

## EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION IN EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the role of ethical leadership in preventing employee burnout caused by work overload. The aim is to explore how work overload results in emotional exhaustion, which leads to burnout, and how ethical leadership can moderate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. Survey responses were gathered from 385 faculty members of Pakistani public higher educational institutions (HEIs), and statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. The study confirms that work overload causes emotional exhaustion, which leads to employee burnout, and that ethical leadership moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. Organizations that prioritize ethical leadership reduce stress and burnout among their employees. Ethical leadership is associated with various positive outcomes, including increased employee well-being, work performance, job satisfaction, dedication and efficiency, voice behavior, and psychological safety. The study concludes that ethical leadership plays a significant role in preventing employee burnout, and fostering superior ethical leadership practices and behaviors can improve organizational culture and outcomes for both employers and employees. The study further recommends exploring the moderating role of ethical leadership on employee burnout in other contexts.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Employee Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Work Overload, Organizational Culture, Job Satisfaction.

### Introduction:

Employee burnout is a growing concern for both employers and employees as it negatively impacts employee well-being, work performance, and organizational outcomes. Work overload is one of the key contributors to employee burnout, causing emotional exhaustion, which leads to exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased job performance. To prevent burnout, organizations need to prioritize ethical leadership that promotes the wellbeing and satisfaction of its employees. Ethical leadership has been associated with various positive outcomes, including increased work performance, job satisfaction, dedication and efficiency, voice behavior, and psychological safety. However, the moderating role of ethical leadership on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout remains unclear. This study aims to explore this relationship and suggests that ethical leadership can moderate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. This study uses survey responses from Pakistani public higher educational institutions (HEIs) faculty members, and the findings show that ethical leadership significantly reduces burnout caused by emotional exhaustion. The study concludes that fostering ethical leadership practices and behaviors can improve

organizational culture and outcomes for both employees and employers. Future research should explore the moderating role of ethical leadership on employee burnout in other contexts.

### *1.2 Significance of the Study*

The current study seeks to contribute to the emerging body of research on ethical leadership and Human Resource Management (HRM) with the main objective of enhancing workplace practices and outcomes for both employers and employees by exploring moderating role of ethical leadership in preventing employee burnout. The employee burnout is considered to be an important concept for the organizations because of its significant implications such as emotional exhaustion. Thence, this study is set out to help organizations and their management in improving organizational culture or environment by fostering superior ethical leadership practices and behaviors, and in preventing employees from experiencing burnout in the workplace.

### *1.3 Problem Statement*

The alarming issue of employee burnout has become a worldwide epidemic. However, the literature available on what kind of relationship ethical leadership forms with employee burnout is still limited. The employee burnout is the emerging and salient phenomenon for the organizations but no research has been done to explore how ethical leadership acts as a moderator on the direct effect that exists between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. Specifically in Pakistan no study has been conducted of this sort. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### *2.1 Work Overload*

Work overload has become a serious and critical issue for organizations now a days that demands immediate attention. This upsurge in work overload causes alarming increase in stress, exhaustion and work-life conflict among employees, decreases their morale and motivation to work which ultimately leads towards poor job performance and low employee engagement. These factors further leads to low job satisfaction among employees. The employees rarely have enough time to relax or function properly while working because of extra work or work overload combined with emotional or mental exhaustion (Ali & Farooqi, 2014). This is backed by previous researches that overload in work increases occupational stress in employees causing them to have trouble focusing. This results in compromised job performance of the employees which ultimately leads towards lower levels of satisfaction related to one's job (Ali et al., 2014). The studies have proved that factors that contribute to occupational stress include increased workload, which is also strongly positively associated with job dissatisfaction (Paktinat & Rafeei, 2012). Another study conducted by Obiora & Iwuoha, (2013) claims that the critical issue of work overload is a very serious problem not only for the employee himself but for the organizations as well. They also go on and report that work overload is the primary reason of stress in job that further leads employees towards job dissatisfaction (Obiora & Iwuoha, 2013).

