

Burnout Among Secretariat Employees: Job Demands, Work-Life Balance and Emotional Pathways

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the effects of job demands and work-life balance on burnout through emotional pathways among secretariat employees. It aims to explain whether emotional pathways mediate the relationship between workplace conditions and burnout in administrative support roles.

Methodology: This study employs a quantitative explanatory design using survey data from 138 valid respondents. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0 to assess the measurement model, structural model, direct effects, and mediation effects.

Results: Job demands significantly increase burnout and emotional pathways, indicating that higher administrative pressure, task urgency, and responsibility intensity contribute to employee strain. Unexpectedly, work-life balance positively affects burnout, suggesting that balance efforts may not reduce burnout when occupational pressure remains unresolved. Emotional pathways do not significantly affect burnout and do not mediate the relationship between job demands, work-life balance, and burnout.

Conclusion: This study concludes that job demands are the most consistent predictor of burnout among secretariat employees. Burnout is primarily driven by persistent workplace demands rather than emotional mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of managing workload and improving organizational conditions to reduce employee burnout.

Limitations: This cross-sectional study is limited to secretariat employees in a specific organizational context, restricting causal interpretation and generalizability. Future studies should examine broader occupational groups and diverse settings.

Contribution: This study contributes to burnout literature by highlighting secretariat employees as an underexplored occupational group and demonstrating that direct workplace factors explain burnout more strongly than emotional mediation mechanisms.

Keywords: *Burnout, Emotional Pathways, Job Demands, Secretariat Employees, Work-Life Balance*

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1. Introduction

Previous burnout studies have extensively investigated the influence of job-related factors, particularly job demands, workload, job pressure, and work resources, as key predictors of employee burnout. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that excessive job demands increase psychological strain and emotional exhaustion, supporting the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework. However, most previous studies have primarily focused on the direct effects of external workplace conditions on burnout, providing limited explanation of the psychological mechanisms that determine how employees interpret and respond to these conditions. As a result, the same level of job demands may produce different burnout outcomes among employees due to differences in their internal emotional responses and coping processes ([Bunjak, Černe, Nagy, & Bruch, 2023](#)).

Although prior research has examined the relationship between work-life balance and burnout, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Several studies indicate that poor work-life balance contributes to higher burnout by reducing recovery opportunities and increasing psychological stress. Conversely, other studies suggest that work-life balance alone may not sufficiently explain burnout experiences because organizational expectations, emotional regulation, and individual coping strategies may influence how employees perceive and manage competing work and personal demands. These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between workplace conditions and burnout requires further investigation through an explanatory mechanism that captures employees' internal psychological processes.

To address this gap, this study introduces emotional pathways as an intermediate mechanism linking job demands and work-life balance to burnout. Unlike previous burnout models that mainly emphasize direct relationships between work conditions and psychological outcomes, the emotional pathway perspective explains how employees' emotional reactions become a critical process through which workplace experiences are transformed into burnout symptoms. By integrating emotional pathways into the burnout framework, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of why similar job demands or work-life conditions may result in different levels of burnout among employees ([Fanggidae, Tadu, & Nursiani, 2025](#)).

The novelty of this study lies in extending the conventional JD-R perspective by incorporating emotional pathways as an additional explanatory dimension within the relationship between job demands, work-life balance, and burnout. This integrated approach moves beyond identifying burnout antecedents by examining the underlying emotional mechanisms that contribute to burnout development. Furthermore, focusing on secretariat employees provides a contextual contribution, as these employees experience continuous administrative responsibilities, coordination demands, and interpersonal pressures that remain relatively underexplored in existing burnout research ([Maslach & Leiter, 2017](#)).

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to employees' perceived ability to effectively manage professional responsibilities and personal life demands without experiencing excessive interference between these domains. Beyond the allocation of time, work-life balance reflects employees' psychological perception of control, flexibility, and satisfaction in managing multiple life roles ([Amegayibor, 2023](#)). [Gragnano et al. \(2020\)](#) conceptualize work-life balance as a multidimensional construct involving the interaction between work-family and work-health domains, while [Kelliher et al. \(2019\)](#) argue that contemporary work arrangements require employees to continuously negotiate boundaries between professional obligations and personal responsibilities. Therefore, work-life balance represents an important psychological resource that enables employees to maintain stability between work demands and personal recovery needs.

The relevance of work-life balance can be explained through the Conservation of Resources (COR) perspective, which suggests that employees experience stress when valuable psychological resources are threatened or insufficiently restored. From this perspective, employees with adequate work-life

balance possess greater opportunities to recover emotional and cognitive resources after work, thereby reducing vulnerability to psychological exhaustion. Conversely, when work responsibilities continuously intrude into personal life, employees may experience resource depletion because recovery opportunities become limited. Previous empirical studies support this argument by demonstrating that excessive workload, extended working hours, and limited autonomy increase work-life interference and contribute to higher stress levels ([Haar et al., 2019](#)).

Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that work-life balance functions as a protective factor against burnout. [Kekeocha et al. \(2024\)](#) found that employees with stronger work-life balance demonstrate greater psychological recovery capacity and lower burnout tendencies. [Similarly, Shirmohammadi et al. \(2022\)](#) showed that organizational support and flexible work arrangements enhance employees' ability to maintain healthy boundaries, whereas intensive work demands weaken such balance. These findings suggest that work-life balance does not merely represent an individual preference but functions as a psychological mechanism that influences how employees recover from occupational pressure.

In the context of secretariat employees, work-life balance becomes particularly important because administrative roles frequently involve continuous coordination, urgent requests, formal communication, and high responsiveness expectations. Such conditions may increase boundary permeability between work and personal life, reducing employees' ability to psychologically detach from workplace demands. Therefore, work-life balance is expected to influence burnout by determining employees' recovery capacity and emotional resources when facing demanding work situations.

