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Work-Family Conflict and Burnout among Sports Centers' Frontline Service employees: Does Service Climate matter?

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Keywords
sports center frontline service employees, work-family conflict, burnout, service climate, hierarchical linear modeling, multilevel analysis

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Abstract

As increasing attention focuses on supporting the central role of positive psychology in the workplace to enhance employee well-being, it is essential to understand how to reduce employee burnout from organizational and individual perspectives. **Purpose**: Based on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, this study tests the cross-level relationships among group-level service climate and individual-level organizational identification, work-family conflict (WFC), organizational tenure, and burnout. **Methods**: Purposive sampling was used to conduct a pilot study and a main study (*Ns*=58 and 331), a cross-sectional survey with self-administered questionnaires among frontline service employees at 29 workgroups of 20 sports centers in Taiwan. We adopted hierarchical linear models to test the hypothesized model. **Results**: The results indicate that WFC is significantly and positively associated with burnout and that organizational identification is significantly and negatively associated with burnout at the individual level. In particular, organizational tenure moderates the relationship between WFC and burnout. The group-level service climate has the main effect on burnout and moderates the relationship between WFC and burnout. The service climate does not moderate the relationship between organizational identification and burnout. **Conclusion**: This study attempts to advance knowledge by developing a multilevel model to identify individual- and organizational-level antecedents of work burnout. The research findings suggest that service climate acts as a protective buffer against work-family conflict and work burnout and is vital in enhancing employee well-being. Organizations can use the JD-R model validated in this study to improve employees' well-being and prevent burnout.

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Given the negative impact of work-family conflict (WFC) and burnout on employees' well-being and productivity, as Schaufeli (2017) proposed, it is necessary for organizations to monitor psychological factors at work and employee's well-being on a regular basis. Schaufeli also suggested that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model can be used as a framework for monitoring employee well-being that aims to increase work engagement and prevent burnout. In line with JD-R researchers' calls (Valencia & Gracia, 2022), the current study develops a multilevel research to examine whether the availability of resources can help mitigate sports center frontline service employees' WFC and burnout.

The current study contributes to the literature on the JD-R model in several ways. First, research examining employees' WFC and burnout within sport and recreational fields is scarce (Lopez et al., 2020). The current study examines the relationships between WFC and burnout in the sports service context. Second, although most studies examining stress-strain relationships still treat organizational tenure as a control variable, several researchers have proposed that stress-strain relationships may vary with time spent in an organization (Jung et al., 2012). Organizational tenure has been viewed as a condition resource that moderates the relationship between stressors and strains (e.g., Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009). As such, the current study tests the moderating effects of employees' organizational tenure, a factor that has been widely neglected as a moderator in research, on the relationships between WFC and burnout.

Third, according to an extension of the original JD-R model, personal resources owned by employees can be used to mitigate the problems caused by high levels of job demands and low levels of job resources. Organizational identification is selected as the indicator of personal resources (Su & Ng, 2019). Service climate represents a job resource that can enhance employees' organizational identification by increasing their intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation to help them attain their professional goals. The current study answers calls for research (Chen et al., 2018; Schaufeli, 2017; Wu et al., 2019) by incorporating personal resources into the JD-R model and examining the moderating effect of service climate on the organizational identification-burnout relationship. Fourth, as Bunjak et al. (2021) pointed out, studies applying the JD-R model have mostly focused on explaining how individual-level job characteristics and personal factors contribute to burnout. Bunjak et al. further clarify that it is necessary to include moderating variables from multiple levels to explain the impact of job demands and resources on employees' well-being in an interactive manner. We therefore propose a comprehensive multilevel model by adopting hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) to test the research hypotheses.

Fifth, according to the meta-analysis by Amstad et al. (2011), there are inconsistent findings about the mechanisms underlying the relationship between WFC and outcome variables for employees and organizations. This inconsistency suggests the possibility of undiscovered moderators that could explain the relationship between WFC and burnout. This study contributes to the WFC literature by not only testing the individual-level moderating effect of organizational tenure on the WFC-burnout relationship but also testing the cross-level moderating effect of service climate on the WFC-burnout relationship. Although various studies have linked WFC to burnout, empirical work on the impacts of service climate, organizational tenure, and organizational identification on WFC and work burnout is still limited. In line with JD-R theory (Schaufeli, 2017), this study tested joint (additive and interactive) cross-level models to identify the contributions of organizational identification (personal resource), WFC (work demand), and organizational tenure (condition resource) at the individual-level, as well as the contribution of service climate (job resource) at the group-level to the predictions of burnout in the sports services context.

Work-Family Conflict

Work and family are two of the most significant domains of adult life (Frone et al., 1992). The strain induced by the job may interfere with employee performance or family-related responsibilities, thus triggering WFC (Karatepe et al., 2010). As Asiedu et al. (2018) pointed out, WFC is an indicator of the quality

of work life and retention of employees. The fitness service environment in which those employees work is demanding and stressful, and in the workplace, personal career opportunities and adequate pay seem to be lacking (Georgiou et al., 2017). When employees face long working hours, low pay, and demanding jobs, work family conflict (WFC) may emerge (Mansour et al., 2016). WFC is "the amount of time devoted to work and the experience of work-related demands and stressors" (Frone & Yardley, 1996, p.354). According to the meta-analysis by Amstad et al. (2011), WFC is associated with work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit, and burnout. Previous research has found that WFC has negative consequences for employees' work and family lives, triggers job burnout, increases employees' turnover intention (Wu et al., 2018), and decreases employees' job performance (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, Michel et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis indicates that the antecedents of WFC include job stressors, role involvement, social support, work characteristics, and personality. Previous studies indicate that "WFC is a form of job stress or work demand" (Wu et al., 2019, p. 431). As many people may have difficulties simultaneously performing two demanding roles, the balance between work and family domains will motivate employees to have excellent achievement in the workplace (Desa et al., 2018).

Work-Family Conflict, Work Burnout, and the Job Demands-Resources Model

The characteristics of burnout syndrome are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment, usually caused by chronic workplace stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1984). Burnout is viewed as a stress reaction (Lingard & Francis, 2005). Frontline service employees are those who have direct contact with customers during service encounters (Kinman, 2009). There is mounting evidence that employees in sports settings face WFC and burnout (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019; Lopez et al., 2020). A previous study in the fitness industry found that frontline service employees (e.g., personal trainers or group exercise instructors) are likely to experience a high level of burnout (Georgiou & Fotiou, 2019). This phenomenon is also apparent in the case of the workforce in Taiwan. Those sports centers are considered labor-intensive and to require employees to display certain emotions during face-to-face interactions with consumers. Service encounters may place requirements on frontline service employees' emotions and create problems related to employees' well-being (Carrasco et al., 2014). Sports center frontline service employees are not only exposed to such stress but also lack adequate resources to cope with stressors. When WFC occurs continuously, it consumes individuals' limited resources and increases the possibility of resource depletion (Lapierre & Allen, 2006).