Work overload has been explained as the "greatness of job tasks and might cause mental distress for employees" (Johari, Ridzoan & Zarefar, 2019). Additionally, this is the phenomena that points out to the amount of assignments and activities that exceeds the designated responsibilities of an employee. (Ali & Farooqi, 2014) This aspect refers to the degree of work stress experienced by employees because of conception that they are unable to handle or be active with the amount of tasks or work assignments they have been given (Idris, 2011). Work overload can also exist because of factors that include long hours and time pressure. The previous literature suggests that pressure that stems from extra workload is considered to be a reason behind compromising employees' performance significantly (Schultz et al., 2015). The pressure also tend to increase as employees go up the employment stairs and began to acquire senior level positions. The reason for an increase in pressure is more responsibilities and work overload which in return influences the employee's job performance (Schultz & Schultz, 2015). Hence, the problem of work overload concerns the organizations which are these days seeking only employees with high performance (Malta, 2004).

## 2.2 Emotional Exhaustion

Maslach, Leiter & Schaufeli, (2001) defines emotional exhaustion employees experience at workplace as “feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources”. Emotional exhaustion means reduction in emotional resources (Ertop, 2019). It refers to the feelings of emotional void followed by intense mental pressure, and severe reduction in abilities to cope up with side effects of being exposed to scenarios for a prolonged period that cause constant stress (Maslach et al., 2016). This causes a great decline in the mental, physical and emotional strength and energy level of employees (Leiter, Maslach & Frame, 2015). Emotionally exhausted individuals experience depletion of energy and feel that all of their resources are diminished. Emotional exhaustion also causes employees to feel tensed and frustrated. Feelings of tension and frustration are often combined with feelings of extreme tiredness. When employees feel extremely tired and exhausted, they are not being able to focus properly on their work and start to withdraw from assigned tasks to protect themselves from burning out (Ertop, 2019).

To study the concept of emotional exhaustion is crucial because it is linked to various relevant outcomes for instance job satisfaction, intention to quit (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), and job performance (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Past studies indicate that emotional exhaustion has a significant influence on both employee and his or her respective organization (Halbesleben and Buckley 2004). Research shows that it has a significant negative impact on the mental as well as physical health of an employee and can lead to poor and compromised well-being (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2014), job dissatisfaction and lower job commitment, high turnover rates and lower job performance (Maslach et al. 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

## 2.3 Employee Burnout

Employee burnout at workplace has become a critical issue worldwide that requires immediate attention. Employees at all levels report that they feel insecure, undervalued, stressed out, alienated, and misunderstood at their workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Although the phenomenon of job burnout is not new but the term recently grabbed the attention of scholars. The initial studies were conducted in the year 1975 by a notable psychiatrist named Freudenberger who was carrying out his research at an agency that specialized in medical care, followed by another wellknown scholar Maslach (1976), who was a social psychologist studying emotions at work. Freudenberger (1975) described effects of the burnout as experiencing mental exhaustion as well as feeling less enthusiastic and committed to one’s job.

Maslach et al. (2001) defines employee burnout as prolonged response to chronic mental, emotional and interpersonal stressors at work, and is comprised of three key dimensions i.e. emotional exhaustion, feelings of cynicism, and diminished personal accomplishment. Exhaustion is referred to as a root cause of employees’ burnout and it is the first indication that individual is suffering from the burnout syndrome (Seidler, et al., 2014; Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2015). It is the most essential criterion of occupational burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). The second aspect, cynicism causes employees to psychologically distance. It leads them to experience negative feelings toward their work and feel detached and alienated (Maslach et al., 2015). The third dimension, feelings of reduced personal accomplishment basically means losing confidence in one’s capabilities to efficiently carry out the task and considering their contributions to be worthless. Employees start to view themselves as incompetent for the job (Maslach et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2015).

Employees experience burnout because of the problematic relationships that exist between them and their employed organizations. When organizational processes and structures do not align with the tendencies and capabilities of their employees it causes them to feel stressed out, tensed and frustrated. The stress and tension leads the employees to feel depletion of energy and results in significantly reduced participation. They end up feeling incompetent and inefficient for the job and give up (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

## 2.4 Ethical Leadership

Ethical scandals in corporates worldwide (Mehta, 2003; Colvin, 2003; Revell, 2003) have brought attention of organizations to realize the need for ethical leadership (Resick et al., 2011). The corporate scandals concerning ethical conduct have shed light on the importance of the role leadership plays in forming a

workplace culture that promotes ethical values and principles (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005). Previous research points to the fact that most employees tend to look outwards for inspiration of moral conduct rather than inside (Bassberg, 1969; Treviño, 1986). Thus, leaders can be a primary and main provider of such assistance and counselling at work (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005).

