

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 those in non-disciplined and disciplined workforces. A cross-sectional survey of 287 working individuals reveals a strong negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout across both groups. However, this relationship varies significantly across occupational structures. Employees in disciplined forces, such as police officers and firefighters, show a stronger bidirectional relationship: lower job satisfaction leads to heightened burnout, and increased burnout further diminishes job satisfaction. In contrast, non-disciplined force employees show a weaker cyclical pattern, suggesting that other occupational factors may moderate this link. Intrinsic job satisfaction, derived from work engagement and personal fulfillment, plays a crucial role in reducing burnout for non-disciplined force employees. Meanwhile, extrinsic factors, such as job security and financial stability, have a greater impact on job satisfaction and burnout among disciplined force employees. The findings highlight the importance of workplace policies tailored to different occupational groups, emphasizing intrinsic motivators in non-disciplined roles and external incentives in disciplined professions. By recognizing how job satisfaction and burnout interact differently in structured and flexible work environments, organizations can develop targeted interventions to enhance employee well-being. Addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction factors can mitigate burnout and foster a healthier, more resilient workforce.

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

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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. Employees in Hong Kong often face long working hours, high job demands, and competitive workplace cultures, which contribute to heightened stress and potential burnout (Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, 2023). Over half of employees work more than 45 hours per week, with 7.3% exceeding 70 hours, surpassing the International Labour Organization's recommended 40-hour workweek. Employees often find themselves caught between pursuing career success and the growing pressure to maintain their well-being. While job satisfaction can drive motivation and commitment, burnout remains a persistent issue, 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). It has been defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting 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). Employees who find their work meaningful and intellectually stimulating exhibit higher job satisfaction and are less likely to leave their jobs (Amabile et al., 1994). A longitudinal study by Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) demonstrated that employees who perceive their jobs as a “calling” experience greater intrinsic satisfaction and lower turnover intentions. Research by Deci and Ryan (2000) further supports the role of intrinsic motivation, showing that employees who experience autonomy and competence in their roles report greater well-being and job satisfaction. Empirical studies suggest a strong link between intrinsic job satisfaction and employee engagement. A meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2001) found that intrinsic job satisfaction is positively correlated with organizational commitment and performance.

Extrinsic job satisfaction arises from external factors such as salary, benefits, job security, and managerial support (Porter & Lawler, 1968). Employees who perceive fairness in compensation and career advancement opportunities tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction (Greenberg, 1990). Spector (1997) elaborates that workplace policies, supervisor relationships, and organizational culture significantly influence extrinsic satisfaction. Also, studies show that extrinsic factors can mitigate stress and improve employee morale. For example, a study by Clark (1997) found that higher wages and better working conditions are associated with increased job satisfaction. Additionally, research by Judge and Bono (2001) indicates that employees who perceive support from supervisors report higher extrinsic satisfaction, which in turn leads to greater organizational commitment.

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 seminal work of Maslach and Jackson (1981), who operationalized burnout into three interrelated dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism), and reduced professional efficacy.

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, Finegan, and Wilk (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) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between burnout and work engagement, revealing that low professional efficacy negatively impacts job satisfaction, work commitment, and performance. 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 significantly impact employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. One of the earliest meta-analyses on job satisfaction and burnout was conducted by Lee and Ashforth (1996), who reviewed 61 studies and found a strong negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout ($p = -0.48$). Their findings highlighted that satisfied employees were less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Similarly, Wright and Cropanzano (1998) found that job satisfaction enhances employee well-being and reduces stress-induced burnout.

Deci and Ryan (2000) examined the role of Self-Determination Theory in understanding burnout, finding that employees with high intrinsic motivation reported lower emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.37, p < .01$). Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) conducted a longitudinal study of 256 professionals, revealing that individuals who viewed their work as a "calling" exhibited greater resilience to burnout symptoms over time. Bakker et al. (2007) further explored intrinsic motivation and burnout in a study involving 1,012 employees, demonstrating a negative correlation between intrinsic job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.42, p < .01$) and cynicism ($r = -0.39, p < .01$). These findings suggest that individuals who find personal fulfillment in their work are better equipped to handle occupational stress.

Beyond intrinsic factors, extrinsic job satisfaction factors such as salary, job security, and managerial support have also been found to mitigate the risk of burnout. Laschinger et al. (2009) conducted a study with 612 healthcare professionals, finding that the organizational support perceived negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.45, p < .01$). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) examined 320 employees in high-stress occupations and reported that supervisor support and work-life balance initiatives significantly reduced cynicism ($r = -0.40, p < .01$). Judge and Bono (2001) analyzed data from 745 employees across various industries and found that employees with strong managerial support exhibited lower burnout symptoms and higher job commitment ($r = -0.43, p < .01$). Similarly, Greenberg (1990) reported that employees who perceived fairness in compensation and career growth experienced lower emotional exhaustion.

