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A Structural Model of Job Burnout Based on Quality of Work Life and Cognitive Ergonomics Mediated by Emotional Adjustment

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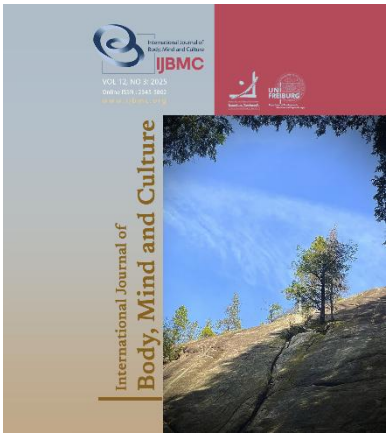

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to propose a structural model of job burnout based on quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics, mediated by emotional adjustment among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries.

Methods and Materials: This applied research falls within the category of descriptive-correlational studies using structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of 1,600 employees of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries in 2024. The sample size was determined to be 250 participants using G*Power software, considering both latent and observed variables, a margin of error of 0.05, a 95% confidence level, and an effect size of 0.2. A stratified random sampling method was employed. Data were collected using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1981), the Cognitive Ergonomics Questionnaire by Shafiei (2022), the Work Life Quality Questionnaire by Lopez (2007), and the Emotional Adjustment Scale by Rabeau et al. (2007). Data analysis was performed using Pearson correlation tests and the Preacher and Hayes bootstrap macro to examine the mediating role of emotional adjustment in the model.

Findings: The results confirmed the research hypothesis, indicating that cognitive ergonomics and quality of work life have an indirect effect on job burnout through emotional adjustment. In other words, by enhancing the quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics, and improving emotional adjustment among employees, job burnout can be reduced.

Conclusion: The structural model of job burnout based on quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics, mediated by emotional adjustment, demonstrates a good fit among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries.

Keywords: Job Burnout, Quality of Work Life, Cognitive Ergonomics, Emotional Adjustment.

Introduction

Work constitutes a significant part of every individual's life. Beyond its economic dimension, it can fulfill many essential human needs, such as psychological and physical needs. However, work can also be a significant source of psychological stress. One concept that has recently attracted the attention of many industrial and organizational psychologists is job burnout (Shakiba Sooreh & Hasani, 2021). It appears that job burnout is particularly prevalent among employees in the petrochemical industry compared to other occupational groups. Job burnout is a state of physical and psychological stress that arises in response to the

emotional demands of one's profession (Ersayan et al., 2022). According to Maslach et al. (2001), job burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. The first dimension, emotional exhaustion, refers to feelings of mental or physical fatigue, loss of energy, and often manifests when individuals experience despair or depression, affecting both their mental and physical states (Ahmadi Nik, 2021). The second dimension, depersonalization, describes a negative or detached attitude toward others, along with a sense of reduced personal responsibility. The third dimension, reduced personal accomplishment, reflects a negative response to oneself or one's success, often manifested as depression, low self-esteem, poor productivity, and an inability to solve problems (Hildenbrand et al., 2018; Khedmati, 2020). Overall, job burnout is considered a significant factor impacting individuals' physical and mental health (Fathi Azar et al., 2024). It can lead to adverse organizational outcomes, such as diminished quality of work life, reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover intentions (Saba et al., 2022).

On the other hand, changes in systems also impact human-system interaction, which often reduces personal and team performance, leading to job burnout (Machado et al., 2020). Ergonomics and human factors specialists can help design practical solutions to support individual and team performance within organizations (Gurses et al., 2020). According to the International Ergonomics Association, cognitive ergonomics is a branch of human factors science that examines the interaction of human cognitive processes—such as perception, memory, reasoning, and motor response—with other system components (Karwowski, 2012). In their study, Kazemi and Smith (2023) demonstrated that cognitive ergonomics plays a crucial role in addressing emerging human factor challenges in the workplace, reducing job burnout, and enhancing job performance (Kazemi & Smith, 2023).

Moreover, optimal use of human resources depends on a series of constructive actions that ensure complete or relative employee satisfaction within the organization. Otherwise, not only will efficiency not improve, but the organization may move in the opposite direction. These actions are discussed under the concept of quality of work life. Zareian et al. (2021) confirmed the relationship between quality of work life and job burnout among employees (Zareeian et al., 2021). Quality of work life is a philosophy and set of principles based on the belief that human resources are the most reliable assets within organizations (Jose et al., 2020). They are responsible and capable of making valuable contributions and should be treated with dignity and respect. Quality of work life is a comprehensive structure that includes well-being related to one's job, valuable work experience, and stress-free work conditions, avoiding other negative personal consequences (Marzilli, 2021; Yildirim & Solmaz, 2020).