2.2 Job Demands

Job demands refer to physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of work that require sustained effort from employees. These demands include workload intensity, time pressure, role complexity, emotional requirements, and responsibility for task completion. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, job demands do not automatically result in negative outcomes; however, persistent demands that exceed employees' available resources initiate a health impairment process characterized by energy depletion, exhaustion, and eventually burnout ([Bakker & De Vries, 2021](#)). [Bakker et al. \(2023\)](#) further explain that continuous exposure to high job demands consumes employees' psychological resources and reduces their ability to maintain optimal functioning.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive relationship between job demands and burnout. [Huhtala et al. \(2021\)](#) found that intensive workload and excessive performance expectations increase employee strain because continuous effort expenditure reduces cognitive and emotional resources. Similarly, previous studies indicate that role pressure, administrative complexity, and time constraints contribute to emotional exhaustion by limiting employees' recovery opportunities ([Haar et al., 2019](#)). These findings confirm the central assumption of JD-R theory that burnout emerges when job demands remain high while sufficient recovery resources are unavailable.

However, previous research has primarily examined job demands as a direct predictor of burnout and has provided limited explanation regarding the psychological process through which job demands are transformed into burnout symptoms. Employees exposed to similar levels of job demands may experience different burnout outcomes because they differ in emotional regulation capacity and psychological interpretation of stressful situations. High job demands may trigger frustration, anxiety, and emotional fatigue, which gradually reduce employees' ability to regulate emotions and maintain psychological stability.

For secretariat employees, job demands are particularly relevant because their responsibilities require accuracy, rapid decision-making, coordination across organizational units, and continuous interaction with internal and external stakeholders. These conditions create both cognitive and emotional demands that may accelerate resource depletion ([Lailla, Rao, Hakim, & Nugroho, 2025](#)). Therefore, job demands may influence burnout not only through direct exhaustion mechanisms but also

through emotional processes that explain how employees psychologically respond to workplace pressure.

2.3 Emotional Pathways

Emotional pathways refer to the psychological processes through which employees perceive, regulate, and respond to emotional experiences generated by workplace conditions. Unlike emotional states that represent temporary reactions, emotional pathways describe the ongoing mechanism through which employees interpret stressful situations, regulate emotional responses, and restore psychological balance. [Gross \(2015\)](#) explains that emotion regulation involves processes through which individuals influence the emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how these emotions are expressed. Furthermore, regulatory flexibility theory suggests that effective emotional regulation depends on employees' ability to adapt emotional responses according to situational demands ([Kobylińska & Kusev, 2019](#)).

The theoretical importance of emotional pathways can be explained through the JD-R framework extension, which proposes that psychological outcomes are not determined solely by external job conditions but also by employees' internal processes when dealing with those conditions ([Fanggidae, Tadu, & Nursiani, 2025](#)). While traditional JD-R models emphasize the role of job demands and resources, incorporating emotional pathways provides a deeper explanation of why identical workplace conditions may produce different levels of burnout. Employees who effectively regulate emotions and recover from stressful experiences may prevent temporary strain from developing into chronic exhaustion. Conversely, ineffective emotional regulation may accelerate resource depletion and increase burnout vulnerability.

Previous empirical studies support the mediating role of emotional processes in burnout development. [Mendes and Miguel \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that emotion regulation explains how occupational stress translates into burnout symptoms, indicating that emotional responses serve as an important mechanism connecting workplace experiences with psychological outcomes. Similarly, [Wang et al. \(2024\)](#) found that stronger emotion regulation abilities are associated with lower burnout levels, while [Farhi and Rubinsten \(2024\)](#) confirmed that emotion regulation mediates the relationship between stress exposure and employee well-being.

Therefore, emotional pathways represent a critical explanatory mechanism that extends previous burnout research beyond direct-effect relationships. By incorporating emotional pathways into the research model, this study explains how job demands and work-life balance influence burnout through employees' internal emotional processing. This perspective is particularly relevant for secretariat employees, whose work requires continuous interpersonal interaction, emotional control, and professional responses under demanding organizational conditions.

2.4 Hypotheses

The proposed model explains burnout through the interaction of job demands, work-life balance, and emotional pathways. Job demands represent work conditions requiring sustained effort, while work-life balance reflects employees' ability to manage professional responsibilities and personal recovery. Emotional pathways describe adaptive emotional conditions that support confidence, comfort, and psychological readiness. Thus, burnout develops not only from demanding work conditions but also from employees' ability to maintain balance and regulate emotional responses.

Job demands can increase burnout because excessive occupational pressure depletes psychological resources. High task intensity, time pressure, and repeated responsibilities may reduce employees' energy and concentration. The Job Demands-Resources theory explains that excessive demands trigger a health-impairment process when recovery resources are insufficient ([Bakker, & De, 2021](#); [Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2023](#)). In secretariat work, this may occur through urgent documentation, administrative accuracy, and continuous coordination. Therefore, this study proposes:

H₁: Job demands have a positive and significant effect on burnout

Work-life balance can reduce burnout by supporting recovery and helping employees manage professional and personal roles effectively. Employees with better balance can detach from work pressure and maintain healthier psychological functioning. [Gragnano, Simbula, and Miglioretti \(2020\)](#) highlight that work-life balance includes work-family and work-health dimensions, while [Haar, Sune, Russo, and Ollier-Malaterre \(2019\)](#) show that resources support balance and reduce role interference. Thus, the second hypothesis is:

H₂: Work-life balance has a negative and significant effect on burnout

Job demands may weaken emotional pathways because excessive pressure reduces employees' ability to maintain positive emotional conditions. Urgent tasks, strict targets, and repeated demands can decrease emotional comfort, confidence, and workplace enjoyment. [Bakker and De \(2021\)](#) explain that demanding conditions affect self-regulation because employees require psychological resources to manage pressure. Therefore:

H₃: Job demands have a negative and significant effect on emotional pathways

Work-life balance can strengthen emotional pathways because recovery opportunities support healthier emotional experiences. Employees who maintain balanced roles are more likely to return to work with better psychological readiness and emotional stability. [Shirmohammadi and Beigi \(2022\)](#) explain that work-life balance develops through resource gain that reduces emotional strain. Thus:

H₄: Work-life balance has a positive and significant effect on emotional pathways

Emotional pathways can reduce burnout by helping employees manage pressure before it develops into prolonged exhaustion. Employees with positive emotional conditions can respond to work demands with greater psychological control. [Mendes and Miguel \(2024\)](#) and Q. [Wang, Gao, and Wang \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that emotion regulation is associated with burnout processes. Therefore:

