

The Interplay of Job Satisfaction and Burnout: Occupational Differences Between Non-Disciplined and Disciplined Workforces

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among employees in Hong Kong, comparing non-disciplined and disciplined workforces. A cross-sectional survey of 287 working individuals found significant negative associations between general job satisfaction and burnout in both groups, with a stronger association among disciplined-force respondents ($r = -.727$) than non-disciplined-force respondents ($r = -.578$). Intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction were also negatively associated with burnout in both groups. Disciplined-force respondents reported higher extrinsic job satisfaction, whereas non-disciplined-force respondents reported higher mean exhaustion and cynicism. Regression analyses were consistent with the correlation results, with job satisfaction accounting for 52.9% of the variance in burnout among disciplined-force respondents and 33.4% among non-disciplined-force respondents. Because the study is cross-sectional, these findings indicate association rather than causal or temporal direction. The results highlight the value of workplace policies tailored to occupational contexts, including job resources, organizational support, and workload management. Addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction may support employee well-being and reduce burnout risk.

Keywords: *Burnout, Disciplined force, Hong Kong, Job satisfaction*

How to Cite

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced, high-pressure work environments, job satisfaction and burnout have become critical factors shaping employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Long working hours are a documented concern in Hong Kong. A 2023 union survey reported that more than half of respondents worked over 45 hours per week and 7.3% worked more than 70 hours, exceeding the International Labour Organization's recommended 40-hour workweek (Sun, 2023). Employees often find themselves caught between pursuing career success and the growing pressure to maintain their well-being. While job satisfaction can support motivation and commitment, burnout remains a persistent concern, especially in high-intensity work environments.

For members of disciplined forces – such as police officers, firefighters, and correctional officers – the structured nature of their roles offers job security and clear career progression, but often entails immense physical and emotional stress. Meanwhile, employees in non-disciplined sectors, such as corporate professionals, educators, and service workers, face different challenges: greater autonomy may provide flexibility, but job insecurity, performance pressures, and unpredictable workloads can heighten stress. This contrast raises an important question: would the occupational nature of disciplined forces, or the rigid nature of these professions, make them just as vulnerable to workplace stress as their non-disciplined counterparts?

While some believe that disciplined force employees are better equipped to handle workplace pressure due to their structured training and support systems, others argue that the demanding nature of these roles – often involving long shifts, public scrutiny, and high-stakes decision-making – leaves them equally, if not more, prone to burnout. On the other hand, non-disciplined force employees, despite facing greater job instability, may have more opportunities to switch careers or adjust their workloads, potentially giving them alternative ways to cope with workplace stress. This study explores these differences and whether job satisfaction plays a stronger protective role against burnout in one group over the other.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's overall evaluation of their job, influenced by affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. Locke (1976) conceptualized job satisfaction as a positive emotional state arising from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Job satisfaction is often categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Porter & Lawler, 1968).

Intrinsic job satisfaction pertains to internal work-related factors that enhance employees' sense of achievement and engagement. These factors include autonomy, skill variety, task significance, and opportunities for personal growth (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Amabile et al. (1994) distinguished intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations in relation to work preferences. Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) further showed that employees differ in whether they view work as a job, career, or calling, with these orientations shaping how work is experienced. Self-Determination Theory also emphasizes autonomy and competence as important foundations of intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). More broadly, job satisfaction is positively associated with job performance (Judge et al., 2001).

Extrinsic job satisfaction arises from external factors such as salary, benefits, job security, and managerial support (Porter & Lawler, 1968). Perceived fairness in compensation and career advancement is relevant to employees' work attitudes (Greenberg, 1990), while workplace policies, supervisory relationships, and organizational culture are important components of job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). Clark (1997) also found that wages and working conditions are associated with job satisfaction. Together, these studies indicate that external job conditions can shape how employees evaluate their work.

2.2. Work Burnout

Freudenberger (1974) first introduced the concept of burnout, describing it as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive workplace demands. This early conceptualization laid the groundwork for subsequent empirical research, particularly the work of Maslach and Jackson (1981), who identified three interrelated dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of emotional and physical energy due to excessive work demands (Maslach et al., 2001). It has been linked to increased absenteeism and decreased job performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Empirical

studies have demonstrated that high job demands and limited job resources exacerbate emotional exhaustion. Demerouti et al. (2001) introduced the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, which posits that while excessive workload and time pressure contribute to exhaustion, access to job resources (e.g., managerial support, autonomy) can mitigate its effects. Further, Bakker et al. (2005) found that job resources, such as social support and skill variety, act as protective factors against emotional exhaustion.

