

**TESTING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKLOAD AND WORK STRESS
ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE**

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Abstrak

This study aims to examine the effects of workload and work stress on employee performance, considering emotional exhaustion as a mediating variable. The research was conducted on employees of Bintang Indokarya Gemilang company, with a sample size of 180 respondents. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that high levels of workload and work stress in the workplace negatively impact employee performance and increase emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the results show that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between workload and work stress on employee performance. This research is expected to contribute to both the company and other entities by emphasizing the importance of managing employee workloads to enhance performance, ultimately aiding in the achievement of organizational objectives.

Keywords: Emotional Exhaustion, Employee Performance, Workload, Work Stress

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees play a crucial role in corporate management, particularly in enhancing company performance (Galeazzo et al., 2021). Human resource (HR) employees are essential for improving organizational outcomes, as they form the core of productivity, innovation, and service within the organization (Udin, 2020);(Akdere & Egan, 2020). Employee quality, skills, and efficiency directly correlate with the level of output and the quality of the company's products or services (Saffar & Obeidat, 2020). Enhancing employee skills and empowering them has been shown to significantly improve performance (Al-Omari et al., 2020; Vu, 2020). Furthermore, HR is a unique competitive advantage that is not easily replicated by other companies; therefore, it is crucial for organizations to prioritize the mental health of their employees (Gowan et al., 2022); (Udin et al., 2022).

Employee responsibilities, work hours, and workload should also be considered by companies, as neglecting these aspects can lead to work-related stress and increased workloads for employees (Gowan et al., 2022; Kim, 2021). Inegbedion et al. (2020) states that workload and job stress are internal factors that can influence employee performance. Employees in various work environments often face significant challenges, including high workloads and work-related stress, which can profoundly impact their performance (Maryati et al., 2019);(Al, 2023). Prior research has established a link between workload and job stress, indicating that higher workloads can lead to elevated stress levels for employees (Sumiyati et al., 2021). This stress can subsequently have a detrimental effect on employee performance.

Studies by Surijadi and Musa (2020), Siswanto et al. (2019), and Diana (2019) indicate that workload positively affects performance; that is, increasing workload can enhance employee performance. However, research by Haq et al. (2020) suggests that workload negatively impacts performance. A study by Johari et al. (2018) conducted in public schools in Northern Malaysia

also found that workload did not have a significant effect on employee performance. Additionally, research by Ekhsan and Septian (2021) and Lestari et al. (2020) demonstrates a positive relationship between job stress and employee performance. Findings by Haq et al. (2020) further indicate that each decrease in stress leads to an increase in employee performance, suggesting that as job stress rises, performance declines. A study by Semaksiani et al. (2019) and Christy and Amalia (2017) explores the impact of production workers' work pressure on their performance, showing a significant negative relationship between job stress and employee performance.

Due to these inconsistencies, this study aims to examine the role of emotional exhaustion as a mediating variable. Research has shown that emotional exhaustion, a key component of burnout, can also negatively impact employee outcomes, such as turnover intentions, commitment, and job performance (Banks et al., 2012). Additionally, emotionally exhausted employees may experience depression and family difficulties, which further exacerbate these issues (Banks et al., 2012). The current study seeks to expand on this existing knowledge by investigating the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between workload, job stress, and employee performance, modifying the research of Karatepe (2013) and Haq et al. (2020).

This study is expected to contribute by providing insights into how workload and job stress can directly reduce employee performance, as well as how emotional exhaustion mediates or exacerbates these negative effects. This indicates that the impact of job stress and workload is not only direct but also involves psychological factors that drain employees' emotional energy. Given the critical role of emotional exhaustion, companies can utilize these findings to develop policies and programs aimed at reducing excessive stress and workloads, such as through work-life balance policies, better workload management, and stress management training programs. By identifying job stress and workload as primary factors that trigger emotional exhaustion, this study aids organizations in recognizing early warning signs of potential performance decline due to stress and exhaustion. These findings are valuable for HR in developing early detection systems to address employee stress before its effects become more severe.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effect of Workload on Employee Performance

Workload refers to the set of processes or tasks that an employee is required to complete within a specified period, as defined by Vanchapo (2020). According to Munandar (2012), workload encompasses the tasks assigned to workers or employees to be completed within a particular time frame, utilizing their skills and potential. In contrast, Koesomowidjojo et al. (2017) describe workload as the process of determining the amount of work hours required by human resources to be used and allocated in completing a task within a set period. This definition highlights that workload is not merely about tasks or jobs but also involves the management of resources and the determination of timeframes.