H₅: Emotional pathways have a negative and significant effect on burnout

Emotional pathways may mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout because work pressure can influence burnout through employees' emotional responses. High job demands may reduce positive emotional conditions, increasing vulnerability to fatigue and reduced functioning. In secretariat roles, emotional regulation is important because employees must remain responsive while managing institutional demands. Therefore:

H₆: Emotional pathways mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout

Emotional pathways may also mediate the relationship between work-life balance and burnout because balance supports emotional recovery and resilience. Employees with better balance have greater opportunities to maintain positive emotions, confidence, and readiness in facing work responsibilities. Thus, emotional pathways strengthen the protective effect of work-life balance against burnout. Therefore:

H₇: Emotional pathways mediate the relationship between work-life balance and burnout

Based on the theoretical arguments and hypotheses development, this study proposes a conceptual framework illustrating the relationships among job demands, work-life balance, emotional pathways, and burnout. The framework describes how occupational pressures and personal resource management influence burnout directly and indirectly through emotional mechanisms.

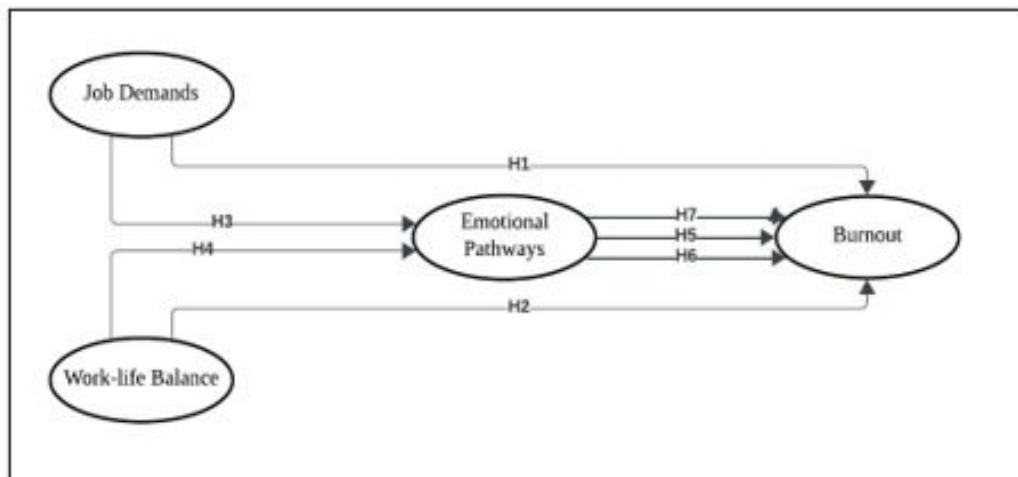


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 1 demonstrates the proposed research model, where job demands and work-life balance is positioned as antecedent factors affecting burnout. Emotional pathways are proposed as a mediating mechanism that explains how these factors influence employees' burnout experiences. The framework provides the basis for testing the direct and indirect relationships among the variables through the proposed hypotheses (H_1 - H_7).

3. Research Methodology

This study applies a quantitative explanatory design to examine the relationships among job demands, work-life balance, emotional pathways, and burnout. The explanatory approach is appropriate because the study aims to test both direct and indirect relationships among latent constructs and to examine the mediating role of emotional pathways in explaining burnout mechanisms. The research was conducted among secretariat employees because this occupational group is exposed to administrative complexity, formal communication requirements, document accuracy responsibilities, coordination activities, and deadline-oriented tasks that are relevant to the study context.

The study involved 138 secretariat employees who met the established eligibility criteria. The sample size was considered adequate for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for predictive research models involving multiple latent variables and mediation relationships. Following the recommendation of [Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle \(2019\)](#), PLS-SEM does not require normally distributed data and can effectively analyze complex structural models with relatively moderate sample sizes. The sample size also exceeds the minimum requirement based on the statistical power consideration for models involving multiple predictor paths.

The respondents' demographic characteristics were collected to provide an overview of the research context. The demographic profile includes information regarding gender, age, educational background, length of employment, and position or work experience within secretariat units. These characteristics are considered relevant because differences in career stage, work experience, and personal background may influence employees' perceptions of job demands, work-life balance, emotional responses, and burnout experiences. The demographic information was analyzed descriptively to describe the characteristics of the respondents participating in the study.

The sampling technique employed purposive sampling because the research requires respondents with direct experience in secretariat and administrative activities. The inclusion criteria required respondents to actively perform secretariat or administrative duties, have experience managing institutional administrative responsibilities, and understand the work demands associated with their roles. These criteria ensure that respondents provide relevant evaluations of job demands, emotional experiences, work-life conditions, and burnout within the specific occupational context examined. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through printed and online survey

forms based on institutional access, permission, and respondent availability. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of measurement items adapted from previously validated instruments.

Job demands were measured using indicators related to workload intensity, time pressure, mental effort, and psychological demands adapted from the Job Demands-Resources framework developed by [Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel \(2023\)](#) and further refined in subsequent empirical studies ([Bakker & De, 2021](#)). Work-life balance was measured using indicators reflecting time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance based on the conceptualization developed and supported by subsequent studies examining work-life balance dimensions ([Gragnano, Simbula, & Miglioretti, 2020](#)). Emotional pathways were operationalized through indicators representing emotional regulation, positive emotional experiences, confidence, and psychological stability, referring to the emotion regulation framework proposed by [Gross \(2015\)](#) and empirical studies examining emotional regulation mechanisms in occupational contexts ([Kobylińska, & Kusev, 2019](#); [Mendes, & Miguel, 2024](#)). Burnout was measured using indicators related to emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, mental fatigue, and reduced professional functioning based on established burnout measurement approaches developed by [Maslach and Leiter \(2017\)](#) and further validated through recent burnout assessment studies ([Edú-Valsania, Laguía, & Moriano, 2022](#); [Hadžibajramović, Schaufeli, & De, 2022](#)).