Cynicism, also called depersonalization, involves developing a negative, detached attitude toward work and colleagues (Maslach et al., 2001). It is particularly prevalent in professions requiring intense interpersonal interactions, such as healthcare, education, and social work (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). A study by Bakker et al. (2007) demonstrated that employees with high job demands and insufficient support were more likely to experience cynicism, which in turn decreased work engagement. Similarly, Laschinger et al. (2009) found that organizational factors, including workplace civility and empowerment, significantly influence cynicism among new professionals.

Reduced professional efficacy refers to employees' perception of diminished competence and accomplishment in their roles (Maslach et al., 1996). This aspect of burnout is often linked to limited career development opportunities, organizational constraints, and insufficient recognition. Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) reviewed burnout in organizational life and highlighted its links with adverse work attitudes and outcomes. Additionally, Kim and Stoner (2008) found that burnout significantly predicts turnover intentions, particularly in social service professions where employees face emotionally demanding workloads.

2.3. Job Satisfaction and Work Burnout

Job satisfaction and work burnout are two critical constructs in organizational psychology that are closely related to employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Meta-analytic and empirical research consistently indicates a negative association between job satisfaction and burnout-related outcomes (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). These findings provide a basis for examining how the strength of this relationship may differ across occupational settings.

Research on intrinsic motivation provides additional insight into this relationship. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy and competence for motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000), while Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) show that employees' orientations toward work shape the meaning they derive from their jobs. Research on job resources also indicates that supportive resources are especially important when job demands are high (Bakker et al., 2007). Together, these perspectives suggest that meaningful and intrinsically motivating work may help employees cope with occupational strain.

Beyond intrinsic factors, external job conditions and organizational resources are also relevant to burnout. Workplace civility, empowerment, and organizational support are associated with lower burnout-related strain (Laschinger et al., 2009), while supervisor support and work-life conditions have long been identified as important elements in burnout research (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Perceptions of fairness in organizational practices may also shape employees' work attitudes and reactions to stress (Greenberg, 1990).

Prior literature also indicates that burnout is associated with lower job involvement, withdrawal, absenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2001; Shirom, 2003; Kim & Stoner, 2008). Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) similarly reviewed evidence linking burnout to adverse organizational outcomes. These findings support examining job satisfaction and burnout as closely interconnected constructs, while longitudinal evidence remains necessary to establish temporal direction or reciprocal causality.

3. METHODOLOGY

Despite extensive research on job satisfaction and burnout, several gaps remain. Much of the foundational evidence has been developed in Western contexts (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Judge & Bono, 2001), while research in Chinese work settings also indicates that quality-of-work-life experiences are shaped by context (Chan & Wyatt, 2007). In addition, many studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which limits causal inference regarding the direction of the job satisfaction-burnout relationship (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Research has also highlighted the importance of high job demands and limited job resources in shaping burnout experiences (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Hong Kong offers a compelling case for further investigation because of its fast-paced and demanding work environment. This study therefore examines the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among Hong Kong employees, considering both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction factors. It also compares non-disciplined and disciplined force respondents to assess whether the strength and pattern of these associations differ across occupational structures. The study provides practical insights for workplace policies aimed at supporting job satisfaction, reducing burnout risk, and improving employee well-being.

3.1. Research Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to quantitatively assess job satisfaction and burnout among employees. The target sample comprised part-time students enrolled in various academic faculties at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. These individuals were employed full-time or part-time across different generational cohorts and a diverse range of industries. However, they can largely be categorized into non-disciplined force organizations and disciplined force organizations. Respondents were informed that participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and that all data collected would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. They were also assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time before the finalization of findings for academic publication.

To enhance accessibility and optimize user engagement, the survey was administered digitally and was compatible with commonly used electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Participants could access the survey via a QR code. Data collection occurred over three months, yielding 300 responses. Following the exclusion of 13 incomplete or duplicate responses, a total of 287 valid responses were retained for analysis.

Job satisfaction was measured using the 20-item short-form Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss et al., 1967), which consists of 12 items assessing intrinsic satisfaction and 6 items measuring extrinsic satisfaction. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5, with reliability analyses indicating strong internal consistency: general job satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.915$), intrinsic satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.865$), and extrinsic satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.834$).