The importance of moral leadership for leading effectively in the organization has been a topic of interest for decades (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This concept emphasizes dignity, being wellinformed about ethical duties, integrity, inclination toward collectivism, preference for civilized conduct, perceptive and considering of the needs and rights of others, and accountability management (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005; Treviño et al., 2006; Gini, 1997; Fluker, 2002; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Gottlieb & Sanzgiri, 1996). Brown et al. (2005, p. 120) describes ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through twoway communication, reinforcement, and decision-making”. Basically it focuses on the way managers utilize the given authority by not only practicing the ethical values in their professional life but in their personal life as well. Hence, they are the ethical persons as well as the ethical supervisors (Resick et al., 2006; De Hoogh et al., 2008; Treviño et al., 2003; Brown & Treviño, 2006).

### *2.5 Work Overload and Emotional Exhaustion*

The type of relation employees form with their respective jobs and the problems or hardships that emerge as this working relation start to become worse or even unhealthy for the employees, have been recognized as an important phenomena of the contemporary times (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). The changing working conditions and work overload to be specific is the main source of stress and exhaustion in the workplace (Laurence, Fried, & Raub, 2016). The work overload may occur because of many reasons, some of them include advancement in the technologies, new and challenging market demands, staff restructuring and adjustments (García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019), and too much extra work (Ali & Farooqi, 2014). This changing environment of work that involves more challenging and greater demands from employees and especially the culture of work overload has put the employees under so much pressure and is affecting their work situation (García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019). These changes can cause the employees to experience symptoms of stress and emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001; 2015; García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019).

Emotional exhaustion is said to be the central aspect of the employee burnout and also the most commonly and widely complained about symptom of the employee burnout syndrome (Maslach et al., 2001; 2015; García-Arroyo et al., 2019). The findings of previous studies show that exhaustion that employees experience because of demanding and extra workload negatively affect employees' satisfaction, commitment and performance (Paktinat & Rafeei, 2012). The stress at work due to work overload can become a serious and harmful issue not only for the employee himself or herself but also for the organization he or she works at as well (Ali & Farooqi, 2014).

Stress that results from various job related elements points to the aspects and elements that job entails, as well as the activities and duties performed by employees at workplace (Nguyen et al., 2018; García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019). It manifests itself in the form of both qualitative and quantitative terms, particularly in the case of work overload specific situations (García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019). Previous literature reports that work overload contributes to many serious psychological and physical health issues (Maslach et al., 2001; García-Arroyo & Segovia, 2019) such as fatigue, insomnia, tension, anxiety, lower self-esteem and depression etc. (Maslach et al., 2001; 2015). Carballo-Penela, Varela & Bande (2018) describes work overload as a job stressor that refers to such work related situations where job responsibilities surpasses the resources available to perform them (Shrimon, Gilboa, Fried, & Cooper, 2008). On the other hand, exhaustion is among the very first symptoms of burnout syndrome which results due to chronic stress caused by work related stress factors such as work overload followed by feelings of reduced energy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Lewin & Sager, 2009; Leiter, Maslach & Frame, 2015).

Intense and extra workload along with chronic fatigue and emotional exhaustion causes employees to be less committed and engaged in their work (Qaiser, Gulzar, Hussain & Shabbir, 2015).

Work overload not only adversely affect employee's well-being as well as in the context of work it causes them to perform their job ineffectively, commit mistakes and errors, and make poor decisions related to work. These negative effects become the reason of their compromised and poor health and well-being (Qaiser, Gulzar, Hussain & Shabbir, 2015).