Resource depletion implies that organizations need to provide various forms of resources to reduce the effects of WFC among their employees. According to the JD-R model, every job includes demands and resources (Schaufeli, 2017). Job demands are the "aspects of work that require effort and therefore are associated with physical and psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p.277). Job resources are "the aspects of the job that can help to achieve work goals, reduce work demands, and stimulate personal growth" (Schaufeli, 2017, p.121). The JD-R model integrates two basic psychological processes. The first is a stress process involving excessive job demands and a lack of resources. Second, a motivational process is triggered by abundant job resources and may lead to positive outcomes through work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017). When employees perceive job demands such as WFC, their physical and psychological resources are gradually exhausted (Wu et al., 2019). Conversely, when employees obtain adequate job resources from their organization, their WFC might be mitigated, thus strengthening their internal motivation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1.: WFC is significantly and positively associated with service employee burnout at the individual level.

The Moderating Role of Organizational Tenure on the Relationship between Work-Family Conflict and Burnout

The accumulated stress of employees in a work environment may cause burnout, which involves physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. The effect of stress and burnout on turnover intention varies because of individual differences (Jung et al., 2012). Organizational tenure is the length of employment in an organization (Shirom & Mazeh, 1988). Organizational tenure has been considered a reliable indicator of cumulative work experience and is a common type of controlled variable in most stress- and strain-related studies (e.g., Karatepe & Karatepe, 2010).

Organizational tenure has been seen as an important indicator of human capital (Steffens et al., 2014). Employees acquire human capital by gaining job knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences during their employment in an organization (Myers et al., 2004). Such human capital enables employees to obtain a promotion in their positions or a better job in the future. Conditions are resources to the extent that they are valued and sought after. Employment, tenure, and seniority are examples of condition resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Previous research treats organizational tenure as a condition resource that can reduce the impacts of stressors on strains and outcome variables (e.g., Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009). Organizational tenure tends to moderate the relationship between stress and strain. However, researchers maintain that employees change their attitudes toward the job and organization through their socialization across successive levels of organizational tenure (e.g., Kraemer & Gouthier, 2014). When the working environment does not have coping strategies to deal with employees' stress, the detrimental effects of WFC on burnout amass. As a result, higher levels of organizational tenure lead to higher levels of WFC and burnout. Given the high turnover rate of sports center employees in Taiwan, the current study adopts the view of Kraemer and Gouthier (2014). That is, the effect of burnout becomes stronger for employees with longer tenure because psychological resources may be diminished by higher levels of WFC. We treat organizational tenure as a condition resource for employees to cope with the detrimental effects of WFC on burnout. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H2.: Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between WFC and burnout such that the relationship between WFC and burnout will be stronger for employees with longer tenures than for employees with shorter tenures.

Organizational Identification, and Frontline Service Employees' Work Burnout

Drawing from social identity theory (SIT), organizational identification refers to the perception of "oneness" with an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and is a special case of identification with a psychological group (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Organizational identification is one form of social identification that can facilitate greater homogeneity among perceived in-group, solid social relationships, and individuals leaning towards the group (Valencia & Gracia, 2022). Researchers suggest that social identification affects intragroup cohesion, cooperation, and positive evaluation of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Employees who develop strong identification with their groups tend to show a supportive attitude toward others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and have a powerful psychological resource against burnout (Jetten et al., 2017). Identification with an organization is viewed as a personal resource, and such a resource plays a similar role to job resources in the extension of the JD-R model (Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019). However, Lopez-Martin and Topa further pointed out that few studies have applied personal resources to analyze their potential effects on workers' health and well-being.

Several studies have shown that frontline service employees' organizational identification is positively related to customer service behaviors, negatively related to turnover intentions (Liden et al., 2014),

and negatively related to work burnout (Su & Ng, 2019). We hypothesize that employees' sense of belonging to their sports centers could increase the support received from their colleagues, which in turn reduces both workload and burnout. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3.: Organizational identification is significantly and negatively associated with service employee burnout at the individual level.

Group-Level Service Climate and Frontline Service Employees' Work Burnout

In sports participant services, service operations often involve dyadic interactions between employees and customers. In particular, the attitudes and behaviors of frontline service employees play a critical role in influencing customer satisfaction. Organizations need to create a strong service climate to guide employees' attitudes and behaviors (Hong et al., 2013; Wen et al., 2020). Climate determines how individuals behave by influencing how they think and feel about certain aspects of their environment (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Service climate is defined as "employees' shared perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures that are rewarded, supported, and expected concerning customer services and service quality" based on the work of Schneider et al. (1998, p. 151). Employees at a sports center under the same management share a concept of the service climate. Sports organizations can communicate their service goals and strategies to influence their service employees' attitudes and behaviors.

An organization is an integrated system, and individual and organizational characteristics interact and combine to shape individual and organizational outcomes (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). The individual-level only approach "neglects contextual factors that can significantly influence and constrain individual behavior" (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Climate strength is related to situational strength (Schneider et al., 2002). Situational strength is defined as "cues provided by external entities regarding the desirability of potential behaviors" (Meyer et al., 2010, p.122). A climate that is both positive and strong would lead to the most consistently positive behavior from employees (Schneider et al., 2002). A favorable service climate sends clear signals to sports center employees that service behaviors are expected, supported, and rewarded. On the other hand, a weak service climate does not have clear requirements and incentives for high-quality service performance. In this study, sports centers' service climate is described as a representation of "organizational stimuli" or "environmental characteristics" that affect individual attitudes and behaviors. Service climate provides cues, norms, and expectations that promote appropriate work behaviors and positive emotions and reduce emotional exhaustion (Lam et al., 2010).