All measurement indicators were treated as reflective constructs because each indicator represents the manifestation of its corresponding latent variable. The use of established measurement instruments improves construct validity and enables comparison with previous empirical findings in occupational stress and burnout research. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. This analytical approach was selected because the study focuses on prediction-oriented analysis and examines a structural model involving multiple latent variables and mediation relationships. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated by assessing indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was examined through outer loading values, while internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Direct effects were tested through the relationships between job demands and burnout, work-life balance and burnout, job demands and emotional pathways, work-life balance and emotional pathways, and emotional pathways and burnout. The mediating effects of emotional pathways were examined through indirect relationships between job demands and burnout as well as between work-life balance and burnout. The significance of direct and indirect effects was assessed using bootstrapping procedures, which provide robust estimates for hypothesis testing in PLS-SEM analysis ([Hair et al., 2019](#)).

4. Results and Discussions

The initial dataset consisted of 160 secretariat employees who participated in the survey. Before conducting the PLS-SEM analysis, the data were examined to ensure that the responses met the minimum quality requirements for statistical testing. The screening process identified 22 responses that indicated a straight-lining pattern, where respondents selected the same answer across all questionnaire items. These responses were removed because such patterns may reduce data accuracy and weaken the validity of the measurement model. After the screening process, 138 responses were retained and used as the final sample for further analysis. This final dataset was considered appropriate for PLS-SEM because the number of respondents remained sufficient for testing the proposed model involving job demands, work-life balance, emotional pathways, and burnout.

After respondent screening, the measurement model was refined to improve the clarity and distinctiveness of each construct. The purification process focused on retaining indicators that demonstrated adequate loading values and stronger conceptual alignment with their respective variables. Several indicators were removed because they showed high overlap with other constructs and could weaken discriminant validity. This step was necessary because the study employed reflective measurement, where each indicator should represent the latent construct without creating excessive similarity with other variables in the model. The retained indicators were then relabeled sequentially for reporting purposes, without changing the original item content or respondent scores. The final measurement model consisted of three burnout indicators, three emotional pathway indicators, four job demand indicators, and five work-life balance indicators. This refined structure provided a more parsimonious and statistically acceptable basis for evaluating the outer and inner models

4.1 Outer Model Evaluation

The outer loadings evaluation was conducted to assess whether each retained indicator adequately represented its latent construct. This stage became important because the study had previously refined the measurement model through respondent screening and indicator purification. In reflective measurement, each indicator should demonstrate a strong relationship with its construct, since the observed items function as manifestations of the underlying variable. Higher loading values indicate that the item contributes meaningfully to the construct measurement and supports indicator reliability. Based on the final SmartPLS output, the retained indicators for burnout, emotional pathways, job demands, and work-life balance showed acceptable loading values and were therefore considered suitable for further analysis.

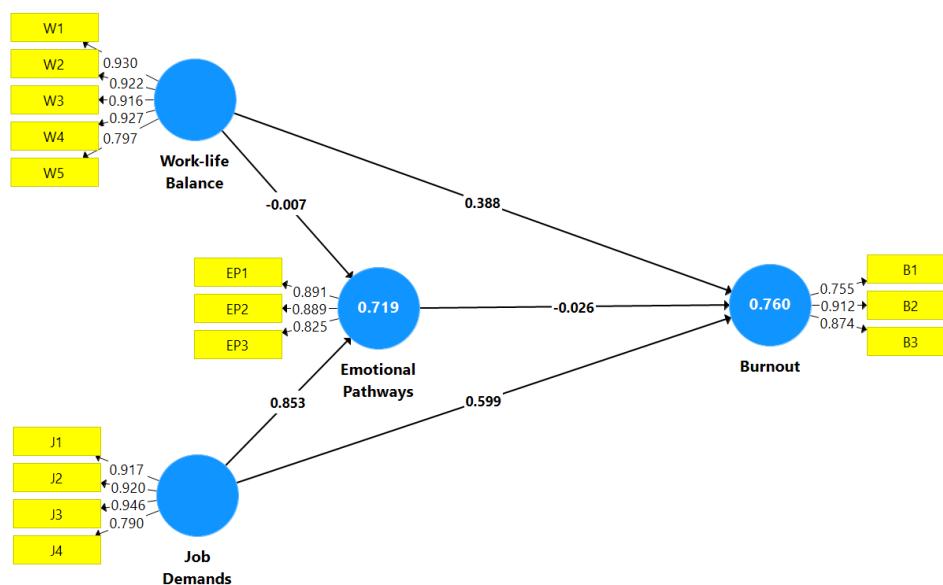


Figure 2. Loading factor path diagram

Figure 2 shows that the retained indicators had acceptable loading values. The work-life balance construct was measured by W_1 , W_2 , W_3 , W_4 , and W_5 , with loading values ranging from 0.797 to 0.930. Job demands were represented by J_1 , J_2 , J_3 , and J_4 , with loading values ranging from 0.790 to 0.946. Emotional pathways were measured by EP_1 , EP_2 , and EP_3 , with loading values ranging from 0.825 to 0.891. Burnout was represented by B_1 , B_2 , and B_3 , with loading values ranging from 0.755 to 0.912. These results indicate that all retained indicators met the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 for reflective measurement. Although several indicators had lower loading values than the others, such as W_5 , J_4 , and B_1 , their values remained above the acceptable standard. Therefore, the indicators were maintained because they still contributed adequately to their respective constructs. The highest loading values appeared in J_3 , W_1 , W_4 , W_2 , and B_2 , indicating strong representation of the latent variables in the final model. Based on this evaluation, the measurement model

had sufficient indicator reliability and could proceed to the assessment of construct reliability and validity.

This assessment was conducted to ensure that the retained indicators consistently measured their respective latent constructs. Construct reliability was examined through Cronbach alpha, rho_A, and CR, while convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted. A construct can be considered reliable when Cronbach alpha and CR exceed 0.70. Meanwhile, convergent validity is achieved when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is higher than 0.50. The construct reliability and validity results are presented Table 1.