Emotional exhaustion is not merely something that employees experience but rather it brings about set of actions one take to distance himself emotionally and cognitively from his job, most likely to deal with increased work demands that extra workload imposes. Previous research indicates that most of the studies that have been conducted to examine the phenomenon of mental exhaustion was done on the workers who were doing "people work". The people work means employees working in human services and health care, whose job requires them to deal with people on everyday basis (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Maslach, Leiter & Schaufeli, 2001). Maslach et al., (2001) reports in his study that emotional work is more draining especially for situations where the role demands from the employees to portray emotions that are not consistent with their feelings. The growing demands of the today's work can cause the employees to feel exhausted and can damage their capacity to respond to the changing needs their work demands. Because of such reasons, employees start to use cognitive distancing as a coping mechanism when they feel exhausted and emotionally drained. Exhaustion is the ultimate response of work overload that manifests itself in many forms including physiological and psychological problems that were discussed above i.e. tension, fatigue, stress, anxiety, insomnia, cognitive distancing and so forth (Maslach, Leiter & Schaufeli, 2001; Maslach & Frame, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be developed:

**H1: There is a significant positive effect of work overload on emotional exhaustion experienced by employees.**

*2.6 Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Burnout* Seidler, et al. (2014) refers to emotional exhaustion as "the heart of the burnout". It is the most commonly reported issue among those who experience job burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Leiter, Maslach & Frame, 2015). It is thought to be most obvious manifestation of occupational burnout (Leiter et al., 2015). Some scholars because of this significant association that emotional exhaustion has with employee burnout even claim that remaining components do not hold much importance as they seem unnecessary and irrelevant (Shirom, 1989). They have labeled this model as "exhaustion-only" model (Maslach et al., 2015).

Emotional exhaustion demonstrates the stress dimension of the employee burnout syndrome (Maslach et al., 2001). It includes feelings of drained physical, mental and cognitive energy and can be manifested in the form of lack of resources one needs to efficiently carry out the assigned tasks in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2015). Previous studies indicate that employees who show signs and symptoms of chronic emotional exhaustion display destructive behaviors (Maslach et al. 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Janssen, Lam & Huang, 2010). Maslach et al., (2001) describe in their study that exhausted employees tend to be less responsive and involved with the demands of their job and have trouble focusing on tasks due to drained out energy levels. A predicament with overwhelming job demands that leads employees towards chronic exhaustion is most likely going to negatively affect one's job efficacy. Further, emotional exhaustion disrupts employees' job effectiveness. It seems hard to have a sense of effectiveness and accomplishment when employees are stressed out as well as drained (Maslach, Leiter & Schaufeli, 2001).

Employee burnout is the ultimate response exhibited by employees experiencing feelings of emotional exhaustion and lack of physical and mental energy (Maslach, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001; 2015). Freudenberger, (1974) defines employee burnout as "mental and physical exhaustion" that occurs in the work settings. The intensity of burnout can vary from person to person, and different people can claim different symptoms (Freudenberger, 1974) but emotional exhaustion is always common (Maslach et al., 1993; 2001; 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be derived:

## **H2: There is a significant positive effect of emotional exhaustion on employee burnout.**

### *2.7 The Moderating Effect of Ethical Leadership on the Relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Burnout*

The leadership style has a significant impact on the effectiveness and performance of the both employees and organization (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Ahmadi, Ahmadi & Zohrabi, 2012). The leadership plays an immense and critical role in shaping and encouraging ethical environment in the organization. Leaders have a crucial impact in determining the conduct of employees and the organization (Trevino, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Kanungo, 2001; Aronson, 2001). Ethical leadership is linked to various significant and positive consequences that are of interest to the organizations, some of the outcomes include leaders' effectiveness, employee's contentment related to job (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005; De Hoogh et al., 2008), work passion (Ahadiat & DackoPikiewicz, 2020), commitment (Ahmadi, Ahmadi & Zohrabi, 2012), engagement, readiness to put forward issues in front of concerned authorities (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005), positive employee voice behavior (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009), organizational citizenship behavior (Brandon, 2013) and so forth. The ethical leadership has also been linked with employee's overall well-being (Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2014), trust and organizational optimism (De Hoogh et al., 2008).