Individuals' emotions are connected with other people in family and work contexts. In addition to fair systems for rewards and recognition to boost employee performance, managers need to know how employees perceive their inner work lives (Amabile & Kramer, 2007) and provide emotional support to their employees. Based on the JD-R model, service climate is viewed as a prominent job resource that can mitigate employee burnout. Previous studies indicate that the group-level service climate is significantly and negatively associated with burnout in the hospitality industry (e.g., Carrasco et al., 2014). In addition, Chang et al. (2019) find that a group-level service climate is negatively associated with employees' individual-level emotional exhaustion. When employees find that sports centers lack guidelines or support to cope with job demands or role conflicts, they may experience burnout. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H4.: Group-level service climate is significantly and negatively associated with individual-level service employee burnout after controlling for the level 1 predictor (WFC and organizational identification).

The Moderating Effect of Service Climate on the Relationship between Work-Family Conflict and Burnout

Service Climate and Work-Family Conflict

According to the JD-R model, when employees perceive increased WFC, their physical and psychological resources are gradually exhausted, and this stress further leads to physical and psychological fatigue and health problems (Bakker et al., 2003). A positive service climate creates a general service-promoting atmosphere that links superior performance with employees' training and performance incentives (Liao & Chuang, 2004). Such a service climate provides information about the availability of supportive resources that facilitates the interaction between frontline employees and customers (Lam et al., 2010). In addition to the organizational aspects of job resources, a positive service climate can also provide employees with social resources such as support from colleagues or supervisors. The social relations and emotional bonds between leaders and employees are considered a social resource that may mitigate the burnout caused by job demands, such as WFC (Demerouti et al., 2001). When employees perceive that their work activities are supported by the organization through a service climate, their chances of experiencing WFC decrease.

The Moderating Role of Service Climate

As previously discussed, climate strength theory could also explain why the relationship between WTC, organizational identification, and burnout may not be the same for all individuals in all situations. Climate strength may moderate the relationship between climate perceptions and organizational outcomes (Schneider et al., 2002). The relationship between WFC and burnout is a type of stressor-strain relationship (Lingard & Francis, 2005). Previous studies hold that job resources moderate such stressor (WFC)-strain (burnout) relationships (Lingard & Francis, 2005; Wang et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2019). When stressful situations make employees feel insecure about their ability to obtain adequate resources, this insecurity may lead to employees' emotional or physical exhaustion. When insufficient job resources are obtained from their organizations, the opportunity to benefit from the buffering effect of positive social interactions is limited, and the WFC-burnout relationship is stronger (Lingard & Francis, 2005). In contrast, employees are likely to obtain more social support and valuable resources in a strong service climate, thereby decreasing their WFC and burnout. According to the gain spiral of resources (Hakanen et al., 2008), when organizations arrange a good working condition such as a positive climate and provide adequate motivating resources with their employees, the positive strengths in work life may lead to acquire more resources for individuals and their organizations. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H5.: Service climate moderates the relationship between WFC and burnout such that the relationship is weaker in a strong service climate.

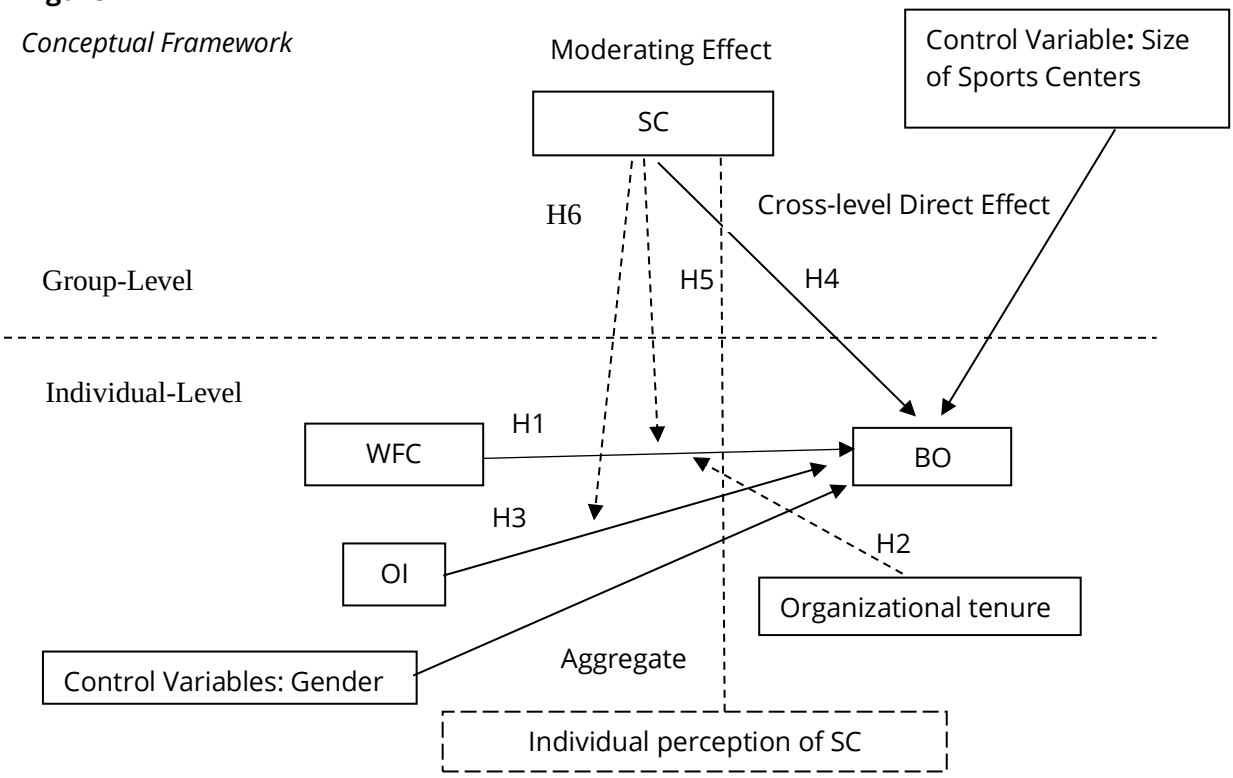
In a strong service climate, employees with stronger organizational identification are less likely to report burnout than their less strongly identified colleagues because of a strong sense of membership with the group, which provides a powerful resource against burnout (Avanzi et al., 2015). Moreover, service climate can help leaders develop good relationships with their subordinates and increase their organizational identification. Individuals with higher identification in a strong service climate are likely to have reduced uncertainty and to experience less strain and burnout. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6.: Service climate moderates the relationship between organizational identification and burnout such that the relationship is stronger in a strong service climate.

Based on the previous literature, the conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Note. SC: service climate; BO: burnout; OI: organizational identification; WFC: work-family conflict.