Table 1. Construct reliability and validity

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Burnout (Y)	0.805	0.824	0.886	0.722
Emotional Pathways (Z)	0.837	0.842	0.902	0.755
Job Demands (X_2)	0.916	0.929	0.942	0.802
Work-life Balance (X_I)	0.940	0.949	0.955	0.809

Table 1 shows that all constructs met the recommended reliability and validity criteria. Burnout obtained a Cronbach alpha value of 0.805, rho_A of 0.824, CR of 0.886, and AVE of 0.722. Emotional pathways showed a Cronbach alpha value of 0.837, rho_A of 0.842, CR of 0.902, and AVE of 0.755. Job demands had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.916, rho_A of 0.929, CR of 0.942, and AVE of 0.802. Work-life balance demonstrated the strongest reliability, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.940, rho_A of 0.949, CR of 0.955, and AVE of 0.809.

These findings indicate that the final measurement model had strong internal consistency. All Cronbach alpha and CR values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, which confirms that the indicators within each construct measured the same underlying concept consistently. The AVE values also exceeded 0.50, indicating that each construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators. This result supports the convergent validity of burnout, emotional pathways, job demands, and work-life balance. Therefore, the measurement model was considered reliable and valid for further evaluation of discriminant validity.

Table 2. Fornell-lacker criterion

Variables	Y	Z	X_2	X_I
Burnout (Y)	0.850			
Emotional Pathways (Z)	0.683	0.869		
Job Demands (X_2)	0.816	0.848	0.895	
Work-life Balance (X_I)	0.743	0.517	0.615	0.900

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity by comparing the square root of AVE with the correlations among latent constructs. A construct meets discriminant validity when its diagonal value exceeds its correlations with other constructs in the same row and column. As shown in Table 2, the diagonal value of burnout was 0.850, which was higher than its correlations with emotional pathways, job demands, and work-life balance. Emotional pathways also met this criterion with a diagonal value of 0.869, which exceeded its correlation with burnout and work-life balance, although its relationship with job demands remained relatively close. Job demands had a diagonal value of 0.895, which was higher than its correlations with burnout, emotional pathways, and work-life balance. Work-life balance showed the highest diagonal value of 0.900, indicating that this construct shared stronger variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model.

These results indicate that the final measurement model satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Each construct demonstrated sufficient empirical distinction from the other constructs, which means that burnout, emotional pathways, job demands, and work-life balance were measured as separate latent

variables. The relatively high correlations between job demands, burnout, and emotional pathways can still be understood because these constructs belong to the same occupational well-being framework. However, the diagonal values remained higher than the inter-construct correlations, so the measurement model retained acceptable discriminant validity. Based on this result, the analysis proceeded to the next discriminant validity assessment through cross-loading and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) evaluation.

Table 3. Cross loadings

Indicators	Burnout	Emotional Pathways	Job Demands	Work-life Balance
B_1	0.755	0.416	0.465	0.757
B_2	0.912	0.672	0.833	0.621
B_3	0.874	0.630	0.746	0.544
EP_1	0.640	0.891	0.768	0.534
EP_2	0.622	0.889	0.728	0.496
EP_3	0.513	0.825	0.714	0.304
J_1	0.677	0.859	0.917	0.511
J_2	0.729	0.797	0.920	0.541
J_3	0.823	0.812	0.946	0.638
J_4	0.696	0.535	0.790	0.509
W_1	0.656	0.483	0.606	0.930
W_2	0.641	0.489	0.591	0.922
W_3	0.692	0.445	0.557	0.916
W_4	0.768	0.518	0.570	0.927
W_5	0.565	0.377	0.427	0.797

Cross-loading evaluation was conducted to examine whether each retained indicator had a stronger loading on its assigned construct than on other constructs. This assessment provides additional evidence for discriminant validity because each indicator should empirically represent the construct to which it belongs. As shown in Table 3, most indicators had the highest loading values on their respective constructs. The burnout indicators B_2 and B_3 loaded strongly on burnout, while EP_1 , EP_2 , and EP_3 showed their highest values on emotional pathways. The job demand indicators J_1 , J_2 , J_3 , and J_4 also demonstrated stronger loadings on job demands than on the other constructs. Similarly, W_1 , W_2 , W_3 , W_4 , and W_5 had their highest loading values on work-life balance.

The cross-loading results generally supported the distinctiveness of the retained indicators in the final measurement model. One indicator, B_1 , showed a very close loading value between burnout and work-life balance, with a difference of only 0.002. This result indicates that B_1 had a borderline cross-loading pattern, although its loading on burnout still exceeded the recommended minimum value for reflective measurement. Considering that the overall construct reliability, convergent validity, and Fornell-Larcker criterion had already met the required standards, the indicator was retained with caution. Therefore, the cross-loading assessment suggested that the measurement model was acceptable, while also indicating conceptual proximity between burnout and work-life balance in the context of secretariat employees.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Y	Z	X_2	X_I
Burnout (Y)				
Emotional Pathways (Z)	0.820			
Job Demands (X_2)	0.937	0.959		
Work-life Balance (X_I)	0.864	0.574	0.660	

The HTMT ratio was used as an additional and stricter assessment of discriminant validity. [Henseler et al. \(2015\)](#) explain that HTMT provides a more sensitive criterion than the Fornell-Larcker criterion because it evaluates the ratio of correlations between indicators across different constructs. The results in Table 4 show that several construct relationships met the recommended threshold. The HTMT value between emotional pathways and burnout was 0.820, while the value between work-life balance and burnout were 0.864. The relationships between work-life balance and emotional pathways, as well as between work-life balance and job demand, also showed acceptable values of 0.574 and 0.660. These findings indicate that work-life balance had sufficient empirical separation from the other constructs in the final measurement model.

However, the HTMT values involving job demands still required careful interpretation. The relationship between job demands and burnout reached 0.937, while the relationship between job demands and emotional pathways reached 0.959. These values exceeded the conservative threshold of 0.90 commonly used in discriminant validity assessment, although they remained below 1.00. HTMT can also be interpreted by examining whether the value clearly remains below 1.00 because a value close to 1.00 indicates limited distinction between constructs. [Voorhees et al. \(2016\)](#) also emphasize that discriminant validity should be evaluated through multiple pieces of evidence rather than relying on a single criterion. Therefore, these results suggest conceptual proximity between job demands, emotional pathways, and burnout, but not complete construct redundancy.