Previous research conducted by Raditya & Supartha (2023) revealed a significant negative relationship between workload and employee performance. Similarly, the study by Andiani & Jayanagara (2023) demonstrated that workload has a significant and negative impact on performance. Haq et al. (2020) also found that workload negatively affects employee performance. The research by Johari et al. (2018) further confirmed a significant negative correlation between workload and employee performance. In addition, Septyaningsih et al. (2017) indicated that workload has a significant negative influence on employee performance. Sulastri & Onsardi (2020) reported similar findings, showing a significant negative effect of workload on employee performance. Based on the findings from these previous studies, the

following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Workload has a negative impact on employee performance.

The Effect of Work Stress on Employee Performance

Work Stress refers to an emotional state resulting from the mismatch between an individual's workload and their ability to cope with the pressures they face. Vanchapo (2020) defines work stress as a condition where the demands placed on an individual exceed their capacity to manage the stressors encountered. P. S. Robbins & Judge (2018) offer a dynamic definition, describing work stress as a condition in which an individual faces opportunities, demands, or resources that are associated with what the individual desires, with outcomes perceived as uncertain and significant. In contrast, Kreitner & Robert (2005) define work stress as an adaptive response linked to individual characteristics or psychological processes, which arise as a consequence of external actions, situations, or events that place psychological and/or physical demands on an individual.

Previous studies have consistently shown a significant negative impact of work stress on employee performance. Hermawan (2022) provided evidence that work stress negatively and significantly affects performance. Similarly, Sardouk & Ali (2022) found that work stress has a detrimental effect on performance. Ayu Wardani et al. (2023) also reported that work stress negatively influences performance. Additionally, research by Yang et al. (2021) demonstrated a significant negative correlation between work stress and performance. Furthermore, Jameel Babbar et al. (2021) confirmed a significant and negative relationship between work stress and performance. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Work stress has a negative impact on employee performance.

The Effect of Workload on Emotional Exhaustion

Several studies have provided evidence of a positive relationship between workload and emotional exhaustion. Buruck et al. (2020) demonstrated that workload is positively related to emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Fasyni & Sarianti (2020) found that workload has a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion. The study by Asaloei et al. (2023) revealed that statistical analysis indicates a positive effect of workload on emotional exhaustion. Research by Russeng et al. (2020) also confirmed a significant positive effect between workload and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, García-Arroyo & Segovia (2019) found that excessive workload is positively related to emotional exhaustion. Based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Workload has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

The Effect of Work Stress on Emotional Exhaustion

Previous research has consistently demonstrated a significant positive relationship between work stress and emotional exhaustion. Alonso et al. (2020) found that work stress and emotional exhaustion in the workplace are significantly related. Similarly, Tageja et al. (2021) indicated that both role-based stressors and technology-based stressors have a direct and significant impact on emotional exhaustion. Research by Salama et al. (2022) confirmed that work stress has a significant positive effect on work-related exhaustion. Mamusung et al. (2019) also found that work stress positively influences emotional exhaustion, suggesting that higher levels of work stress are associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Additionally, Noer Hanifah (2023) reported similar findings, indicating a positive impact of work stress on emotional exhaustion. Based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Work stress has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion.

The Effect of Emotional Exhaustion on Employee Performance

Previous research has consistently shown a significant negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee performance. Niyi et al. (2020) found that emotional exhaustion has a significant negative impact on employee performance, as emotional exhaustion is perceived to interfere with employees' work abilities. Similarly, Irene Simanjuntak et al. (2020) demonstrated that job satisfaction has a direct significant effect on performance, with emotional exhaustion affecting performance indirectly through its impact on job satisfaction. In this context, the relationship between emotional exhaustion and performance can be described as negative. Kadir et al. (2022) also found a significant negative effect of emotional exhaustion on performance. Research by Gustina et al. (2022) further confirmed that emotional exhaustion significantly affects employee performance, suggesting that emotional exhaustion negatively impacts work performance. Additionally, Wahyuni (2023) reported similar findings, showing that emotional exhaustion has a significant negative impact on employee performance. Based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on employee performance.

Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Workload and Employee Performance

Several studies have highlighted the role of emotional exhaustion as a mediator in the relationship between workload and employee performance. Daud Ali et al. (2020) concluded that emotional exhaustion fully mediates the relationship between workload and employee performance. Similarly, Saputri & Solovida (2020) found that emotional exhaustion mediates the impact of workload on performance. Karatepe (2013) demonstrated that emotional exhaustion successfully mediates the relationship between excessive workload and performance, suggesting that poor performance is influenced by emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, is driven by excessive workload. Furthermore, Diah & Tenri (2021) showed that workload affects performance through emotional exhaustion as an intervening variable. Astuti (2018) also confirmed that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between excessive workload and employee performance, particularly when employees feel overwhelmed by their workload, leading to emotional exhaustion. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Workload negatively affects employee performance through the mediation of emotional exhaustion.

Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Work Stress and Employee Performance

Several studies have examined emotional exhaustion as a mediator in the relationship between work stress and employee performance, consistently finding a negative effect. Hidayat et al. (2019) demonstrated that work stress negatively affects performance, with emotional exhaustion serving as a mediating variable. Similarly, Listiya Rinsa (2020) found that work stress negatively impacts employee performance through work-related exhaustion, reflecting a negative relationship between work stress and performance. Purwanti et al. (2022) reported that work stress has a significant negative effect on healthcare workers' performance through burnout (emotional exhaustion). Nengah Weni et al. (2023) further confirmed that burnout mediates the effect of work stress on performance, indicating that burnout acts as an intermediary between work stress and performance. This relationship suggests that high levels of work stress lead to burnout, which, in turn, negatively affects performance. In a similar vein, Fahri (2019) found that work stress, including workload, role conflict, and role ambiguity, significantly influences performance through emotional exhaustion. These findings suggest a negative relationship

between work stress and performance, as high work stress leads to emotional exhaustion, which subsequently undermines performance. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Work stress negatively affects employee performance through the mediation of emotional exhaustion

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a quantitative method using a questionnaire survey. The research object is Bintang Indokarya Gemilang company, with the subjects being employees of Bintang Indokarya Gemilang company. A purposive sampling technique was employed, with the criterion that employees must have worked for at least one year. This requirement ensures that the selected sample has sufficient familiarity with the work environment and can comprehend the questionnaire questions. A total of 180 employees were selected as the sample. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the respondent characteristics.

Tabel 1 Respondent Characteristics

Employee Characteristics	Total Respondents	%
Work unit		
Production operator	26	14.44
Assembling	35	19.44
Cutting	32	17.77
Sewing	30	16.67
Finishing	30	16.67
Labeling	27	15
Total	180	100
Length of service		
>1 Year	156	86.67
>2 Years	24	13.33
Total	180	100
Education		
Senior High School	174	96.67
Bachelor's degree	5	2.78
Mater degree	1	0.55
Total	180	100

In the process of designing the research questionnaire, the dimensions (indicators) of each variable were established to ensure that the instrument effectively addresses the research objectives. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to measure all variables, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), as this scale is widely utilized in survey research in Indonesia. Each question underwent validation by two experts in the field of human resource management. The questionnaire was adapted and modified to align with the specific context of the study. The exogenous variables in this research include workload and work stress. The workload variable was adapted from the work of Indik et al. (1964), while the work stress variable was derived from the study conducted by Parker and DeCotiis (1983). The endogenous variable, employee performance, was adapted from Koopmans (2014). Finally, the mediating variable of emotional exhaustion was adapted from Maslach and Jackson (1981).

The hypothesis testing in this study will be analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is based on variance. Prior to this analysis, it

is essential to examine potential biases due to the survey nature of the research. Following the recommendation of MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012), if the Common Method Variance (CMV) test results indicate a total variance exceeding 50%, it suggests the presence of bias in questionnaire responses. The findings from the CMV test revealed a variance of 35.59%, indicating that the data is free from bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The choice of PLS-SEM is motivated by its capability to assess complex models that include both mediation and moderation simultaneously (Hair et al., 2019). This method is particularly suitable for this research due to the non-parametric nature of the Likert scale and the potential for multicollinearity among the elements (Hair et al., 2019). To ensure strong predictive power, additional analyses will be conducted, including the PLSpredict test and several other evaluations. Based on the methodology and design research, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this research.