Method

The Context of Taiwan Sports Centers

To promote "sports for all", local governments in Taiwan have established 51 public sports centers. These public sports centers open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and provide suitable sports venues and activities to meet the needs of people of all ages. The main study was conducted with frontline service employees at 20 sports centers in Taipei City, New Taipei City, and Taichung City, Taiwan. The frontline service employees of public sports centers consist of administrative staff (e.g., receptionists), physical instructors, coaches, and swimming pool lifeguards. In this study, frontline service employees were engaged in high levels of customer contact (i.e., 66.10% of the respondents reported spending over 70% of their time engaging with customers).

Although the popularity of sports centers has created many new jobs, a high turnover rate has been an important problem in the human resources management of sports centers in Taiwan (Huang, 2022; Le et al., 2014). High turnover can be seen from sport center employees having a shorter organizational tenure (i.e., 15 months) than employees of other occupations (Huang, 2022). Thus, the retention of employees is essential for sports centers to maintain human capital.

Pilot Study

Participants

Data collection for the pilot study was conducted between Jan. 2021 and Feb. 2021. We subsequently recruited a sample of 59 participants, and 1 response was discarded due to missing data. Fifty-eight completed surveys resulted in an effective response rate of 98.31%.
In the pilot study, the sample comprised 32 men (55.20%) and 26 women (44.80%). Most participants (84.48%) spent over 70% of their time with their customers. The average age was 31.07 years (range 19-62 years). The average tenure of employment in this sports center was 38.05 months (range 0.3-132 months).

Measures

The scales validated in the pilot study include service climate, organizational identification, WFC, and work burnout. These scales were translated and back-translated into Chinese based on established cross-cultural translation procedures (Brislin, 1980). After developing the draft questionnaire, we invited two frontline service employees to participate in a small-group questionnaire survey about the wording and interpretation of scale items. Finally, the author of this article made a few revisions to ensure the equivalence of the measures in the Chinese and English versions. All the scale items of service climate, organizational identification, and WFC were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Burnout Measure-Short Version (BMS) scale items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Service Climate. Sports centers' service climate was assessed using a 7-item scale adapted from the global service climate scale (Schneider et al., 1998) (a =.950). The scale with one dimension has shown good reliability in previous sports center studies (e.g., Chang et al., 2019) (a =.927). A sample item is "Employees in our organization have knowledge of the job and the skills to deliver superior quality work and service". According to the bottom-up emergence process suggested by Kozlowski and Klein (2000), we aggregated individual employees' service climate perceptions to evaluate the group-level service climate. Moreover, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) (1) was .07087 and Rwg (j) was .9892, suggesting that the aggregation was suitable for the service climate variable.

Organizational Identification. Organizational identification was measured by a scale with one dimension adapted from Smidts et al.'s (2001) 5-item scale (a =.840). The scale has shown good reliability in previous hospitality studies (e.g., Buil et al., 2019). A sample item is "I feel strong ties with this sports center".

Employee Work-Family Conflict. Employees' WFC was assessed using the three items adapted from the Frone and Yardley scale (1996). Strauss et al. (2009) also adopted these three items from Frone and Yardley's scale (a =.750). A sample item is "After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do".

Work Burnout. Employee burnout was assessed using the easy-to-use 10-item Burnout Measure-Shorter Version (BMS) scale developed by Malach-Pines (2005) (α=.85-.92). It assesses an individual's levels of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, with a score of 4 or above indicating burnout. The BMS has been validated in previous studies across occupations and cultures (e.g., Mersin et al., 2020) and has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties. A sample item is "When you think about your work overall, how often do you feel the following? Tired".

Control Variables. According to the meta-analysis by Purvanova and Muros (2010), employees' work burnout differs significantly according to their gender. Organizational size is the number of frontline service employees in each sports center. Thus, we included employees' gender as our control variable at the individual level and organizational size as our control variable at the group level.

Results

Cronbach's α was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the scales, and item analysis was conducted to assess the quality of the scale items. The criterion for an acceptable Cronbach's α was set at $\alpha \geq .70$ (Robinson, 2018). The results indicate that all scales exceeded the suggested criterion of .70 (service climate α= .868, organizational identification α= .896, WFC α= .701, burnout α= .902), showing acceptable consistency of the scales. The discrimination of each scale item was significantly different at the 0.001 level. Thus, all questionnaire items were retained for the main study.

Main Study

Participants

In the main study, the sample of 331 included 178 men (54.5%) and 153 women (45.50%). The participants' mean age was 29.84 years (*SD* = 8.21), and most participants (68.58%) spent over 70% of their time with their customers. In addition, the average organizational tenure in these sports centers was 33.98 months (i.e., 2.831 years, range 0.01-12 years).

Procedures for the Main Study

We contacted the CEOs of 20 public sports centers located in Northern and central Taiwan. Participants were drawn from frontline service employees at each of the 20 sports centers. A total of 371 frontline service employees were employed by these 20 sports centers. To obtain representative samples, we recruited participants from each workgroup of the sports centers in the main study. Through purposive sampling, the main study adopted a cross-sectional design using paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaires to collect data. Data collection for the main study was conducted between March 2021 and May 2021. After obtaining organizational permission for data collection from each sports center, we administered the questionnaires to frontline service employees in 29 workgroups belonging to 20 sports centers. We approached only workgroups with at least 3 members, distributed the questionnaires and explained them to the participants on a written informed consent document that did not require their signature. The following information was presented on the informed consent page: "each participant was informed that his or her participation was confidential and voluntary, that if participants want to quit, they may do so at any time, that only the authors could access the data and that all data would be kept confidential". Each participant received a gift certificate valued at 100 NTD after completing the survey. The number of participants ranged from 3 to 25 frontline service employees per workgroup. The final sample included 347 frontline service employees, with a mean of 11.97 respondents per workgroup. Of these, 16 were omitted from further analysis due to incomplete data. A total of 331 valid questionnaires were collected, yielding a valid response rate of 95.39%.