It is evident from above mentioned positive outcomes of ethical leadership that leaders who prioritize ethical behaviors and practices in the workplace, allow employees to exhibit positive attitude toward their job and hence prevent them from experiencing negative feelings and ultimately exhaustion. Research indicates employees tend to trust the leaders who show great concern for their followers and emphasize ethical attributes and characteristics (Brown et al., 2005). The trust on leadership is manifested in advantageous consequences i.e. improved employees' behaviors and attitudes (Burke et al. 2007) and better job performance (Trevino, Brown, & Harrison, 2005; Neves & Caetano, 2009). Previous studies reveal that employees feel less exhausted and have higher level of satisfaction when their leader is ethical, thus, lowering their chances of burnout. In light of above arguments, the following hypothesis can be developed:

### **H3: Ethical leadership negatively moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout such that when ethical leadership is high then it weakens the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout.**

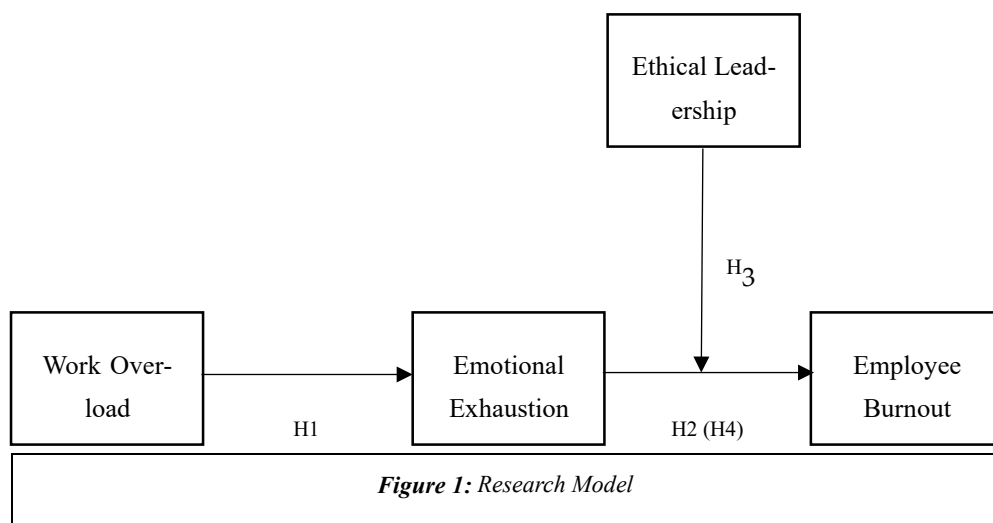
### *2.8 The Mediating Effect of Emotional Exhaustion on the Relationship between Work Overload and Employee Burnout*

As noted above, previous studies on the topic of work overload has positively related work overload with chronic stress at workplace and feelings of severe emotional exhaustion (Laurence, Raub, & Fried, 2016; Abbas & Roger, 2013; Pienaar, Rothmann, & De Beer, 2016). Research has proven that fatigue and anxiety caused at work because of reasons such as work overload leads the employee toward burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) argue that exhaustion is mostly experienced with the combination of feelings of alienation and depersonalization which basically works as a defense mechanism for the employee dealing with extra burden that is imposed on the employee. It is very critical for organizations and management to know when employees are feeling exhausted and stressed out so they could take important measures to treat the problem otherwise if left untreated exhaustion can further lead to burnout (Maslach, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001; 2015).

There has been tremendous studies done on burnout that states that there are some situational factors i.e. work overload that correlates to employee burnout. In fact extra workload and strict deadlines are the main reasons of job-related stress (Malach et al., 2015). Especially for employees whose jobs are demanding and oftentimes require them to deal with job overload. Such employees are more likely to experience burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). In view of these arguments, following hypothesis can be formulated:

### **H4: The emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between work overload and employee burnout such that work overload leads toward heightened emotional exhaustion and presence of emotional exhaustion leads toward increased employee burnout.**

## 2.9 Research Model



## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Data Collection

The study is cross-sectional in nature. The convenience sampling method is used for data collection. The survey responses were collected from faculty members of 17 Public HEIs operating in Islamabad and Wah Cantt, Pakistan. The reason for choosing this as target population is that research has proved that teachers working in a Public sector HEIs of Pakistan are more dissatisfied with their jobs as compared to the teaching staff working in a Private sector HEIs of Pakistan. The stress and exhaustion are the major reasons for this job dissatisfaction (Ayub, 2010). The sample size is about 385 at the confidence level of 95% and confidence interval or margin of error of 5%. As the population size is unknown; it is safe to take sample size of 385.