The measurement model was retained with caution because the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading results supported discriminant validity. This decision was also consistent with the recommendation that discriminant validity assessment should consider several diagnostic procedures, particularly when constructs have theoretical proximity ([Voorhees et al., 2016](#)). In the context of this study, the high HTMT values involving job demands can be understood because demanding work conditions, emotional responses, and burnout belong to the same occupational strain process. Secretariat employees who experience stronger work pressure may also report stronger emotional reactions and higher exhaustion. Based on this consideration, the model was considered acceptable for further structural analysis, while the borderline HTMT values were acknowledged as a measurement limitation.

4.2 Inner Model Evaluation

After the measurement model met the required criteria, the analysis proceeded to the inner model evaluation. This stage was conducted to assess the explanatory and predictive ability of the structural model. In PLS-SEM, R-square explains the proportion of variance in endogenous constructs that can be accounted for by their predictor constructs. [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#) state that R-square should be interpreted according to the research context because behavioral and organizational models often involve complex psychological relationships. In addition to explanatory power, predictive relevance was assessed through Q-square. [Shmueli et al. \(2019\)](#) emphasize that prediction-oriented assessment is important in PLS-SEM because a model should not only explain relationships among constructs but also demonstrate relevance in predicting endogenous variables. Therefore, this study used R-square (R^2) and Q-square (Q^2) to evaluate whether the proposed model had sufficient explanatory and predictive strength.

Table 5. R-square and Q-square evaluate

	R^2	Q^2
Burnout (Y)	0.760	0.529
Emotional Pathways (Z)	0.719	0.532

The results in Table 5 show that the model explained 76.0% of the variance in burnout. This value indicates strong explanatory power because burnout could be substantially explained by job demands, work-life balance, and emotional pathways. The R-square value for emotional pathways reached 0.719, meaning that 71.9% of its variance was explained by job demands and work-life balance. These findings suggest that the structural model had a strong capacity to explain the endogenous constructs

in the context of secretariat employees. [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#) explain that higher R-square values indicate greater explanatory ability, although interpretation should remain connected to theoretical logic and research context. In this study, the high R-square values indicate that the selected predictors were relevant for explaining psychological outcomes among secretariat employees.

The Q-square values further support the predictive relevance of the model. Burnout obtained a Q-square value of 0.529, while emotional pathways obtained a value of 0.532. Since both values were greater than zero, the model demonstrated predictive relevance for the two endogenous constructs. This interpretation follows the PLS-SEM guideline that Q-square values above zero indicate that the model has predictive relevance for a particular endogenous construct ([Hair et al., 2019](#)). [Shmueli et al. \(2019\)](#) further argue that predictive assessment provides additional value because explanatory power alone does not always guarantee predictive capability. Overall, the R-square and Q-square results indicate that the inner model had adequate explanatory and predictive quality, making it appropriate for hypothesis testing.

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. This procedure was used to examine the significance of direct and indirect relationships among the constructs in the structural model. The interpretation of hypothesis testing was based on the path coefficient, t-statistic, and p-value. A relationship was considered significant when the p-value was lower than 0.05. However, because the hypotheses in this study were directional, the decision also considered whether the coefficient direction was consistent with the proposed hypothesis. [Hair et al. \(2019\)](#) explain that hypothesis testing in PLS-SEM should not only focus on statistical significance but also consider the direction and theoretical meaning of the structural relationship.

Table 6. Direct and indirect effects results

Path	Direct Effects (β)	Indirect Effects (β)	t-statistic	p-value
$Z \rightarrow Y$	-0.026	-	0.272	0.785
$X_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.599	-	5.329	0.000
$X_2 \rightarrow Z$	0.853	-	21.621	0.000
$X_1 \rightarrow Y$	0.388	-	5.197	0.000
$X_1 \rightarrow Z$	-0.007	-	0.138	0.890
$X_2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	-	-0.022	0.269	0.788
$X_1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	-	0.000	0.035	0.972

The results in Table 6 show that several direct relationships were statistically significant. Job demands had a positive and significant effect on burnout with a coefficient of 0.599, a t-statistic of 5.329, and a p-value below 0.001. Job demands also had a positive and significant effect on emotional pathways with a coefficient of 0.853, a t-statistic of 21.621, and a p-value below 0.001. Work-life balance had a positive and significant effect on burnout with a coefficient of 0.388, a t-statistic of 5.197, and a p-value below 0.001. Meanwhile, work-life balance did not have a significant effect on emotional pathways because its p-value was 0.890. Emotional pathways also did not have a significant effect on burnout because its p-value was 0.785.

The indirect effect results show that emotional pathways did not mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout. The indirect coefficient was -0.022, with a t-statistic of 0.269 and a p-value of 0.788. Emotional pathways also did not mediate the relationship between work-life balance and burnout because the indirect coefficient was 0.000, with a t-statistic of 0.035 and a p-value of 0.972. These findings indicate that the mediating role of emotional pathways was not statistically supported in the proposed model. Therefore, burnout was explained more strongly through the direct effects of job demands and work-life balance than through the indirect mechanism of emotional pathways.

Table 7. Hypotheses testing result

Hypotheses	(β)	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H_1 : Job demands have a positive and significant effect on burnout.	0.599	5.329	0.000	Supported
H_2 : Work-life balance has a negative and significant effect on burnout.	0.388	5.197	0.000	Not supported, but not in the hypothesized direction
H_3 : Job demands have a negative and significant effect on emotional pathways.	0.853	21.621	0.000	Not supported, but not in the hypothesized direction
H_4 : Work-life balance has a positive and significant effect on emotional pathways.	-0.007	0.138	0.890	Not supported
H_5 : Emotional pathways have a negative and significant effect on burnout.	-0.026	0.272	0.785	Not supported
H_6 : Emotional pathways mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout.	-0.022	0.269	0.788	Not supported
H_7 : Emotional pathways mediate the relationship between work-life balance and burnout.	0.000	0.035	0.972	Not supported

Based on Table 7, only H_1 was fully supported because the relationship between job demands and burnout was positive and statistically significant, as proposed in the hypothesis. H_2 and H_3 produced statistically significant results, but their coefficient directions were different from the hypothesized directions. Work-life balance had a positive effect on burnout, whereas the hypothesis predicted a negative effect. Job demands also had a positive effect on emotional pathways, whereas the hypothesis predicted a negative effect. Therefore, H_2 and H_3 were not supported in the hypothesized direction, even though the relationships were statistically significant.