Analysis

To evaluate the validity and reliability of the instruments in the study, we conducted a single measurement model analysis using Analysis of Moment Structure 22.0 software. Considering the criteria

suggested in previous research, six fit indexes were used to evaluate the overall model fit: χ2/df, RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, TLI, and CAIC (Hooper et al., 2008). CFI and TLI values higher than 0.90 are considered an acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), and RMSEA values below 0.08 show a good fit; an SRMR less than 0.08 is considered an acceptable fit (Hooper et al., 2008). Discriminant validity is established if the square root of each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) is larger than the correlations with other constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Workgroups that vary in type and size have become increasingly popular for performing organization-related tasks (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). Since workgroups were nested in sports centers, we adopted hierarchical linear models (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) to test the joint (additive and interactive) model. As Lau and Nie (2008) noted, the additive multilevel model tests whether the relations between level-l variables are homogenous across higher-level contexts. The joint multilevel model test examines whether the higher-level context moderates the relations at level 1. We first checked the viability of the service climate construct by examining the within-group agreement (rwg; Lau et al., 1993), ICC(1), and ICC(2) (Bliese, 2000). An rwg(j) value over 0.70 suggests a criterion to justify interrater agreement (Cohen et al.., 2009). ICC(1) values ranging from 0.059 to 0.138 are moderate values (Cohen, 1988). If ICC(1) > 0.059, between-group differences exist and cannot be neglected.

Results

Measurement Model Analysis

A single measurement model analysis for all the constructs was conducted to assess the fit of the model. As shown in Table 1, the results of alternative measurement models (Model A) indicate that the four-factor model fit the data slightly better and had the lowest CAIC compared to the other four alternative models. The fit indexes indicated an acceptable model fit and supported the four-factor model with the distinct constructs of service climate, organizational identification, WFC and burnout.

As shown in Table 2, all composite reliabilities exceeded 0.60, and all average variance extracted values (AVEs) exceeded 0.50. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics, correlations, and discriminant validity of all variables.

Table 1

Comparison of the Alternative Models (N=331)

Nested Model	Factors	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	CAIC
Model A	Four-Factor	2.621	.070	0.052	.937	.924	1098.525
Model B*	Three-Factor	3.975	.095	0.061	.880	.881	1441.636
Model C*	Two-Factor	7.789	.143	0.066	.728	.702	2481.157
Model D*	One-Factor	10.915	.173	0.071	.601	.565	3341.775

Note. Model B*: WFC and burnout were combined; Model C*: WFC and burnout, and service climate were combined; Model D*: WFC, burnout, organizational identification and service climate were combined; RMSEA: root mean squared error of approximation; SRMR: standardized root mean squared residual; CFI: comparative fit index; TLI: the Tucker-Lewis index; CAIC: the consistent version of the AIC.

Table 2

Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Coefficients in the main study (N=331)

Constructs	items	SIL	CR	AVE
SC	7	.733-.838	.937	.679
BO	10	.623-.912	.948	.651
WFC	3	.505-.904	.756	.518
OI	5	.782-.924	.930	.727

Note. SIL, standardized item loading; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; SC: service climate; BO: burnout; OI: organizational identification; WFC: work-family conflict

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Correlations*, and Discriminant Validity of Variables (N*=331*)*

Group Level *(N*=29*)*								
Variables	*M*	*SD*	1					
1.Size	18.28	3.826						
2.SC	5.02	.562	.215					
Individual Level *(N*=331*)*								
Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Gender								
2.Tenure	33.976	25.703	-.153**					
3.OI	4.817	1.219	.073	.079	**.853**			
4.SC	4.985	1.147	.021	-.078	.771***	**.824**		
5.BO	2.967	1.214	-.045	.120*	-.471***	-.570***	**.806**	
6.WFC	4.052	1.271	.135*	-.011	-.070	-.105**	.333***	**.720**

Note: 1. M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation

2. Diagonal elements (bold) are the square root of AVE; off-diagonal elements are Pearson correlations between variables; $^{*}p<.05$, $^{**}p<.01$, $^{***}p<.001$.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling

We followed the methods suggested by previous researchers and tested the model in four steps (Gavin & Hofman, 2002):

Null Model

Using HLM, we estimated ICC (1). ICC (1) was .07087, indicating that 7.087 percent of the variance in employee burnout was between sports centers and 92.913 percent of the variance was within sports centers. The ICC was greater than .059 and was used as a criterion for aggregating the individual-level SC and analyzing it as a group mean. Rwg (j) was .9892, indicating a high level of interrater agreement.

Random Coefficient Regression Model (H1, H2, and H3)

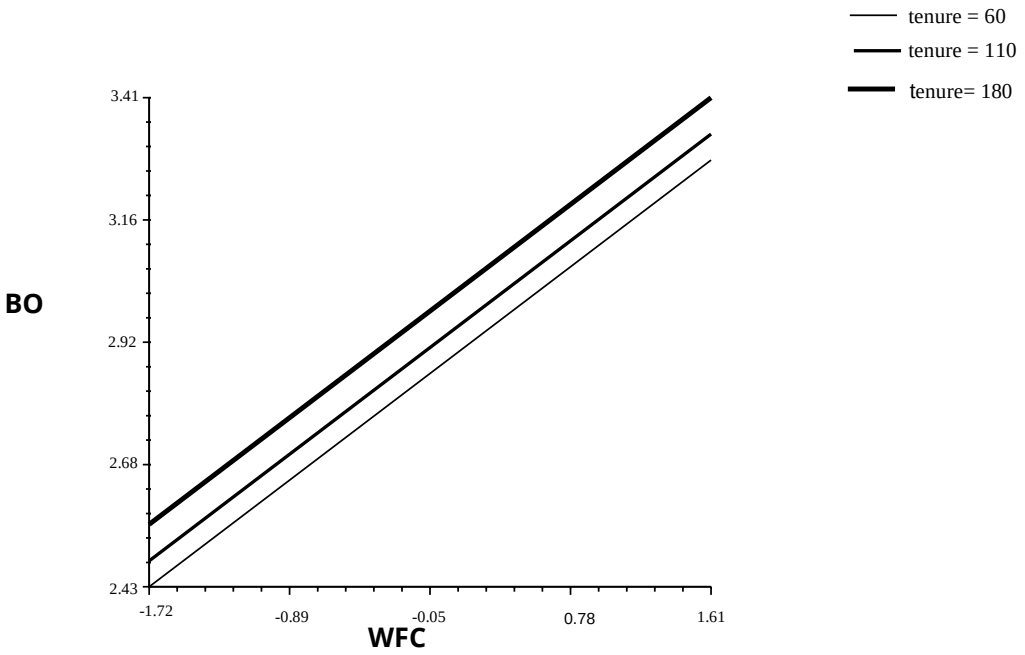
HLM provides a *t*-test related to the γ_{00}, γ_{10}, γ_{20}, γ_{30}, and γ_{40} parameters. In the case of the γ_{20} and γ_{30} parameters, the *t*-test provides evidence of hypotheses 1 and 2. As there are no level 2 predictors, the level 2 regression equation is equal to an intercept term and a residual.

