical company were part of the study and all other departments employees of pharmaceutical companies were excluded in the current study.
- Individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and religious affiliations were selected and incorporated as participants.
- This research study included participants who were married, single, or separated.
- Only employees who have had at least some contact with the internet were considered for inclusion.

To control for the possible impact of certain variables on the results, individuals who met the following criteria were not included in the present study, aiming to reduce errors and address concerns associated with sampling.

- Participants who were excluded or not included in the study due to physical or psychological disabilities were accepted to protect the study from potential negative effects caused by these disabilities.
- To avoid any negative impact on the study findings caused by substance use addiction, the current research did not include any employees who had any type of addiction to drugs or other substances.
- Individuals who have twin nationality were not included in the sample for the present study.

### ***Measures***

#### **Personal Information Form**

Participants personnel information was collected through the self-developed information form which was comprised of age, gender, their birth order, educational qualification, marital status, area of their residence and their nature of job etc.

#### **Oldenburg Burnout Inventory**

This scale was developed by Demerouti et al. (2003). This tool aims to evaluate work-related burnout and consists of 16 items. It is a self-administered scale that uses a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 5 means strongly agree to 1 means strongly disagree. Within this scale, 8 items are scored in the opposite direction. The OLBI comprises two subscales: Exhaustion and

Disengagement. The internal consistency of the OLBI, represented by the coefficient, is 0.83 (Demerouti et al., 2003). This scale has also been used with workers. This scale has been translated into 20 languages and it is also adapted for measuring academic burnout.

### **Kessler Psychological Distress Scale**

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is a straightforward tool developed by Kessler et al. (2002) to assess psychological distress. It consists of 10 questions that inquire about emotional states. Each question offers a response scale with five levels ranging from 1-5 where 1 means none of the time and 5 means all the time. High score indicates high level of distress (Kessler et al., 2003). Its total score is 10 to 50 and its cutoff score is 22. It has high internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Kessler et al., 2002).

### ***Procedure***

To gather data for the current study, the initial focus was on all pharmaceutical companies operating in Punjab. A comprehensive list of these companies was created. Once the list of companies was prepared, the HR department of those companies was approached to seek approval from the higher authorities. The purpose of the data collection process was explained to the participants, and their consent was obtained to collect the information. The purpose of this action was to collect data in a regulated and impartial way, and particular precautions were implemented to guarantee that. The measures were administered in an appropriate assessment setting, as recommended by educational professionals. In these settings, measures were taken to prevent any form of interference or intrusion. All settings adhered to a consistent organizational structure for implementing and maintaining measures. The method of administration remained the same in all settings. The guidelines provided in the manuals for the measures used were strictly followed in terms of information and procedures. The present study was shown with the employee of a pharmaceutical company who is doing a job in the sales department of a pharmaceutical company working in Punjab. The Punjab state had a prepared list of pharmaceutical companies to aid in approaching them for data collection. To gather data for this study, the researcher initially went to the HR departments of various companies and visited the workplaces of employees (such as hospitals and doctor chambers, as per the provided list). The participants were asked for consent to collect data for the study, and data collection began once consent was obtained. In order to obtain approval for the present

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research, a variety of documents and measures were submitted to the respective universities' heads and authorities, where data collection occurred. The documents included a letter from the Department of Psychology permitting students to collect data, a form giving participants the choice to join the study, and various psychological measurement scales used in the research. After receiving approval from the universities' higher authorities, the participants were approached at their workplaces. The medical representatives who participated in the study were selected through random sampling.

Individual data forms were provided exclusively to those participants who consented to take part in the study, ensuring the gathering of personal information while safeguarding the privacy of their demographic particulars. Based on this data, the examination of the participants was conducted. If any confusion arose regarding any information, it was resolved through a brief interview, utilizing the Individual Data Shape form. Upon completion of data collection, participants and specialists from pertinent educational institutions were involved. Recognizing the importance of building trust and a positive relationship between researchers and participants is a fundamental aspect of conducting a successful research study. Thus, prior to implementing the psychological procedures, it was crucial to establish trust and rapport with the participants. Firstly the researcher established the rapport with the participant and the consent form was given along with the explanation of the objective of the study, the information sheet was filled and it was followed by the administration of Burnout scale. At the end of the session, they were thanked for their volunteer participation.

The current study is an extract of Master Thesis for which initial approval was granted by the departmental research Board and then the synopsis was approved from the Board of study and Board of advanced study and Research, of University of UMT, Sialkot. The researchers was abide to the ethical considerations of research during the whole process of the study, the principles of confidentiality, volunteer participation of the participants, right to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection and safe guard of the participant from any harm. Since the study involve the administration of Psychological distress scale, and there was a chance that the items may upset the any participant, the researchers made sure that to kept the environment relaxing and provide counseling to the participant.