The remaining hypotheses were not supported because the relationships were not statistically significant. H_4 was not supported because work-life balance did not significantly affect emotional pathways. H_5 was not supported because emotional pathways did not significantly affect burnout. H_6 and H_7 were also not supported because the indirect effects through emotional pathways were not significant. These results indicate that emotional pathways did not function as a mediating variable in the relationship between job demands and burnout or in the relationship between work-life balance and burnout. Consequently, the discussion section focuses on explaining why burnout was mainly influenced by direct relationships rather than by the proposed emotional mediation mechanism.

4.4 Discussion

The results show that job demands had a positive and significant effect on burnout. This finding supports the Job Demands-Resources theory, which explains that high job demands can trigger a health-impairment process when employees continuously invest effort without sufficient recovery resources (Bakker, & De, 2021; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2023). In the context of secretariat employees, job demands may appear through urgent administrative requests, accuracy requirements, formal documentation, and repeated coordination with different organizational actors. These work conditions require sustained concentration and emotional control, which can gradually drain psychological resources. The finding also aligns with Lesener, Gussy, and Wolter (2019), who show that job demands consistently predict strain outcomes in longitudinal research. Therefore, the result confirms that burnout among secretariat employees can develop when administrative pressure accumulates and exceeds employees' capacity to recover.

The significant positive effect of job demands on burnout also strengthens the argument that secretariat work should not be viewed as routine administrative support only. Although the role may not always involve visible frontline pressure, it still contains cognitive, emotional, and procedural demands that can increase exhaustion. Burnout reflects prolonged psychological depletion rather than ordinary tiredness, especially when employees must maintain accuracy and responsiveness under repeated work pressure ([Edú-Valsania, Laguía, & Moriano, 2022](#)). [Salvagioni, Melanda, Mesas, González, Gabani, and De \(2017\)](#) also emphasize that burnout can produce occupational and psychological consequences that affect employee functioning. This means that high job demands in secretariat work may reduce employee well-being and weaken organizational reliability if institutions do not manage workload intensity. The result therefore provides empirical support for the importance of workload evaluation in administrative and institutional support units. The effect of work-life balance on burnout was significant, but the direction differed from the proposed hypothesis. The hypothesis predicted a negative relationship, yet the result showed a positive coefficient. This finding indicates that respondents with higher work-life balance scores also reported higher burnout, which requires careful interpretation. One possible explanation is that employees who try to maintain balance may still experience unresolved work pressure when institutional demands remain high and difficult to control. [Kelliher, Richardson, and Boiarintseva \(2019\)](#) argue that work-life balance has become more complex because employees may pursue balance while still facing blurred role boundaries and intensified work expectations. In this study, the positive coefficient may reflect the reality that secretariat employees attempt to manage personal and work roles, but such efforts do not automatically reduce burnout when administrative pressure continues.

This unexpected result can also be understood through the changing meaning of work-life balance in contemporary employment settings. [Gragnano, Simbula, and Miglioretti \(2020\)](#) explain that work-life balance should involve work-family and work-health dimensions, which means balance requires more than time allocation. Employees may perceive that they have some balance in managing roles, yet they may still lack psychological recovery when work pressure remains cognitively and emotionally demanding ([Wang, Liu, Xu, Wang, Huang, & Zhang, 2024](#)). [Haar, Sune, Russo, and Ollier-Malaterre \(2019\)](#) show that work demands and work resources shape balance experiences, suggesting that balance may lose its protective function when demands dominate employees' daily work. [Kossek, Perrigino, and Lautsch \(2023\)](#) further emphasize that flexibility and boundary management require supportive organizational conditions to become beneficial. Therefore, the positive relationship between work-life balance and burnout may indicate that balance efforts among secretariat employees occur under pressure rather than under genuinely restorative conditions.

The result also showed that job demands had a positive and significant effect on emotional pathways, although the hypothesis predicted a negative relationship ([Gaspar, Botelho-Guedes, Cerqueira, Baban, Rus, & Gaspar-Matos, 2024](#)). This finding suggests that higher job demands were associated with stronger emotional pathway scores in the sample. Since the emotional pathways indicators reflected positive emotional conditions such as confidence, pride, comfort, and psychological readiness, this result may indicate that some secretariat employees respond to demanding work through adaptive emotional activation. In certain contexts, demanding tasks can encourage employees to develop self-control, responsibility, and a stronger sense of professional involvement ([Tesi, 2021](#)). [Bakker et al. \(2023\)](#) explain that the effect of demands depends on how employees experience and manage their work environment, while [Bakker and De \(2021\)](#) connect demanding conditions with self-regulatory processes. Thus, the positive coefficient may suggest that job demands do not only create strain but also activate emotional effort and coping responses among employees who must remain functional under pressure.

However, emotional pathways did not have a significant effect on burnout. This result indicates that positive emotional conditions alone were not strong enough to reduce burnout in the proposed model. [Mendes and Miguel \(2024\)](#) show that emotion-regulation strategies can play a mediating role in burnout processes, yet the effectiveness of emotional regulation may depend on the type of strategy, work context, and intensity of pressure. [Wang, Gao, and Wang \(2024\)](#) also report that emotion regulation relates to burnout, but this relationship may vary across occupational settings and

emotional demands. In the present study, emotional pathways may have reflected employees' emotional readiness rather than a deeper regulatory capacity that directly prevents exhaustion. Therefore, the insignificant effect suggests that emotional conditions may not reduce burnout when structural work demands remain strong.