As indicated in Table 4, the results indicated that WFC was significantly associated with employee burnout. We further tested whether organizational tenure moderated the relationship between WFC and

burnout. The results in Model 1 and Figure 2 indicated that organizational tenure had a significant moderating effect on the relationships between WFC and employee burnout. Thus, H2 was supported. In addition, the results indicated that organizational identification was significantly related to employee burnout. Thus, H3 was supported.

Figure 2

The moderating effect of Organizational Tenure on the relationship between WFC and BO



Intercept-As-Outcome Model (H4)

In Model 2, we included group-level service climate as the predictor of employee burnout at level 2. The *t*-test associated with the γ_{01} parameter provides a test of hypothesis 4. The results (Table 4) indicated that service climate had a cross-level direct effect on employee burnout after controlling for the level 1 predictor (WFC and organizational identification). Thus, H4 was supported.

Slopes-As-Outcome Model (H5 and H6)

The results (Table 4) indicated that service climate had a cross-level moderating effect on the relationships between WFC and employee burnout after controlling for the level 1 predictor (WFC and organizational identification) and the level 2 predictors (service climate and workgroup size). Figure 3 shows the relationship between WFC and burnout in conditions of high, medium, and low service climate. When the level of service climate was high, the relationship between WFC and burnout was weaker. Thus, H5 was supported.

Table 4

Hierarchical Liner Modeling for Employees' Burnout (*N*=331)

Variables	Null Model	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4
Fix Effect					
Employee Burnout					
Intercept (γ_{00})	2.962*** (32.857)	2.993*** (27.790)	3.242*** (12.226)	3.219*** (12.039)	3.231*** (12.201)
Level 1					
Gender (γ_{10})		-0.058 (-0.525)	-0.046 (-0.415)	-0.045 (-0.411)	-0.054 (-0.486)
WFC (γ_{20})-H1		0.251*** (4.125)	0.261 *** (4.229)	0.251*** (4.256)	0.256*** (4.073)
WFC x OT(γ_{30})-H2		0.002* (2.291)	0.001* (2.137)	0.001* (2.223)	0.001* (2.278)
OI (γ_{40})-H3		-0.406*** (-7.876)	-0.413*** (-7.898)	-0.402*** (-7.352)	-0.400*** (-7.617)
Level 2					
SC (γ_{01})-H4			-0.651*** (-5.315)	-0.674*** (-5.543)	-0.659*** (-5.466)
Group Size (γ_{02})			-0.015 (-1.113)		-0.014 (-1.058)
SC (γ_{21}) **x WFC-**H5				-0.176* (-2.129)	
SC (γ_{41}) **x OI-**H6					0.129 (1.220)
Random Effect		**Variance Component**			
Between Group Variance in Burnout (τ_0)	0.105**	0.141***	0.027	0.028	0.027
Deviance	1064.080	965.631	952.932	951.111	952.291

Note. t-value (in parentheses); *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

As indicated in Model 4 (Table 4), we examined whether service climate moderated the relationship between organizational identification and burnout. The results indicated that service climate had no cross-level moderating effect on the relationship between organizational identification and employee burnout after controlling for the level 1 predictor and the level 2 predictors. Thus, H6 was not supported. As shown in Figure 4, the hypotheses testing results are illustrated.

Figure 3

The moderating effect of SC on the relationship between WFC and BO

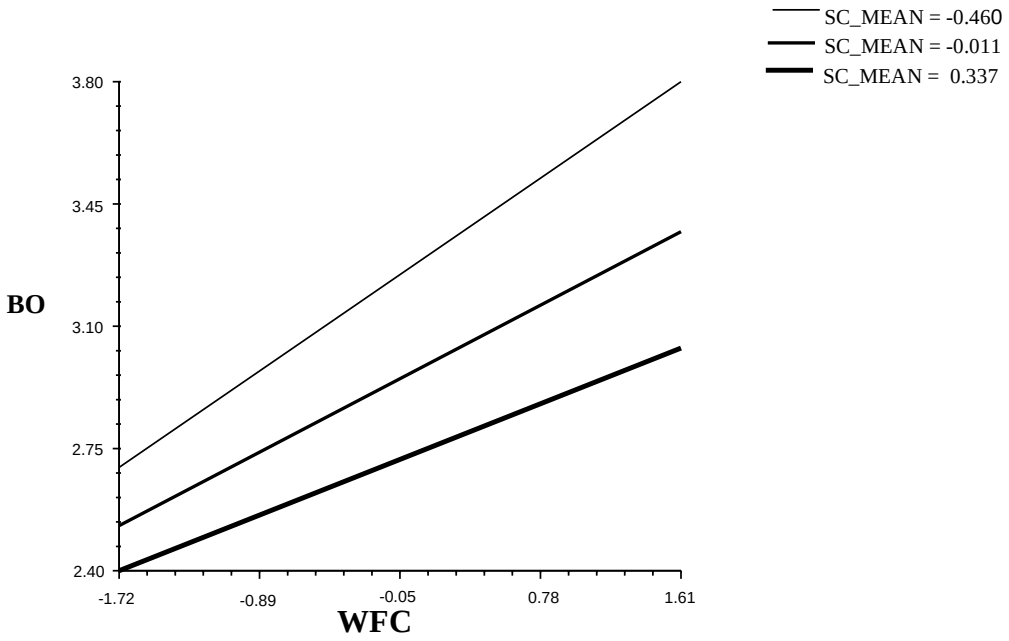
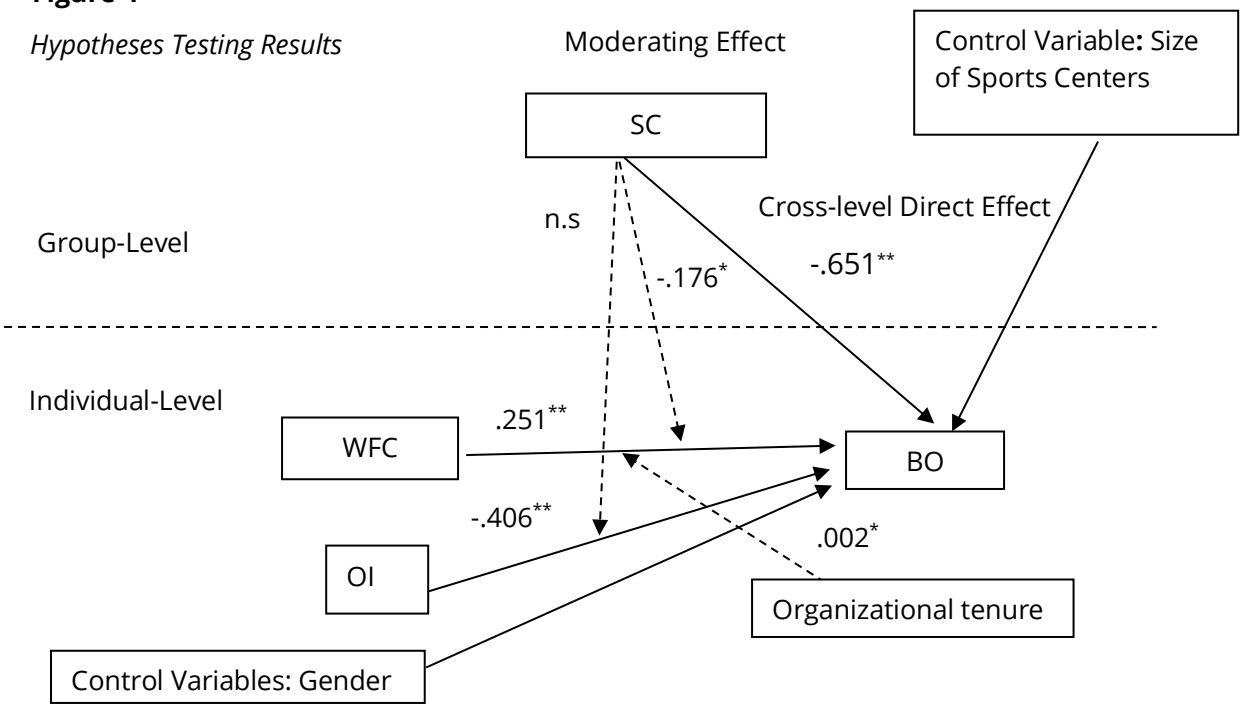