*Statistical Analysis*

The scoring of the measures was carried out in accordance with the instructions provided in their respective manuals. An Excel file was generated specifically for this purpose, and the outcomes were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to the complete set of data. To determine the results and assess the hypothesis, linear regression was applied.

**RESULTS**

Table 1  
*Socio-demographic Information of the Participants (N = 201)*

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Education		
Graduation	181	90.05
Post-graduation	20	9.95
Marital Status		
Unmarried	96	47.76
Married	103	51.24
Separated	02	1.0
Socioeconomic status		
Upper	14	6.96
Middle	171	85.07
Lower	16	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	27.55	4.96



Table 2  
*Linear Regression Analysis with Work-related Burnout as Predictor of Psychological Distress among Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives*

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	35.19	3.21				
Work-related Burnout	-.12	.09	-.09	.01	1.86	.17

\* $p > .05$

## DISCUSSION

The main focus of the current study was to examine the predictive relationship of Work related burnout with Psychological distress among pharmaceutical sales representatives. The results reveal that work-related burnout didn't predict psychological distress (Table 2). It has been observed that the factors contributing to this psychological distress is not only the work-related, there are other intervening variables, like working hours of the worker. Wang et al. (2017) explained that the relationship of occupational stress with burnout is influenced by psychological capital in workers. However, some previous other researches showed that Burnout is linked with Psychological Distress and it has been noted that any type of burnout either it can be physical or mental burnout these may lead to many of the other psychological problems among the pharmaceutical representatives or workers Brook et al., 2011; Kounenou, 2010). Greenberg et al. (1999) reported that workers, who have anxiety or other mental health, put a burden on the organization and also it leads to the low level of productivity. Numerous studies have highlighted that the growth and development are compromised as a result of burnout (Bakker et al., 2000). Researchers also showed that factors such as poor self-esteem also play a significant role in causing feelings of loneliness and affecting overall well-being. In Pakistan,

various studies have demonstrated and confirmed the interconnectedness of these factors (Riaz et al., 2007; Khanam et al., 2008; Tateno et al., 2016). It also suggests that self-esteem plays a contributing role in the development of psychological distress in individuals.

It has been noted that the sales representatives are always backbones of the industry around the globe and they work purposefully to increase the growth of the any of the industry but due to the heavy duties which leads to burnout and other stressful condition, faced by these populations have many of the negative impact on their lives. One of the reasons why the results are important is because they link psychological issues with burnout and mental distress. It has been inspected that burnout has its own effects on the mental health of the employees (Chou & Hsiao, 2000; Zhou et al., 2015; Caplan, 2003). There are very few studies that have been conducted with pharmaceutical sale representatives in Pakistan, however on the study with sales representatives of banking industry of Pakistan have been published and, the findings of this study indicated that Burnout plays a significant role in the performance. It was also observed that employees' performance, satisfaction and intension to leave the job were significantly related. They strongly recommended that there should be clear job description, incentive should be given to appreciate their performance, assigned target should be given according to the employees capabilities, so that they can be achieved, and training to new employees should also give (Rehman et al., 2015).

There are some limitations and recommendations of the study. It would be valuable to explore these variables allowing with other variables. Additionally, any specific relationships discovered between work- related burnout and other mental health factors such as psychological distress must be viewed as hypothetical due to the self-reported nature of the data collected from pharmaceutical sale representative. Since most studies have relied on a single respondent, it is necessary to conduct further research in this area involving mix method. The study suggests that improving statistical control can be achieved by increasing the sample size. Furthermore, data collection from additional cities in Pakistan and the inclusion of participants beyond pharmaceutical sale representative are advised. Additionally, exploring the influence of economic status as a

vulnerability factor for mental health issues is also crucial. This will significantly contribute to the generalizability of research findings and broaden our understanding of mental health problems among pharmaceutical representatives.

There are some practical implications of the findings. Firstly this study's findings will aid in understanding the role of work-related burnout and psychological distress (means anxiety and depression) among medical representatives employed in various government and private companies in Pakistan. To enhance the productivity and mental health of employees, employers should give them support for their mental and psychological health As Lee et al. (2016) suggested that coping strategies plays an important role in the development of burnout. Boland et al. (2019) suggested that Problem focused coping are effected to deal with burnout. Hence it is strongly recommended that employers should arrange these types of personal development workshops for the employees to enhance their mental health. Further, researchers should explore role of intervening variables, like working hours, rewards, healthy working environment.

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