Empirical studies have well documented the cyclical nature of the job satisfaction-burnout relationship. Demerouti et al. (2001) reported that employees experiencing burnout showed lower job involvement, reinforcing a feedback loop in which burnout fuels dissatisfaction, which in turn exacerbates burnout symptoms. Shirom (2003) investigated 605 employees from diverse professional backgrounds and found that burnout was associated with increased withdrawal behaviors and absenteeism ($r = 0.48, p < .01$), further reducing job engagement. A meta-analysis by Halbesleben and Buckley (2004), encompassing 36 studies with over 14,000 participants, confirmed that burnout negatively affects work performance,

creativity, and workplace interpersonal relationships. Kim and Stoner (2008), in their study of 498 social workers, found that burnout significantly predicted a decrease in job satisfaction over time ($\beta = -0.51$, $p < .001$), reinforcing a negative feedback loop.

3. METHODOLOGY

Despite extensive research on job satisfaction and burnout, several gaps remain. Many studies have been conducted in Western contexts (e.g., Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Judge & Bono, 2001), limiting their applicability to non-Western work environments. Additionally, while existing research confirms a negative relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, most studies rely on cross-sectional designs, making it difficult to determine causality (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Moreover, research has often overlooked the impact of high-intensity work cultures, in which long hours and extreme job demands may shape how employees experience and cope with job satisfaction and burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Hong Kong offers a compelling case for further investigation because of its fast-paced, high-pressure work environment and strong collectivist influences. Employees often face long working hours, high job demands, and intense competition, making burnout a critical issue. Given recent shifts in workplace dynamics—such as digitalization, hybrid work models, and economic uncertainties—it is crucial to understand how these factors affect employees' job satisfaction and burnout levels in Hong Kong (Chan & Wyatt, 2007). Therefore, this study examines the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among Hong Kong employees, considering both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction factors. It will also explore specific differences between non-disciplined and disciplined force workers, identifying which group is at greater risk of burnout. The study will then offer insights to help companies develop effective workplace policies that enhance job satisfaction, reduce burnout, and improve overall 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 ($\alpha = 0.851$).

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 reduce burnout, with intrinsic satisfaction showing a stronger association, particularly among 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 plays a more substantial role in reducing 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, particularly from intrinsic sources, are less likely to develop a cynical or detached attitude toward their work, with the effect 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	Burn Out						
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	Burn Out						

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

Table 3 presents the results of regression analyses examining the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout across non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. In both groups, general job satisfaction significantly predicts burnout, with a negative unstandardized coefficient (B) of -0.816 for non-disciplined force respondents and -1.247 for disciplined force respondents. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in job satisfaction, burnout decreases by 0.816 units in the non-disciplined force group and by a larger 1.247 units in the disciplined force group.

The standardized coefficient (β), which allows comparison across variables, further highlights this effect: $\beta = -0.578$ for non-disciplined force respondents and $\beta = -0.727$ for disciplined force respondents. These β values suggest a stronger relationship among disciplined force employees, indicating that job satisfaction plays a more critical role in mitigating

burnout in structured, high-pressure occupations. The proportion of variance in burnout explained by job satisfaction, denoted by R^2 , is 33.4% for non-disciplined force respondents and 52.9% for disciplined force respondents, indicating a stronger explanatory power in the latter group.

Similarly, burnout significantly predicts job satisfaction in both groups, reinforcing a bidirectional relationship. The regression results show that a one-unit increase in burnout reduces job satisfaction by 0.409 units for non-disciplined force respondents ($B = -0.409$, $\beta = -0.578$, $p < .001$) and by 0.424 units for disciplined force respondents ($B = -0.424$, $\beta = -0.727$, $p < .001$). The identical β values for both job satisfaction predicting burnout and burnout predicting job satisfaction within each group suggest a fully reciprocal relationship. However, the larger coefficients in the disciplined force group indicate that their job satisfaction and burnout levels are more interdependent than those of their non-disciplined counterparts. Furthermore, the F-statistic, which assesses the overall significance of the regression model, is much larger for disciplined force respondents ($F = 176.35$, $p < .001$) than for non-disciplined force respondents ($F = 63.057$, $p < .001$), indicating that job satisfaction explains variations in burnout more effectively in this group.

Beyond the bidirectional effects, the larger absolute values of B and β for disciplined force respondents suggest that changes in job satisfaction have a stronger impact on burnout than in non-disciplined force employees. This may indicate that external pressures, rigid hierarchies, and structured work environments in disciplined professions amplify the effects of job satisfaction on emotional resilience. The relatively lower B and β values for non-disciplined force employees suggest that other external variables—such as workplace flexibility, career mobility, or sector-specific stressors—may play a more substantial role in shaping burnout beyond job satisfaction alone. Given the substantially higher R^2 for disciplined-force respondents, job satisfaction is a more dominant predictor of burnout in this group. In contrast, in non-disciplined professions, other factors may contribute more significantly to employees' stress and exhaustion.

Table 3
Regression analysis between job satisfaction and work burnout

Non-disciplined force - Dependent Variable: Burn Out										
	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 (Judge & Bono, 2001). 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 impact 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 nature and strength of their association vary between non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. Disciplined force employees exhibit a stronger relationship between the two constructs, indicating that fluctuations in job satisfaction are more closely tied to changes in burnout and vice versa. This aligns with previous research suggesting that in structured, high-stakes professions, employees' well-being is more directly influenced by job conditions, rewards, and perceived fairness in organizational practices (Greenberg, 1990; Shirom, 2003). In contrast, among non-disciplined force employees, the relationship appears weaker, suggesting that while job satisfaction and burnout remain interrelated, other occupational stressors or coping mechanisms may moderate their connection.