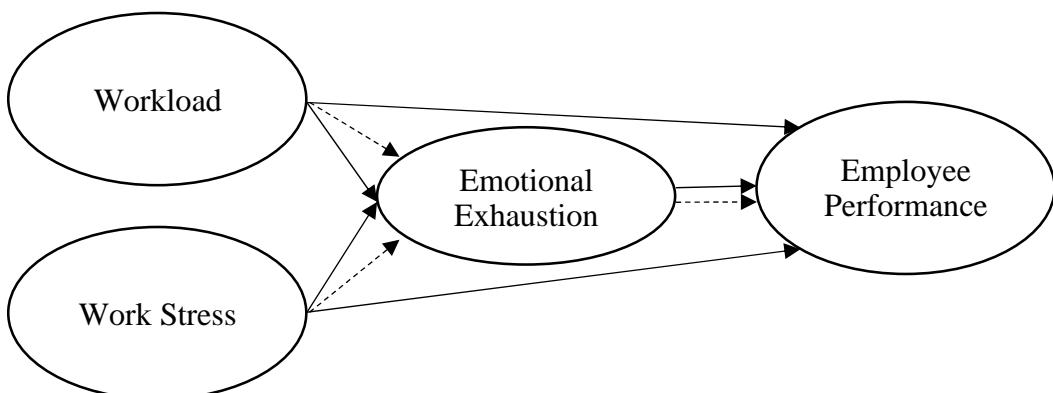


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics based on respondents' answers. The results indicate that the average perceptions of respondents regarding the tested variables fall into the moderate category, as evidenced by the means of each variable, which range from 2 to 3. Among the variables assessed, employee performance exhibited the highest average at 3.84. This is further supported by the relatively low minimum values, which range from 1 to 2.

Table 2. Statistic Descriptive

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Workload	1.00	5.00	2.43	0.77
Work Stress	1.00	4.90	2.04	0.63
Employees Performance	1.30	5.00	3.84	0.68
Emotional Exhaustion	1.00	5.00	2.31	0.75
Valid N (listwise)	180			

Subsequently, this study was evaluated using PLS-SEM, which encompasses both measurement and structural testing. The measurement evaluation includes validity and reliability assessments (outer model) (Hair et al., 2019). Validity is further divided into convergent and discriminant validity. Table 3 presents the results of the convergent validity test. According to

Hair et al. (2019), convergent validity can be assessed through the values of factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with the statistical criterion set at a threshold of greater than 0.5. Based on the results shown in Table 3, the criteria for convergent validity have been met (Hair et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2019)

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Variables/Indicators	Loadings	AVE
Workload		
WL1	0.780	0.625
WL2	0.728	
WL3	0.833	
WL4	0.814	
WL5	0.810	
WL6	0.769	
WL7	0.806	
WL8	0.745	
WL9	0.780	
WL10	0.811	
WL11	0.779	
WL12	0.831	
WL13	0.737	
WL14	0.782	
WL15	0.845	
Work stress		
WS1	0.715	0.581
WS2	0.840	
WS3	0.749	
WS4	0.793	
WS5	0.795	
WS6	0.726	
WS7	0.759	
WS8	0.718	
WS9	0.722	
WS10	0.713	
WS11	0.776	
WS12	0.795	
WS13	0.798	
Employee Performance		
EP1	0.803	0.663
EP2	0.835	
EP3	0.825	
EP4	0.850	
EP5	0.885	
EP6	0.842	
EP7	0.780	
EP8	0.799	
EP9	0.857	
EP10	0.796	

Variables/Indicators	Loadings	AVE
EP11	0.752	
EP12	0.792	
EP13	0.760	
EP14	0.754	
EP15	0.824	
EP16	0.846	
EP17	0.816	
EP18	0.826	
Emotional Exhaustion		
EE1	0.873	0.738
EE2	0.822	
EE3	0.861	
EE4	0.900	
EE5	0.835	
EE6	0.857	
EE7	0.866	
EE8	0.857	