Considering the stated relationship and impact of cognitive ergonomics and quality of work life on job burnout, a key question arises: What mechanisms may play a significant mediating role in either sustaining or mitigating the effects of these variables? Research has indicated that emotional adjustment plays a significant role in job burnout among employees (Kim et al., 2019; Mousavi et al., 2021). Emotional skill is not simply about emotion itself but refers to a person's competence in utilizing emotion to regulate behavior and interpersonal relations (Carlson et al., 2012; Ding et al., 2015). Emotional adjustment involves the ability to regulate emotions, satisfy needs, and endure frustration or failure (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Given that emotional adjustment plays a central role in normal psychological development—and deficiencies in this area are significant contributors to mental disorders—it is considered a key determinant of psychological well-being and effective employee functioning (Fiorillo et al., 2017). Mousavi et al. (2021) found that emotional adjustment has a significant predictive role in occupational stress and mental pressure in the workplace (Mousavi et al., 2021).

Therefore, recognizing and preventing job burnout among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries can contribute to enhancing psychological well-being and increasing service quality and satisfaction among these employees. Given that the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries constitute one of the country's major economic entities—and considering the sensitivity of its organizational mission and the critical role of its workforce—examining the factors influencing human resource productivity and job burnout is of vital importance. Based on these considerations, this study aimed to propose a structural

model of job burnout, mediated by emotional adjustment, among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries in 2024, drawing on quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted in a natural setting and fell under the category of descriptive-correlational research, specifically employing structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of 1,600 employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries in the year 2024. To determine the sample size, a regression-based model decomposition technique was used to predict the endogenous variable based on the proposed conceptual model. Using G*Power software and considering both latent and observed variables, with a significance level of 0.05, a 95% confidence interval, and an effect size of 0.2, the required sample size was calculated to be 250 participants. The sampling method was stratified random sampling.

To access the research sample, preliminary discussions were held with the managers of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and necessary permissions. After obtaining managerial consent, initial interviews were conducted with employees to discuss the implementation of the questionnaire. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate were asked to complete the questionnaires, with the assurance of confidentiality.

Instruments

1) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): This instrument was developed by Maslach (1981) as a novel assessment of the stress phenomenon known as burnout. The questionnaire consists of 23 items that assess emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment within the professional context. It is particularly used to evaluate and prevent burnout in professional groups such as nurses and teachers. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5). Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, and 20 assess emotional exhaustion. Items 5, 10, 11, 15, and 22 assess depersonalization. Items 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21 assess lack of personal accomplishment. Item 23 evaluates overall burnout. Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, and 22 are reverse-scored, while items 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21 are scored directly. The minimum and maximum scores range from 22 to 110. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was 0.86.

2) Cognitive Ergonomics Questionnaire: This questionnaire, developed by Shafiei in 2022, comprises 44 items that assess cognitive ergonomics across six subscales: decision-making power, workplace learning, creative problem-solving, group dynamics, situational awareness, and proactive behavior. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding the following results: total scale (0.827), decision-making (0.667), workplace learning (0.671), creative problem-solving (0.695), group dynamics (0.633), situational awareness (0.744), and proactive behavior (0.623), indicating the high reliability of the instrument. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.95.

3) Quality of Work Life Questionnaire: The standard Quality of Work Life questionnaire, developed by Lopez et al. (2007), includes 26 items rated on a Likert scale. Scoring is as follows: very high (5), high (4), medium (3), low (2), very low (1). Interpretation of total scores: 90–130: high quality of work life, 50–90: moderately high, and below 50: low quality of work life. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency in measurement. In Kazemi's study (2002), positive and negative correlations among the subscales confirmed good convergent and divergent validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, ranging from 0 (no stability) to +1 (complete stability). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.91. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted due to inconsistencies among certain items. Three factors were extracted: overall satisfaction, work quality, and work environment quality.

4) Emotional Maladjustment (Emotional Adjustment) Questionnaire: To measure emotional adjustment, the scale developed by Rabeau, Agada, Huntingas, and Hernandez (2007) was used. This instrument comprises 28 items across two dimensions and utilizes a 6-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 1 to disagree = 6 strongly).