Work burnout was assessed using the 16-item Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach et al., 1996). This scale comprises three dimensions: exhaustion (5 items), cynicism (5 items), and professional efficacy (6 items). Participants rated items on a 7-point Likert scale (0-6), and reliability coefficients confirmed strong internal consistency: overall burnout ($\alpha = 0.808$), exhaustion ($\alpha = 0.920$), cynicism ($\alpha = 0.942$), and professional efficacy ($\alpha = 0.851$). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression separately for non-disciplined and disciplined force respondents. Given the cross-sectional design, regression results were interpreted as statistical associations rather than evidence of causal or temporal direction.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis of job satisfaction and burnout responses obtained in this study, highlighting differences between non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. General job satisfaction is rated moderately high, with a mean score of 3.425 for non-disciplined force respondents and 3.487 for disciplined force respondents on a five-point scale. Intrinsic job satisfaction is higher than extrinsic job satisfaction in both groups, with intrinsic satisfaction rated at 3.631 for non-disciplined force respondents and 3.556 for disciplined force respondents. However, extrinsic satisfaction differs more noticeably: non-disciplined force respondents rate it at 2.987, while disciplined force respondents report a higher mean score of 3.334. This suggests that disciplined force employees may find greater satisfaction in external job factors such as higher salary, better benefits, or greater job security. In contrast, non-disciplined force employees perceive fewer rewards from these aspects.

Burnout levels differ notably between the two groups. The overall mean burnout score is 3.289 for non-disciplined force respondents and 3.108 for disciplined force respondents, on a seven-point scale. Exhaustion is rated higher among non-disciplined force respondents, with a mean score of 3.184, whereas disciplined force respondents report a lower score of 2.844. Cynicism follows a similar pattern, with non-disciplined force respondents rating it at 2.758 compared to 2.585 for disciplined force respondents. Despite these differences in exhaustion and cynicism, professional efficacy scores remain relatively consistent, with non-disciplined force respondents reporting a mean score of 4.075 and disciplined force respondents reporting a slightly higher mean of 4.107. These findings suggest that while non-disciplined force employees may experience greater emotional exhaustion and detachment from their work, both groups maintain a similar level of confidence in their professional abilities.

Table 1
Descriptive statistical analysis of job satisfaction and burnout rating from respondents in this study

		Mean ND	sd	Mean D	sd
1	Intrinsic	3.631	0.691	3.556	0.660
2	Extrinsic	2.987	1.044	3.334	0.754
3	General Job Satisfaction	3.425	0.737	3.487	0.650
4	Exhaustion	3.184	1.379	2.844	1.433
5	Cynicism	2.758	1.690	2.585	1.531
6	Prof. Efficacy	4.075	1.037	4.107	0.977
7	Burnout	3.289	1.042	3.108	1.115

ND: comprising 128 non-disciplined force respondents

D: comprising 159 disciplined force respondents

The correlation analysis in Table 2 indicates a significant negative relationship between general job satisfaction and overall burnout in both non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. General job satisfaction is negatively correlated with burnout ($r = -0.578$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = -0.727$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents), suggesting that employees who report greater job satisfaction experience lower levels of burnout. A similar pattern is observed for intrinsic job satisfaction, which is negatively correlated with burnout ($r = -0.508$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = -0.713$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). Extrinsic job satisfaction also exhibits a significant negative correlation with burnout ($r = -0.521$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = -0.621$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). These findings indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction are associated with lower burnout. The association is stronger for disciplined-force respondents.

A closer look at the exhaustion dimension of work burnout reveals statistically significant negative correlations between job satisfaction and exhaustion among disciplined-force respondents, but not among non-disciplined-force respondents. General job satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -0.647$, $p < .01$) among disciplined force respondents, whereas the correlation is not significant among non-disciplined force respondents. In particular, intrinsic job satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with exhaustion ($r = -0.640$, $p < .01$) among disciplined force respondents, but this relationship is not significant among non-disciplined force respondents. Extrinsic job satisfaction follows the same trend, with a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.544$, $p < .01$) among disciplined force respondents, whereas the relationship remains non-significant among non-disciplined force respondents. These findings suggest that job satisfaction is more strongly associated with lower exhaustion among disciplined-force employees than among non-disciplined-force employees.