In addition to convergent validity, this study also examined discriminant validity as recommended by Hair et al. (2019), discriminant validity is assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the results are considered satisfactory if the correlation of each construct is greater with itself than with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Table 4 presents the results of the discriminant validity assessment. According to the statistical guidelines, the criteria for discriminant validity have been met (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	Emotional exhaustion	Employee Performance	Workload	Workstress
Emotional exhaustion	0.859			
Employee Performance	-0.589	0.814		
Workload	0.487	-0.471	0.791	
Workstress	0.201	-0.361	-0.060	0.762

Finally, the reliability of the measurement model was evaluated through the reliability test. This assessment is based on the results of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Hair et al., 2019). According to the rule of thumb provided by Hair et al., both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values should exceed 0.6 (Hair et al., 2019). The results presented in Table 5 indicate that the reliability test criteria have been met, confirming that the data is reliable according to the established guidelines (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5. Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Emotional exhaustion	0.949	0.952
Employee Performance	0.970	0.972
Workload	0.957	0.964

Work stress	0.940	0.948
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Following the recommendations of Hair et al., this study took multicollinearity issues into account. Hair et al. (2019) suggest that multicollinearity is a concern when the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) exceeds 3, indicating that acceptable VIF values should be 3 or lower. Table 6 demonstrates that all VIF values are below 3, confirming that multicollinearity is not a concern in this analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the results of the prediction regarding the strength of the exogenous variables in explaining the endogenous variable are represented by an adjusted R^2 coefficient of 0.468, indicating that 46.8% of the variance is explained, which falls into the moderate category.

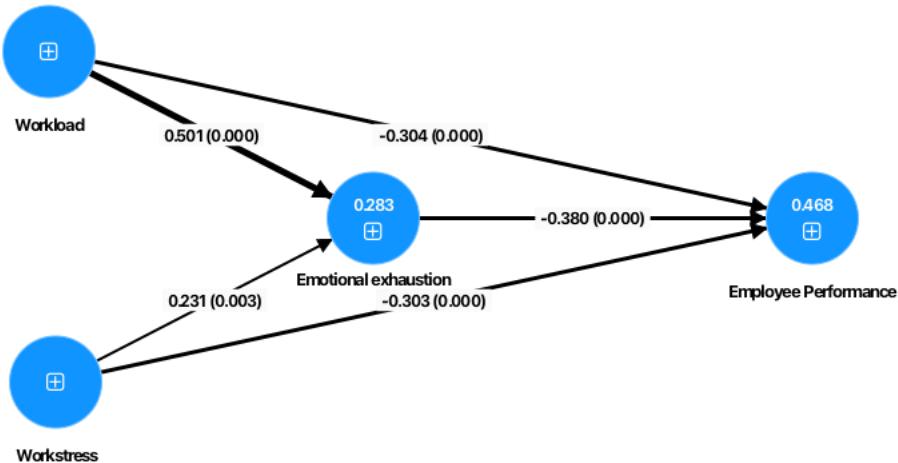


Figure 2. Structural Model Result

Table 6 and Figure 2 also presents the results of hypothesis testing, indicating that workload and work stress in the workplace negatively impact employee performance and contribute to increased emotional exhaustion among employees. Additionally, emotional exhaustion among employees similarly affects performance; the higher the level of emotional exhaustion, the lower the performance (support for H5). The results further demonstrate that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between workload and work stress.

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Original sample	T statistics	Conclusion
Direct Effect			
Workload → Employee Performance	-0.304	3.786*	Supported
Work stress → Employee Performance	-0.303	3.391*	Supported
Workload → Emotional exhaustion	0.501	5.283*	Supported
Work stress → Emotional exhaustion	0.231	2.796*	Supported
Emotional exhaustion → Employee Performance	-0.380	3.991*	Supported
Indirect Effect			
Workload → Emotional exhaustion → Employee Performance	-0.190	3.109*	Partial Mediation
Work stress → Emotional exhaustion → Employee Performance	-0.088	2.111*	Partial Mediation
VIF	2.098- 2.912		