It evaluates individuals' tendency to achieve balance, regulation, and emotional stability in the face of emotional instability. Items 21, 25, and 28 are reverse-scored. The subscales include: Lack of regulation of emotional and physiological arousal (items 1–5, 7–11, 13, 17, 21). Hopelessness and wishful thinking: items 6, 12, 14–16, 18–20, 22–24, 25–28. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of this scale. Rabeau et al. (2007) reported correlations with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-A N) and the emotional adjustment subscale of the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ) as r = 0.86 and r = 0.77, respectively, and reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. In Iran, the psychometric properties were examined by Shokri, Sanaeepour, Royaee, and Ghareh Tapei (2016) using a student sample, reporting Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.91. Construct validity was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis, and correlations with perceived stress reactivity and the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II) supported the construct validity of emotional regulation. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire was 0.93.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, two incomplete or invalid questionnaires were excluded. Ultimately, 248 valid questionnaires were analyzed using AMOS-18 software. The statistical methods used for data analysis included the Pearson correlation coefficient and the Preacher and Hayes bootstrap macro to examine the mediating role of intermediary variables in the model.

Findings and Results

The results obtained from the demographic analysis indicated that 42.7% of the study participants were female and 57.3% were male. Regarding educational background, 45.2% held a bachelor's degree, 47.5% a master's degree, and 7.3% held a doctoral degree. More than half of the participants had postgraduate education (master's or doctoral degrees). In terms of work experience, 75.4% of participants had over 15 years of experience, while 24.6% had 11 to 14 years of experience. Regarding employment type, 22.6% were officially employed, and 77.4% were on contractual terms.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Job Burnout	48.43	11.18	-0.257	-0.452
Emotional Exhaustion	18.50	6.04	0.330	-0.563
Depersonalization	9.26	3.40	0.693	-0.033
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	20.66	4.85	-0.429	0.225
Cognitive Ergonomics	176.15	17.31	0.032	-0.364
Decision-Making Power	19.82	2.51	-0.197	0.458
Workplace Learning	46.69	5.35	-0.256	-0.672
Creative Problem-Solving	20.56	2.88	-0.137	-0.429
Group Dynamics	28.94	3.86	-0.543	-0.753
Situational Awareness	32.51	3.88	-0.543	-0.753
Proactive Work Engagement	27.60	3.45	0.121	0.170
Quality of Work Life	58.20	8.80	0.531	0.258
Overall Satisfaction	21.02	3.98	0.073	-0.172
Work Quality	17.69	3.08	0.058	0.199
Work Environment Quality	19.45	3.33	0.609	0.580
Emotional Adjustment	63.45	17.31	0.343	-0.254
Emotional-Physiological Dysregulation	30.50	8.59	0.353	-0.373
Hopelessness and Wishful Thinking	32.95	9.52	0.256	-0.209

According to Table 1, the means and standard deviations for the variables are as follows: Job Burnout: 52.01 (SD = 11.07), Cognitive Ergonomics: 179.62 (SD = 17.44), Quality of Work Life: 58.20 (SD = 8.80), and Emotional Adjustment: 71.04 (SD = 18.11). The skewness index indicates the symmetry of data distribution. The closer the skewness is to zero, the more symmetric the distribution. Generally, if skewness and kurtosis fall within the range of ±2, the data distribution is considered normal. As shown in Table 1, the skewness and kurtosis for all main variables and their components lie between -1 and +1, indicating a normal distribution.

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In this study, the evaluation of individual questionnaire items about their respective constructs confirmed the validity of the measurement model. Items with factor loadings below 0.30 were removed, and the measurement model was adjusted accordingly. Each measurement model was executed twice. In the first execution, the path coefficients of each item with the latent variable were examined, and items with path coefficients below 0.30 were excluded. To assess the internal fit of the model, composite reliability coefficients were calculated based on the consistency of items in each scale, along with Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. According to the reliability standards, coefficients above 0.81 are considered excellent, while those between 0.71 and 0.80 are considered good. The results indicated that reliability levels across all variables were excellent. In this study, skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were below ±1, confirming univariate normality. Multivariate kurtosis was also below 10 (2.66 < 10), and the critical value was below 1.96 (1.01 < 1.96). These results confirmed multivariate normality of the data.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Research Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Job Burnout	1			
2. Cognitive Ergonomics	-0.504**	1		
3. Quality of Work Life	-0.565**	0.422**	1	
4. Emotional Adjustment	0.639**	0.388**	0.503**	1

Table 2 shows that the endogenous variable, job burnout, has statistically significant correlations with the exogenous and mediating variables. All correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices

CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
106.68	22	0.011	1.59	0.916	0.931	0.954	0.905	0.07	0.326

Model 1 displays the standardized coefficients, direct path values, and the explained variances of the variables. All direct paths were statistically significant at the 0.001 level. The variance in emotional adjustment explained by cognitive ergonomics was 0.48. The variance in job burnout explained by cognitive ergonomics, quality of work life, and emotional adjustment was 0.54. The model fit indices (CFI, TLI, IFI, GFI) were all close to 1, RMSEA was 0.07, and PCLOSE = 0.326 indicated non-significance. Overall, the obtained values confirmed good model fit (Table 3).