Cynicism shows a statistically significant negative correlation with job satisfaction in both groups, though the association is stronger among disciplined-force respondents. General job satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with cynicism ($r = -0.622$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents; $r = -0.690$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). Intrinsic job satisfaction is also negatively correlated with cynicism ($r = -0.551$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = -0.675$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). Extrinsic job satisfaction follows a similar pattern, showing a significant negative correlation with cynicism ($r = -0.581$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = -0.585$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). These results indicate that employees with higher job satisfaction report lower cynicism, with the association slightly stronger among disciplined force respondents.

Professional efficacy, unlike exhaustion and cynicism, exhibits a statistically significant positive relationship with job satisfaction in both groups. General job satisfaction is positively correlated with professional efficacy ($r = 0.522$, $p < .01$ for

non-disciplined force respondents and $r = 0.460$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). A similar pattern emerged for intrinsic job satisfaction, which was positively correlated with professional efficacy ($r = 0.524$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = 0.447$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). Extrinsic job satisfaction also demonstrates a significant positive relationship with professional efficacy ($r = 0.405$, $p < .01$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $r = 0.413$, $p < .01$ for disciplined force respondents). These findings suggest that employees with higher job satisfaction, whether derived from intrinsic engagement or external rewards, are more likely to report a stronger sense of competence and effectiveness in their professional roles. The effect is inconclusive between the two groups of respondents, with a stronger association between intrinsic satisfaction and non-disciplined force respondents and between extrinsic satisfaction and disciplined force respondents.

Table 2
Correlation analysis between job satisfaction and work burnout

Non-disciplined force		2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Intrinsic	.731**	.939**	-.083	-.551**	.524**	-.508**
2	Extrinsic		.912**	-.164	-.581**	.405**	-.521**
3	General Job Satisfaction			-.154	-.622**	.522**	-.578**
4	Exhaustion				.537**	-.055	.750**
5	Cynicism					-.363**	.898**
6	Prof. Efficacy						-.553**
7	Burnout						
Disciplined force		2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Intrinsic	.784**	.969**	-.640**	-.675**	.447**	-.713**
2	Extrinsic		.969**	-.544**	-.585**	.413**	-.621**
3	General Job Satisfaction			-.647**	-.690**	.460**	-.727**
4	Exhaustion				.862**	-.351**	.925**
5	Cynicism					-.358**	.932**
6	Prof. Efficacy						-.607**
7	Burnout						

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 presents regression analyses examining the association between job satisfaction and burnout across non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. When burnout is specified as the dependent variable, general job satisfaction is significantly and negatively associated with burnout in both groups. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is -0.816 for non-disciplined force respondents and -1.247 for disciplined force respondents. Thus, a one-unit higher job satisfaction score is associated with a 0.816-unit lower burnout score in the non-disciplined force group and a 1.247-unit lower burnout score in the disciplined force group.

The standardized coefficients further indicate a stronger inverse association among disciplined force respondents ($\beta = -0.727$) than among non-disciplined force respondents ($\beta = -0.578$). The proportion of variance in burnout statistically accounted for by job satisfaction (R^2) is 33.4% for non-disciplined force respondents and 52.9% for disciplined force respondents. These values indicate that the bivariate relationship is stronger in the disciplined force group; they do not, however, establish that job satisfaction causally reduces burnout.

When the regression is specified in the reverse direction, burnout is likewise significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction: $B = -0.409$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $B = -0.424$ for disciplined force respondents, with standardized coefficients of $\beta = -0.578$ and $\beta = -0.727$, respectively ($p < .001$). Because these are simple bivariate regressions based on the same cross-sectional observations, the identical standardized coefficients and R^2 values across the two model directions reflect the same underlying correlation. They should not be interpreted as evidence of a fully reciprocal or bidirectional causal relationship. The larger F-statistic for disciplined force respondents ($F = 176.35$, $p < .001$) relative to non-disciplined force respondents ($F = 63.057$, $p < .001$) is consistent with the stronger bivariate association in that group.

Overall, the regression results support a stronger inverse association between job satisfaction and burnout among disciplined force respondents. The lower association among non-disciplined force respondents suggests that additional occupational

factors may also be related to burnout in this group. Differences in workplace flexibility, career mobility, job demands, or organizational structure may be relevant explanations, but these mechanisms were not directly tested in the present study.