Figure 4

Hypotheses Testing Results



Note. SC: service climate; BO: burnout; OI: organizational identification; WFC: work-family conflict.

Discussion

According to extensions of the JD-R model, we provide a comprehensive framework for the service industry to understand the dynamics of how a service employee's work environment can develop resources and mitigate frontline service employees' burnout. This study bridges the research gap by testing the multilevel relationships among service climate, WFC, organizational tenure, organizational identification, and burnout. The results indicate that WFC is positively and significantly related to service employee burnout. These results support the findings of previous studies (e.g., Wu et al., 2019; Kaya & Ceyhun, 2014) that proposed that frontline service employees' WFC is significantly and positively related to burnout. Frontline service employees play an important role in service delivery to meet customers' changing needs. To cope with excessive work demands, frontline service employees may drain their mental and emotional resources and experience difficulties in balancing their work and family responsibilities, resulting in burnout. The current study adds support to and extends these findings in the sports literature. As elsewhere, sports centers in Taiwan are a growing industry. The issues of WFC have become increasingly important because of their negative impacts on the well-being of individuals and organizations.

The current study tests the moderating effects of employee organizational tenure on the relationship between WFC and burnout. The results indicate that organizational tenure significantly moderates the relationship between WFC and employee burnout. Although the moderating effect is relatively small, the relationship between WFC and burnout will be stronger for employees with longer tenures than for those with shorter tenures. As 47.70% of the participants in our main study had one to three years of work experience, and the participants' mean age was 29.84 years (*SD* = 8.21), reflecting the young demographics of sports center human resources and the likelihood of employee turnover. As Kraemer et al. (2014) noted, employees change their attitudes toward their job and organizations through their socialization across successive levels of organizational tenure. Employees with longer tenure are an asset to organizations. They can gain know-how through work experiences. However, the stress caused by a poor work environment may lead to sports center employees' WFC and burnout and a consequent increase in turnover intention. The current study demonstrates how organizational tenure moderates the relationships between WFC and burnout among sports center employees. These findings answer the calls of researchers (Jung et al., 2012; Kraemer & Gouthier, 2014) and contribute to the literature by highlighting that organizational tenure should be considered as a moderator of the WFC-burnout relationship. The findings also imply that constant high WFC would result in experiencing burnout over time. Sports centers should manage adequate resources for employees with different tenures when WFC and burnout are high.

Furthermore, the results show that organizational identification is significantly and negatively related to burnout. The results are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Avanzi et al., 2015; Su & Ng, 2019) showing that employees' organizational identification is negatively related to burnout. In line with SIT, employees with higher identification have a greater sense of oneness with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Thus, such employees are more likely to have improved individual health, well-being, and psychology (Jetten et al., 2017). They are less likely to consider work a burden and experience less emotional dissonance and burnout (Kumar et al., 2012). The findings contribute to the literature by identifying the role of organizational identification, a personal resource, in lowering work burnout.

The results indicate that group-level service climate, aggregated from individual-level service climate through bottom-up processes, is significantly and negatively related to burnout after controlling for level 1 predictors (WFC, organizational identification) and control variables. The result indicates that a sports center is a multilevel system and that individual and organizational characteristics interact and combine to shape individual-level outcomes (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). These results are in line with previous studies (e.g., Carrasco et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2019) revealing a significant negative correlation between service climate and work burnout. Service climate, a contextual factor, aligns employees' attitudes and behaviors with

organizational strategy and helps achieve service quality goals (Wen et al., 2020). When sports centers provide frontline service employees with guidelines to support them in coping with work demands and WFC, they are less likely to experience burnout.

Based on climate strength theory, we hypothesized that the relationship between WFC and burnout might not be the same for all individuals in all situations. The results indicated a negative moderating effect on the relationship between WFC and burnout. That is, the relationship between WFC and burnout is weaker in sports centers with higher levels of service climate. In some sports centers, a clear emphasis on the requirements and incentives for rewarding customer quality service may exist. However, other sports centers may not provide such unambiguous organizational stimuli. As a result, the service climate may help to create a strong situation that constrains the influence of WFC.

According to Schneider et al. (1998), service climate is a strategic goal for improving the service quality. Service climate signals what kind of service behaviors are expected and rewarded. A positive service climate may provide employees, especially those who have difficulties coping with work and family conflict, with the drive to maintain the expression of positive emotions in service encounters and deliver quality services to customers. Such a service climate helps employees promote their perceived organizational support, reduces stress and burnout, and fosters job performance (Chang et al., 2019). Our findings are consistent with the JD-R model, which claims service climate to be a job resource that buffers the negative impact of WFC on burnout. Given the negative impact of WFC on employees' well-being and organizational outcomes, organizations should understand how service climate can mitigate the negative impact of WFC and burnout.