Differences in workplace structure and career flexibility may explain variation in the strength of this relationship. Disciplined force employees operate within rigid institutional frameworks, where hierarchical structures, procedural demands, and performance expectations limit their ability to adjust work conditions in response to dissatisfaction or stress (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). As a result, declining job satisfaction may be reflected more immediately in burnout symptoms such as exhaustion and cynicism. Conversely, non-disciplined force employees often work in more fluid environments, where job roles, workload distribution, and career progression are subject to greater individual discretion. Employees in these professions may have alternative ways to mitigate dissatisfaction, such as switching jobs, developing skills, or modifying work tasks, thereby weakening the direct influence of job satisfaction on burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001).

These findings reinforce the idea that the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout is not uniform across occupational settings but is shaped by the broader organizational and professional context. In highly structured professions, employees may have fewer avenues for adaptation, making job satisfaction a more central determinant of well-being. In contrast, employees in less rigid work environments may experience burnout due to a combination of factors beyond job satisfaction alone, such as workload uncertainty, career mobility, or interpersonal dynamics (Bakker et al., 2007).

4.2.3. Reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and burnout

The results confirm a bidirectional relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, although its strength varies across occupational groups. Among disciplined force respondents, the standardized coefficient for burnout predicting job

satisfaction mirrors that of job satisfaction predicting burnout, suggesting a reinforcing cycle of dissatisfaction and exhaustion. This aligns with previous research showing that burnout erodes job engagement, which in turn worsens dissatisfaction (Shirom, 2003). The regression model's high explanatory power further suggests that fluctuations in burnout levels have a pronounced impact on job satisfaction in structured work environments, where employees may have fewer avenues for role negotiation or job redesign (Laschinger et al., 2009).

For non-disciplined force respondents, while the bidirectional relationship is also present, the lower standardized coefficient suggests that burnout and job satisfaction interact less strongly. This aligns with findings that employees in professions with greater autonomy and mobility may have alternative coping mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of burnout on job satisfaction, such as job switching or self-directed role adjustments (Demerouti et al., 2001). Moreover, prior research indicates that non-disciplined force employees, particularly in knowledge-based professions, may be more influenced by factors such as career progression, skill development, and leadership support, which can moderate burnout's impact on job satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2007).

Overall, while the reciprocal relationship is evident in both groups, its strength is contingent on occupational structure and career constraints. Disciplined force employees, operating in hierarchical work environments, may experience a more entrenched cycle of dissatisfaction and burnout, as fewer external opportunities exist to offset workplace stressors (Kim & Stoner, 2008). In contrast, non-disciplined force employees, who may navigate more fluid job markets, might experience burnout as a transient rather than a reinforcing phenomenon, leading to different coping strategies and career adaptations (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 (Judge & Bono, 2001). 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, can provide non-disciplined force employees with greater control over their schedules, reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction (Clark, 1997). 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 bidirectional nature of job satisfaction and burnout

The study highlights the reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, suggesting that interventions should target both constructs simultaneously rather than in isolation. Employees who experience chronic burnout are likely to exhibit lower job satisfaction, which in turn exacerbates burnout symptoms, creating a negative feedback loop (Shirom, 2003). Organizations should implement continuous monitoring systems, such as employee satisfaction surveys and burnout assessments, to identify early warning signs of dissatisfaction and stress. Regular check-ins between managers and employees can help address concerns proactively before they escalate into more severe burnout-related issues. Moreover, promoting a healthy work culture that values employee well-being, rather than merely focusing on productivity metrics, can break the cycle of burnout and dissatisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

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 complex relationship between job satisfaction and burnout among employees in Hong Kong, particularly by comparing non-disciplined force and disciplined force respondents. The findings reinforce the negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout, suggesting that employees who derive greater intrinsic or extrinsic satisfaction from their work are less likely to experience emotional exhaustion, cynicism, or reduced professional efficacy. Moreover, the results indicate that disciplined force employees exhibit a stronger reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, highlighting the structured, high-pressure nature of their work environments. The bidirectional influence between these two constructs suggests that dissatisfaction not only increases burnout but that prolonged burnout also deteriorates job satisfaction over time, creating a reinforcing cycle of workplace stress. These insights underscore the importance of workplace policies that prioritize both job satisfaction and burnout prevention, particularly through strategies such as workload management, organizational support, and career development initiatives. Given the evolving work landscape, further research should explore sector-specific interventions and longitudinal changes in job satisfaction and burnout. By addressing these issues, organizations can foster healthier work environments, ultimately improving employee well-being, productivity, and retention.

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 (Chan & Wyatt, 2007). 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

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of West London, United Kingdom, and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The [Institutional Ethics Committee/Review Board] granted ethical approval under reference number [**Approval Number, if applicable**]. All participants were informed about

the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes

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