Table 3
Regression analysis between job satisfaction and work burnout

Non-disciplined force - Dependent Variable: Burnout										
	Predictor	B	se B	Beta	t	sig	R Sq	Adj R Sq	F	sig
1	Constant	6.083	.360		16.91	.000				
	General Job Satisfaction	-.816	.103	-.578	-7.941	.000	.334	.328	63.057	.000
Non-disciplined force - Dependent Variable: General Job Satisfaction										
	Predictor	B	se B	Beta	t	sig	R Sq	Adj R Sq	F	sig
1	Constant	4.770	.178		26.87	.000				
	Burnout	-.409	.051	-.578	-7.941	.000	.334	.328	63.057	.000
Disciplined Force - Dependent Variable: Burnout										
	Predictor	B	se B	Beta	t	sig	R Sq	Adj R Sq	F	sig
1	Constant	7.456	.333		22.39	.000				
	General Job Satisfaction	-1.247	.094	-.727	-13.28	.000	.529	.526	176.35	.000
Disciplined Force - Dependent Variable: General Job Satisfaction										
	Predictor	B	se B	Beta	t	sig	R Sq	Adj R Sq	F	sig
1	Constant	4.805	.105		45.58	.000				
	Burnout	-.424	.032	-.727	-13.28	.000	.529	.526	176.35	.000

4.2. Discussions

4.2.1. Job satisfaction and burnout levels across occupational groups

The findings indicate that both non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents report moderate levels of job satisfaction, with intrinsic satisfaction consistently rated higher than extrinsic satisfaction. This aligns with previous research suggesting that employees derive greater fulfillment from internal work-related factors such as autonomy, skill variety, and a sense of purpose (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, extrinsic satisfaction differs, with disciplined-force respondents reporting higher levels than their non-disciplined counterparts. This suggests that external rewards such as salary, job security, and structured career progression may contribute more significantly to satisfaction in hierarchical, rule-based professions (Porter & Lawler, 1968; Spector, 1997). In contrast, non-disciplined force employees, who may have greater flexibility in their job roles, appear to place greater emphasis on intrinsic work motivation (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Burnout levels, while moderate overall, vary between the two occupational groups. Non-disciplined force respondents report higher levels of exhaustion and cynicism, indicating greater emotional strain and disengagement. This aligns with prior research suggesting that professions with greater autonomy and unpredictable work demands may expose employees to higher stress due to unclear role expectations and limited structural support (Bakker et al., 2007). In contrast, disciplined force respondents report lower exhaustion and cynicism scores, possibly reflecting institutionalized support mechanisms, formalized teamwork, and structured work routines that mitigate burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). However, despite these differences, professional efficacy remains relatively high in both groups, suggesting that employees continue to perceive themselves as competent and capable of meeting job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

These findings suggest that while employees across different occupational structures experience job satisfaction and burnout, the underlying drivers of these experiences differ. Non-disciplined force employees, who typically navigate more fluid career paths, may experience greater emotional exhaustion due to factors such as job insecurity and variable workloads (Clark, 1997). Conversely, disciplined force employees, operating in structured roles with more stable career trajectories,

may benefit from the predictability of their work environment, leading to lower levels of exhaustion and cynicism (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). However, reliance on extrinsic job satisfaction factors in disciplined professions may also create vulnerability to dissatisfaction if external rewards are perceived as inadequate over time (Greenberg, 1990).

4.2.2. DIFFERENTIAL STRENGTH OF THE JOB SATISFACTION–BURNOUT RELATIONSHIP ACROSS OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

The findings suggest that while job satisfaction and burnout are strongly related in both occupational groups, the strength of their association differs between non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. Disciplined force employees exhibit the stronger inverse association, indicating that job satisfaction scores are more closely related to burnout scores within this group. This pattern is consistent with literature showing that job conditions, rewards, and perceived fairness are important to employee well-being in structured work environments (Greenberg, 1990; Shirom, 2003). Among non-disciplined force employees, the weaker association suggests that other occupational stressors or coping resources may also be relevant.

Differences in workplace structure and career flexibility may help explain variation in the strength of this relationship. Disciplined force employees operate within structured institutional frameworks, where hierarchical procedures and performance expectations may limit opportunities to adjust work conditions in response to dissatisfaction or stress (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Conversely, non-disciplined force employees often work in more varied environments and may have alternative ways to respond to dissatisfaction, such as changing roles, developing skills, or adjusting work tasks (Demerouti et al., 2001). These interpretations remain contextual explanations rather than mechanisms tested directly in this study.