Work-life balance did not significantly affect emotional pathways. This finding indicates that balance experiences did not directly strengthen employees' positive emotional conditions in the sample. [Shirmohammadi and Beigi \(2022\)](#) explain that work-life balance can emerge from resource gain, yet it may also decline when work intensity and emotional pressure remain high. In secretariat work, employees may have some ability to manage personal and occupational roles, but this condition may not automatically improve emotional comfort or confidence during work. The result suggests that emotional pathways may depend more strongly on immediate work pressure than on broader perceptions of balance ([Ninaus, Diehl, & Terlutter, 2021](#)). This interpretation aligns with the strong effect of job demands on emotional pathways, which indicates that emotional responses in this context were shaped more by occupational demands than by work-life balance. The mediation hypotheses were not supported because emotional pathways did not mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout or the relationship between work-life balance and burnout. This result means that burnout was explained more strongly through direct relationships than through the proposed emotional mechanism. The direct effects of job demands and work-life balance on burnout were significant, while the indirect effects through emotional pathways were not significant ([Sanjaya, Wibisono, & Sajiyo, 2024](#)). This pattern suggests that burnout among secretariat employees may develop from accumulated work pressure and role-balance conditions without necessarily passing through the emotional pathway construct measured in this study. [Maslach and Leiter \(2017\)](#) argue that burnout develops through a complex interaction between work conditions and employee experience, which means not every psychological mechanism will operate equally across occupational groups. Therefore, the absence of mediation does not weaken the relevance of the model, but it clarifies that emotional pathways did not serve as the main explanatory route in this research context.

Overall, the findings indicate that burnout among secretariat employees was mainly driven by direct effects. Job demands emerged as the most consistent predictor because it significantly influenced both burnout and emotional pathways. Work-life balance also had a significant effect on burnout, although the direction differed from the hypothesis and requires contextual interpretation. Emotional pathways did not reduce burnout and did not function as a mediator, suggesting that emotional readiness may not be sufficient when employees face strong administrative pressure. These results contribute to burnout research by showing that secretariat employees represent an important occupational group whose psychological strain can arise from less visible but persistent institutional demands. The findings also imply that organizations should not rely only on individual emotional capacity, but should manage workload, clarify priorities, and create real recovery support to reduce burnout risk.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the effects of job demands and work-life balance on burnout through emotional pathways among secretariat employees. The findings showed that job demands had a positive and significant effect on burnout. This result indicates that higher administrative pressure, task urgency, coordination demands, and responsibility intensity can increase burnout among secretariat employees. Job demands also had a positive and significant effect on emotional pathways, although the direction differed from the proposed hypothesis. This finding suggests that demanding work conditions may activate stronger emotional responses and psychological effort among employees who must remain confident, composed, and professionally responsive.

The results also showed that work-life balance had a significant effect on burnout, but the direction was positive rather than negative. This finding indicates that work-life balance did not function as a protective factor in the expected direction within this research context. One possible interpretation is that secretariat employees may report efforts to balance work and personal life while still experiencing unresolved occupational pressure. Work-life balance did not significantly affect emotional pathways,

which means that balance experiences did not directly strengthen employees' emotional readiness in this model. Emotional pathways also did not significantly affect burnout, indicating that positive emotional conditions alone were not sufficient to reduce burnout when work pressure remained strong.

The mediation results showed that emotional pathways did not mediate the relationship between job demands and burnout. Emotional pathways also did not mediate the relationship between work-life balance and burnout. These findings indicate that burnout among secretariat employees was explained more strongly through direct effects than through the proposed emotional mediation mechanism. Overall, the study concludes that job demands represent the most consistent predictor in the model because they significantly influenced both burnout and emotional pathways. The findings contribute to burnout research by showing that secretariat employees experience psychological strain through less visible but persistent institutional demands.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research used a cross-sectional design, so the results cannot explain causal relationships over time. The relationships among job demands, work-life balance, emotional pathways, and burnout were examined based on data collected at one point, which limits the ability to observe changes in employee conditions. Second, the study focused on secretariat employees in a specific institutional and regional context. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent employees in other occupational groups, organizational levels, or geographical settings. Third, this study relied on self-reported questionnaire data. Although this method was suitable for measuring perceptions and psychological experiences, it may still contain response bias. Respondents may interpret work pressure, emotional conditions, and burnout differently depending on their personal experiences and workplace situations. Fourth, the measurement model showed acceptable reliability and validity, but several discriminant validity results required careful interpretation. The HTMT values involving job demands were relatively high, which indicates conceptual proximity between job demands, emotional pathways, and burnout. This condition suggests that future studies should refine the measurement of emotional pathways and job demands to improve construct distinction.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should examine the model using a longitudinal design to better understand how job demands and work-life balance influence burnout over time. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to observe whether work pressure gradually increases burnout or whether emotional pathways change as employees adapt to demanding conditions. Future studies may also involve broader samples from different administrative units, sectors, or provinces to improve generalizability. Comparing secretariat employees with other occupational groups could provide deeper insight into whether administrative support work has a distinctive burnout pattern. In addition, future research should consider refining emotional pathways by separating positive emotional readiness, emotion regulation strategies, and emotional exhaustion processes more clearly.

For institutional practice, the findings suggest that organizations should pay serious attention to job demands among secretariat employees. Workload distribution, deadline clarity, task prioritization, and coordination procedures should be managed to prevent excessive pressure. Institutions should not assume that administrative work is low-risk simply because it appears routine. Secretariat employees often carry hidden pressure related to accuracy, responsiveness, and formal communication. Therefore, leaders should create realistic task structures, provide recovery opportunities, and strengthen support systems that help employees manage work pressure more effectively.

The findings also suggest that work-life balance policies should not focus only on time flexibility. Institutions need to ensure that balance efforts genuinely reduce psychological pressure and support recovery. Employees may still experience burnout when flexible arrangements or balance initiatives exist without workload control. Supervisors should encourage clearer boundaries, reduce unnecessary urgency, and avoid excessive after-hours communication when possible. By combining workload

management, boundary support, and emotional resource development, organizations can reduce burnout risk and improve employee well-being in secretariat work.

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Author Contributions

AS contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and preparation of the manuscript. NFG contributed to supervision, validation, critical review, and final approval of the manuscript.

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