Table 4

Mediating Role of Emotional Adjustment in the Relationship Between Quality of Work Life, Cognitive Ergonomics, and Job Burnout Using Preacher and Hayes Bootstrap Method

Pathway	Data	Boot	Bias	SE	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
QWL → Emotional Adjustment → Job Burnout	-0.3174	-0.3115	-0.0059	0.050	-0.424	-0.226
Cognitive Ergonomics → Emotional Adjustment → Job Burnout	-0.1322	-0.1328	-0.0006	0.026	-0.187	-0.081

As shown in Table 4, the indirect effect of the exogenous variable on the endogenous variable via the mediating role of emotional adjustment was -0.1322. Since the confidence interval (LB = -0.1874, UB = -0.0811) does not contain zero, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming the mediating role of emotional adjustment in the relationship between cognitive ergonomics and job burnout. Similarly, the indirect effect

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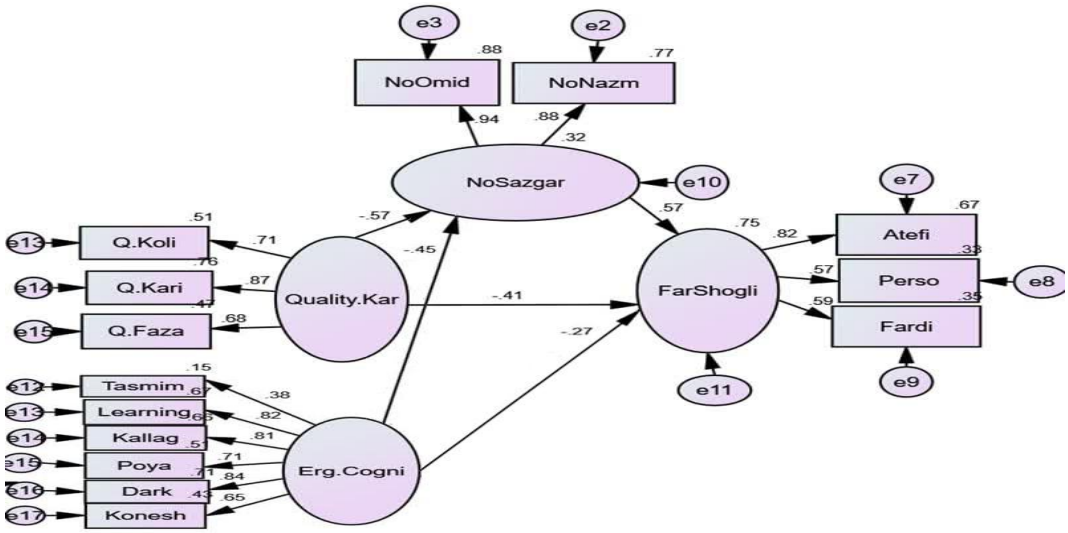
of quality of work life on job burnout, mediated by emotional adjustment, was -0.3174. Since the confidence interval (LB = -0.4242, UB = -0.2262) does not include zero, the null hypothesis is again rejected, confirming the mediating effect of emotional adjustment in the relationship between quality of work life and job burnout.

Figure 1

Standardized model, direct paths, and explained variance.



Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to propose a structural model of job burnout based on quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics, mediated by emotional adjustment among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries. The results confirmed the research hypothesis regarding the indirect effect of cognitive ergonomics and quality of work life on job burnout, mediated by emotional adjustment. These findings are consistent with parts of the results reported in the prior studies (Fadaei Keyvani & Ashrafi, 2023; Ghaderi & Bayazi, 2014; Mousavi et al., 2021; Zahednezhad et al., 2021; Zarrin Kolak et al., 2023).

These findings can be explained by considering that in high-stress occupational environments such as petrochemical industries, employees are often exposed to high workloads, long shifts, and harsh physical conditions, all of which contribute to job burnout. Burnout not only affects employees' mental and physical health but also reduces productivity and work quality. Emotional adjustment serves as a mediating factor between the quality of work life and job burnout. Employees with high emotional adjustment skills are capable of managing their emotions effectively in response to job-related challenges and pressures. This capacity helps them avoid negative emotional responses such as anxiety, anger, or depression, and instead adopt adaptive and effective coping strategies when facing stressors (Zarrin Kolak et al., 2023).