These findings reinforce the idea that the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout is not uniform across occupational settings but is associated with broader organizational and professional contexts. In highly structured professions, job satisfaction may be a more prominent correlate of burnout. In less rigid work environments, burnout may be associated with a broader combination of factors, such as workload uncertainty, career mobility, or interpersonal dynamics (Bakker et al., 2007).

4.2.3. Interrelationship between job satisfaction and burnout

The results confirm a strong inverse relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, with a stronger association among disciplined force respondents. The reverse-direction regression produces the same standardized coefficient and R^2 as the corresponding simple regression because both models are based on the same bivariate correlation. Accordingly, the present cross-sectional analysis demonstrates interdependence in the observed scores but does not establish temporal reciprocity or bidirectional causation. Prior literature nevertheless indicates that burnout can be associated with withdrawal and reduced job engagement over time (Shirom, 2003).

For non-disciplined force respondents, the inverse association between job satisfaction and burnout is weaker than for disciplined force respondents. Employees in occupations with greater autonomy and mobility may have additional coping mechanisms, such as job switching or self-directed role adjustments, that are relevant to how dissatisfaction and burnout are experienced (Demerouti et al., 2001). Other factors, including career progression, skill development, and job resources, may also shape burnout in less structured work settings (Bakker et al., 2007).

Overall, the cross-sectional evidence indicates that job satisfaction and burnout are closely and inversely related in both groups, with the relationship stronger among disciplined force respondents. Occupational structure and career constraints may help explain this difference, but longitudinal or experimental research is required to determine whether changes in one construct lead to subsequent changes in the other (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

4.3. Implications for Practice

4.3.1. Tailoring workplace strategies to occupational structures

The findings suggest that the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout differs across occupational groups, highlighting the need for tailored workplace interventions. For disciplined force employees, where the connection between job satisfaction and burnout is particularly strong, organizations should prioritize strategies that enhance both intrinsic and

extrinsic job satisfaction. Structured career progression pathways, transparent reward systems, and clear communication of job expectations can help reinforce employees' sense of stability and fairness, thereby reducing dissatisfaction-driven burnout (Greenberg, 1990). In contrast, for non-disciplined force employees, interventions may need to focus more on role flexibility, career development, and workload management, as burnout in these professions likely stems from a broader set of factors beyond job satisfaction alone (Demerouti et al., 2001).

4.3.2. Enhancing job satisfaction through workplace resources

Since job satisfaction plays a critical role in mitigating burnout, organizations should invest in both intrinsic and extrinsic job resources to enhance employee well-being. For intrinsic satisfaction, employers can focus on job enrichment strategies, such as providing autonomy, meaningful work tasks, and opportunities for skill development (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Employees who feel challenged and engaged in their roles are more likely to experience fulfillment and less likely to develop burnout symptoms (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In disciplined force organizations, structured mentorship programs and leadership training may foster a sense of purpose and professional growth. For extrinsic satisfaction, fair compensation, performance recognition, and supportive managerial practices are crucial in reducing dissatisfaction-driven stress (Greenberg, 1990; Spector, 1997). This is particularly relevant for non-disciplined force employees, who may be more sensitive to financial incentives and career mobility opportunities.

4.3.3. Addressing burnout through workload and stress management

Given the moderate levels of burnout reported across both occupational groups, organizations should implement proactive stress management initiatives. Workload distribution plays a crucial role, as excessive job demands contribute to exhaustion and cynicism, particularly in non-disciplined force professions where role ambiguity may be more prevalent (Bakker et al., 2007). Employers should assess task allocation processes and ensure that employees are not burdened with unrealistic expectations. Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options or compressed workweeks, may provide non-disciplined force employees with greater control over their schedules and may help reduce work-related strain. In disciplined force settings, structured debriefing sessions and psychological resilience training may help employees process work-related stress more effectively (Leiter & Maslach, 2009).

4.3.4. Strengthening organizational support systems

The findings reinforce the importance of managerial and peer support in shaping job satisfaction and mitigating burnout. Employees who perceive strong organizational support tend to report lower burnout levels and higher job satisfaction (Laschinger et al., 2009). In disciplined force organizations, where work environments are often hierarchical, supportive leadership and peer collaboration are essential in buffering against job stressors. Encouraging an open feedback culture and implementing structured mentorship programs may help employees navigate work challenges more effectively. In non-disciplined force professions, where career paths may be less predictable, career coaching, networking opportunities, and well-being programs can help employees build a sense of job security and professional growth, thereby reducing the risk of burnout.