<i>R-square Adjusted</i>	0.468
Note: * significant 5%	

Workplace performance is a critical factor in the success of any organization, and understanding the factors that contribute to it is essential for managers and leaders. One key area of investigation is the relationship between workload, work stress, and employee performance (Sumiyati et al., 2021; Teo et al., 2017). Studies have shown that excessive workload and high levels of work-related stress can have a detrimental effect on employee performance (Azizi & Abdullah, 2021; Pandey, 2020; Sumiyati et al., 2021). Employees who experience high levels of workload and stress are more likely to suffer from decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction (De Reuver et al., 2021). For instance, a study of special education schools in Malaysia found that work stress was a significant predictor of employee turnover, absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction (Azizi & Abdullah, 2021). Moreover, research has demonstrated that workload and stress are closely linked; higher workloads tend to lead to increased levels of work stress (Phillips, 2020). As workload demands exceed an employee's available resources, the resulting stress can negatively impact their ability to perform their job effectively.

Employees across various industries often face demanding workloads and high levels of stress, which can significantly impact their performance and well-being (Bartram et al., 2023). Excessive workloads and the resulting work stress can lead to emotional exhaustion—a state of mental and physical depletion with detrimental consequences for both individuals and organizations (Balducci et al., 2021). Emotional exhaustion, a type of burnout, is characterized by a sense of emotional and physical fatigue, where employees feel drained of their emotional resources (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Employees who are emotionally exhausted are more likely to experience negative outcomes, such as decreased job performance, lower organizational commitment, and higher turnover intentions (Banks et al., 2012).

Extensive research has examined the relationship between workload, work stress, and emotional exhaustion (Ilies et al., 2015). Studies have shown that excessive workloads and high levels of work-related stress can contribute to emotional exhaustion, which in turn can negatively impact an individual's job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Kumar, 2023). Specifically, when employees perceive their workload as overwhelming and the demands of their job as exceeding their resources, they are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion (Pluta & Rudawska, 2021). This state of emotional exhaustion can impair their ability to perform their duties effectively, as they may lack the physical and cognitive resources needed to engage in their work tasks.

Furthermore, emotionally exhausted employees may adopt coping strategies that prioritize only the most essential tasks, neglecting safety behaviors and other discretionary activities that contribute to organizational effectiveness. In addition to the direct impact of emotional exhaustion on performance, research has also suggested that emotional exhaustion can have indirect effects through its influence on organizational commitment. Emotionally exhausted employees may feel less committed to their organization, which can further undermine their job performance and engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors.

This study confirms the importance for companies to pay attention not only to the physical but also the mental health of their employees, given that employees are valuable human resources that must be nurtured and developed. The study validates that workload and work stress can reduce employee performance, which disrupts operational effectiveness. These findings can help company management identify job stress and workload as primary factors triggering emotional exhaustion. This research aids organizations in recognizing early signs of

performance decline that may occur due to stress and exhaustion. These results are beneficial for HR departments in developing early detection systems to address employee stress before its effects become more severe. This study contributes to understanding the importance of creating a work environment that supports employees' emotional well-being. Managers and HR practitioners can use such findings to design work environments that better support employee mental health, such as by providing adequate rest periods, a friendly work environment, or opportunities for consultation with psychologists.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze and provide empirical evidence regarding the influence of workload and work stress in the workplace on employee performance, while also considering emotional exhaustion as a mediating variable. The results indicate that high levels of workload and work stress negatively impact employee performance, with emotional exhaustion partially mediating this relationship. This finding underscores the importance for companies to prioritize managing employee workload and work stress to ensure optimal performance. Excessive workload and stress can lead to physical and mental health issues, adversely affecting employee well-being. Healthy and balanced employees tend to be more productive, and effectively managed workload and stress can enhance job satisfaction. Satisfied employees are more likely to remain with the company, thereby reducing turnover and associated recruitment costs. Furthermore, companies that care for their employees' well-being tend to have a positive reputation in the market, which can attract top talent and enhance customer loyalty.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample is limited to employees of Bintang Indokarya Gemilang, necessitating caution when generalizing the findings to other companies. This limitation may reduce the generalizability of the research findings to a broader population. Second, despite the robustness of the statistical analyses employed, there is a possibility that other unmeasured variables may influence the relationships between the variables studied. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research that considers additional variables that may contribute to employee performance. Taking these limitations into account, future research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal design and a more diverse population to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of workload and work stress on employee performance.

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