Moreover, the relationship between WFC and burnout is a stressor-strain relationship (Lingard & Francis, 2005). Previous studies indicate that organizational resources such as organizational reward and caring (Wang et al., 2021) or organizational support (Wu et al., 2018) moderate the stressor-strain relationship. Our cross-level hypothesis suggests that the relationship between the lower-level constructs is changed or moderated by a higher-level construct (i.e., service climate). The results of our study are similar to those of previous studies in which practical support, involving offering practical assistance to help employees resolve these difficulties, moderated the relationship between WFC and burnout (Lingard & Francis, 2005). That is, organizational support acts as a protective buffer against burnout and is very important in enhancing employee well-being. Employees can obtain more valuable resources in a strong service climate, thereby decreasing their WFC and burnout. The current study shows that service climate has a cross-level moderating effect of on the WFC-burnout relationship. The findings respond to the calls of Mansour et al. (2018), which recommends that future research examine the type of organizational resources that influence WFC and employees' well-being. The findings of this study have implications for sports managers; that is, improving the service climate could be used as an intervention for sports centers to alleviate the effects of WFC on burnout.

An unexpected finding of this research is that service climate does not moderate the relationship between organizational identification and burnout. The relationships between individual (organizational identification) and contextual variables (service climate) show a positive but insignificant interaction effect on burnout. That is, organizational identification is negatively and significantly related to burnout regardless of the level of service climate. Following the social identity model of stress, prior studies have shown that organizational identification with one's own organization or work team relates negatively to burnout, which indicates that a strong sense of membership with a group is a powerful resource against burnout (Avanzi et al., 2015). Although empirical studies have shown that organizational identification can reduce employees' stress and burnout, the moderating effect of service climate on the relationship between organizational identification and burnout needs to be further explored. One possible explanation for the insignificant finding may be the consequences of insufficient statistical power because of the small sample size (Liao & Chuang, 2004). It is recommended that future studies test our research model by increasing the sample size

at the individual and group levels or validate our research model across industries to test whether the same moderating effects hold between organizational identification and burnout.

Our cross-level joint (additive and interactive) model shows that service climate is able to predict employees' burnout variance beyond individual-level antecedents (i.e., organizational identification and WFC). Service climate not only has a cross-level direct effect on reducing employees' burnout but also has a cross-level moderating effect on the WFC-burnout relationship. The positive aspects of service climate include job resources that support the growth, development, and achievement of organizational goals, which all relate to employees' stress and the balance of work and family roles. As employees are integrated within the organizations, a positive service climate creates a general service-promoting atmosphere among all levels of organizations (Liao & Chung, 2004). In sports centers, where the service climate is high, the gain spiral of resources leads to acquiring more resources such as organizational identification, organizational tenure, and organizational resources, leading to less WFC and burnout. On the other hand, in sports centers, where the service climate is low, working conditions may not have adequate job resources to trigger more motivating resources, which leads to more WFC and burnout. Consequently, the role of service climate as a precursor of WFC and burnout in service work is identified in this study.

As Schaufeli (2017) noted, the JD-R model can be broadly applied in different types of organizations because a wide range of job- and personal resources, and outcomes can be incorporated into the model. The current study contributes to the JD-R theory by integrating job resources, personal resources, condition resources, and WFC in the model to predict frontline service employees' burnout. The findings of this study can provide organizations with a management tool for applying the JD-R framework to assess employees' psychological factors at work and improve their well-being.

Managerial Implications

The results of this study have several managerial implications. Frontline service employees who can balance the demands of the work and family domains or mitigate their WFC tend to experience less burnout. Sports center supervisors and managers could adopt a proactive approach to mitigate employee burnout by (1) hiring employees with more positive emotions and optimism during the selection process; (2) training individuals and teams about how to effectively manage their work demands and fulfill their work responsibilities; (3) providing employees with adequate resources (e.g., employee assistance programs) to help them cope with issues that affect their ability to reach their potential and work or family problems; (4) workshops or educational training classes held by sports centers to help and support staff with their mental health and well-being in the workplace; (5) understanding that the detrimental effects of WFC on burnout are stronger for longer-tenured than shorter-tenured frontline service employees, which implies that sports centers should strive to reduce the WFC of longer-tenured employees to avoid burnout; (6) creating a supportive work environment that opens a communication channel between managers and employees and improves employees' perceptions of organizational policies, procedures, and practices should be created; (7) creating a positive service climate and promoting employees' organizational identification are coping strategies to mitigate the negative effects of WFC and burnout; and (8) to attract and retain happiness and health workers, work-family measures are very important for sports centers to understand employees' WFC, as the WFC issue is particularly important for the female married workforce; and (9) as Schaufeli (2017) noted, organizations can use the JD-R model validated in this study to communicate with their stakeholders, such as employees, managers, and HR officers, about how to develop a healthy working environment.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Researchers have found that several possible causes, such as job characteristics (Kaya & Ceyhun, 2014), workload (Karatepe et al., 2010), and lack of organizational support (Lingard & Francis, 2005), might leave employees with fewer resources for dealing with the family domain and trigger employee burnout. Future studies can extend our multilevel research model to test the impact of job characteristics and workload as antecedents of WFC and burnout at the individual level.

Although there is no strong evidence to guide researchers about the sample size at the individual, group or organization levels in a multilevel study design, the group-level sample size is generally more important than the total sample size. A sufficient sample size for a multilevel model is 30 for the smallest acceptable number at the group level (Maas & Hox, 2005). One limitation of this study is that large individual-level sample sizes (331 employees) partially compensate for the smaller sample size for the group-level variable (29 groups). It is recommended that future studies increase the sample size at the group level to examine our research model further. The other limitation is that the scope of this study was limited to 20 sports centers in Taiwan. Therefore, the ability to generalize the study findings to the entire participant sports service industry may be limited.

Conclusion

Based on JD-R theory, this study suggests that frontline service employees may need to employ job resources (service climate) and personal resources (organizational identification) to cope with burnout. The study also confirms that a positive service climate could lead to less work-family conflict and burned-out workers. Specifically, organizational tenure buffers the impact of work-family conflict on burnout. Therefore, organizations should invest in their frontline employees with different tenures via positive service climate and management practices.

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