In work environments where the quality of work life is high, emotionally adjusted individuals are better equipped to utilize available resources to manage stress, thereby maintaining their motivation and energy, rather than succumbing to fatigue and burnout. Emotional adjustment can directly prevent the onset of burnout. In high-quality work environments, where employees benefit from social support and career advancement opportunities, emotionally resilient workers demonstrate stronger resistance to occupational challenges. Under such conditions, emotional adjustment enables them to mitigate work-related stress and prevent emotional exhaustion, lack of motivation, and poor performance. In essence, employees who can effectively regulate their emotions are better able to

conserve their energy and motivation in the face of workplace pressure (Zahednezhad et al., 2021).

Emotional adjustment, as a psychological trait, can enhance the quality of work life and thereby contribute to reducing job burnout. When employees are placed in a supportive and healthy work environment, their high emotional adjustment enables them to manage workplace stress more effectively and avoid burnout. In this context, resilience and emotional adjustment serve as tools to cope with workplace challenges, enabling employees to adapt to work conditions rather than succumbing to pressure, thereby preserving their energy and motivation. Ultimately, emotional adjustment strengthens employees' ability to cope with job-related stress and workplace challenges, serving as a significant mediating variable between quality of work life and job burnout. This capability enables employees to draw on their internal resources when facing psychological and physical workplace stressors, reducing the risk of burnout. Accordingly, fostering emotional adjustment alongside improving quality of work life can reduce burnout and enhance both productivity and job satisfaction among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries.

Additionally, emotional adjustment serves as a psychological factor that enables employees to manage their feelings effectively under stressful conditions. Emotional resilience can mediate the relationship between cognitive ergonomics and job burnout, meaning that when employees work in optimized environments that reduce cognitive load, this psychological trait helps them regulate their emotions more effectively. As a result, they become more resilient to job stress and less likely to experience burnout. Burnout typically arises from chronic stress and an inability to cope with job demands. However, employees with high emotional adjustment can manage their emotional responses effectively and employ healthier coping strategies. Instead of feeling exhausted or demotivated, they can maintain their motivation and energy. When cognitive ergonomics in the workplace is well-designed, such employees can use emotional resilience to mitigate stress and prevent burnout.

The combination of cognitive ergonomics and emotional adjustment enables employees to deal with workplace stress more effectively. When the work environment is cognitively optimized, employees experience less cognitive strain, which positively influences their emotional regulation and reduces stress. This ability enables them to draw on psychological resources to face challenges rather than succumbing to burnout. In summary, cognitive ergonomics and emotional adjustment are two key factors in reducing job burnout. Designing ergonomic workplaces can enhance employees' emotional adjustment, thereby reducing occupational stress and preventing burnout. Organizations should therefore pay attention to ergonomically optimizing the work environment and provide employees with training programs focused on emotional management and resilience-building. The general conclusion from this hypothesis is that designing ergonomic workplaces can reduce cognitive and physical stress and consequently enhance emotional adjustment. These factors support effective coping strategies, ultimately leading to a reduction in job burnout.

This study is not without limitations. The first limitation involves the use of self-report methods and questionnaires. Another major limitation is the scope of the sampling. The research was conducted in a single organization or department, which limits the generalizability of the results to other organizations or professions. Sampling from specific groups may compromise the diversity of results across different populations. This study examined causal and correlational relationships between variables; however, these findings could be further validated using alternative research methods, such as psychological interventions. Given the correlational design of this research, it is recommended that future studies explore these relationships using other approaches to obtain more precise results. Moreover, external factors such as economic conditions, social changes, and job pressures beyond the control of managers or employees may have influenced the findings and should be considered in future research.

To gain deeper insights into the effects of these variables, future studies may benefit from mixed-methods research (qualitative and quantitative). Such research could incorporate interviews or focus groups better to understand employees' personal experiences and managerial perspectives. Given the prominent role of emotional adjustment in reducing job burnout, it is recommended that the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries implement ongoing psychological support

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programs for employees. These programs may include individual and group counseling sessions, as well as online counseling options for individuals who are unable to attend in person. These services should specifically focus on strengthening emotional adjustment and helping employees adapt to workplace changes and pressures.

The structural model of job burnout based on quality of work life and cognitive ergonomics, mediated by emotional adjustment, demonstrates a good fit among employees of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study included the fact that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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