4.3.5. Recognizing the close relationship between job satisfaction and burnout

The study highlights the close relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, suggesting that workplace interventions should consider both constructs rather than treating them in isolation. Prior literature indicates that chronic burnout can coexist with lower job satisfaction and disengagement (Shirom, 2003). Organizations can use employee satisfaction surveys, burnout assessments, and regular manager-employee check-ins to identify early signs of dissatisfaction and stress. Promoting a healthy work culture that values employee well-being alongside performance may also help address conditions associated with both burnout and dissatisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Longitudinal evidence is still needed to establish the direction of these relationships over time.

4.3.6. Adjusting future workplace policy

The findings emphasize the need for ongoing research and policy adjustments to address evolving workplace dynamics. Given the high-intensity work culture in regions like Hong Kong, organizations must remain adaptive to maintain job satisfaction while minimizing burnout. Future research should explore sector-specific interventions, leadership styles, and organizational justice as potential moderators of the job satisfaction–burnout relationship (Greenberg, 1990; Halbesleben, 2010). Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how job satisfaction and burnout fluctuate over time, informing more sustainable workplace policies. Organizations should collaborate with researchers and policymakers to develop evidence-based well-being initiatives that align with both employee needs and organizational goals.

5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among employees in Hong Kong by comparing non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. The findings show significant negative associations between general, intrinsic, and extrinsic job satisfaction and overall burnout in both groups, with the relationship consistently stronger among disciplined force respondents. Non-disciplined force respondents reported higher mean exhaustion and cynicism, whereas disciplined force respondents reported higher extrinsic job satisfaction. The regression analyses likewise indicate a stronger bivariate association in the disciplined force group, with job satisfaction accounting for a larger proportion of the variance in burnout. Because the study used a cross-sectional design, these results should not be interpreted as evidence that job satisfaction causes changes in burnout or vice versa. The findings nevertheless support workplace policies that address job satisfaction and burnout together through workload management, organizational support, fair employment practices, and career development. Future longitudinal research is needed to clarify temporal direction and to examine sector-specific mechanisms underlying these associations.

5.1. Limitations and future research

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design constrains the ability to infer causality between job satisfaction and burnout. While significant correlations were found, the data provide only a snapshot of employee experiences at a single point in time, limiting understanding of how these constructs evolve over longer periods. Longitudinal research would offer a clearer perspective on the dynamic nature of job satisfaction and burnout, allowing researchers to assess whether changes in one construct predict changes in the other over time (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Second, the study's sample consists primarily of part-time students employed in various industries within Hong Kong. While this allows for broad sectoral representation, it may introduce biases related to work-life balance challenges unique to this demographic. Future studies should consider a more diverse sample, including employees at different career stages and with different work arrangements, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Third, reliance on self-reported measures introduces the risk of response bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their job satisfaction and burnout levels due to social desirability bias or their emotional state at the time of response. Including objective indicators, such as absenteeism records, performance evaluations, or physiological stress markers, could complement self-reported data and strengthen the robustness of future research (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Future research can build upon these findings in several ways. Given the stronger relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among disciplined force respondents, future studies could explore the specific organizational mechanisms that mediate this relationship, such as leadership style, institutional culture, or role expectations. Additionally, sector-specific investigations could offer tailored insights into how different occupational structures shape job satisfaction and burnout, particularly in high-pressure industries such as healthcare, law enforcement, and financial services (Bakker et al., 2007). Furthermore, given the evolving nature of work amid digitalization and remote work models, future research should examine how technological advancements and flexible work arrangements affect job satisfaction and burnout, especially in high-intensity labour markets such as Hong Kong (Demerouti et al., 2001). Experimental or intervention-based studies could also provide actionable recommendations by testing workplace modifications – such as flexible scheduling, mental health resources, or enhanced job autonomy – to determine their efficacy in reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction. Lastly, integrating qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic studies, could offer richer insights into employees' lived experiences, providing a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and cognitive mechanisms underlying job satisfaction and burnout.

5.2. Declaration

The researchers did not receive any financial assistance, grants, or sponsorships for the study presented in this article. AI technology was employed to refine grammatical accuracy and improve the manuscript's overall fluency.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

8. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and writing of the original draft.

Author 2 was responsible for data collection, analysis, and result validation.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

9. ETHICS STATEMENT

Participation in this questionnaire study was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the study purpose, the academic use of the data, their right to withdraw before finalization of the findings, and the measures used to protect privacy and confidentiality. No identifying participant information is reported in this article.

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