### 3.2 Instrument Selection

The questionnaire used for data collection was subdivided into two parts, the first part was related to participant's demographics and second one consisted of all the variables of the study i.e. work overload, emotional exhaustion, ethical leadership, and employee burnout. The demographics portion of the survey questionnaire included items such as age, gender, designation, qualification and experience etc. The section after that enlisted all the variables. Work Overload is evaluated by utilizing four items derived from Buckingham (2004) scale. The items are assessed by utilizing four point Likert Scale response that ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Emotional exhaustion was measured using 7 items, and employee burnout was assessed with 11 items extracted from the "The measurement of experienced burnout" (Maslach, & Jackson, 1981). The items were listed with 7-point Likert Scale response that ranged from "1= Strongly Disagree" to "7= Strongly Agree". To measure ethical leadership, Brown and Trevino et al.'s (2005) ten item scale was used. In order to evaluate the response given by the participants, five-point Likert Scale response was used in which 1 was for "Strongly Disagree" and 5 for "Strongly Agree".

### 3.3 Analytical Procedure

To ensure the internal consistency or reliability of the scales, Cronbach's alpha's values were examined. Skewness, Kurtosis and graphical methods i.e. scatter plot, histogram, and normal P-P plot etc were looked at to ensure the normality of the data. Correlation analysis was used to measure how the variables of the study were related to each other. Different types of regression analysis i.e. simple linear, mediation analysis, moderation analysis, and moderated mediation analysis (using PROCESS MACRO) were conducted to test the hypotheses of the study.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Normality Test

**Table 1.** Normality Analysis of the variables

Variables	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	S.E	Statistic	S.E
Work Overload	-.290	.124	.475	.248
Emotional Exhaustion	-.923	.124	-.360	.248
Employee Burnout	-.158	.124	-1.097	.248
Ethical Leadership	.360	.124	-1.412	.248

Generally to test the normality of the sample data, the Shapiro-Wilk test or KolmogorovSmirnov Test is performed. But for the sample data (n) larger than 300, such tests may seem to be proven unreliable. In such case, normality is ensured by assessing skewness and kurtosis (Kim, 2013). The acceptable value range for the skewness and kurtosis in order for the sample data to be considered normally distributed is between -2 and +2 (George et al., 2010). The statistics for all the variables lie between the acceptable ranges. The skewness values for all the variables lie between -1 and +1 and are really close to 0 which indicates data is moderately normally distributed.

### 4.2 Reliability Analysis

**Table 2.** Reliability Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Work Overload	.623	.668	4
Emotional Exhaustion	.968	.968	7
Employee Burnout	.926	.926	11
Ethical Leadership	.978	.978	10

The Cronbach's alpha for all four variables' scales of the study is gr which represents internal consistency. Thus, data set can be consid

### 4.3 Simple Linear Regression Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 1

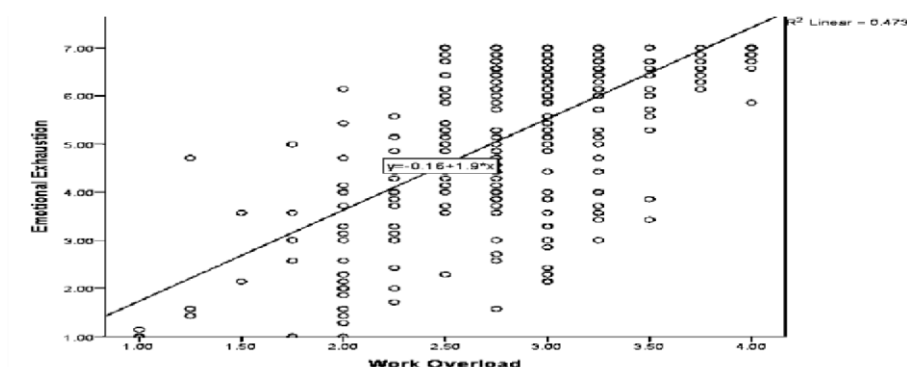
**Table 3.** Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	1.7332	7.4211	5.2998	1.18103	385



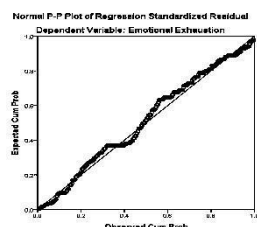
<b>Residual</b>	-3.47969	2.51372	.00000	1.24704	385
<b>Std. Predicted Value</b>					
<b>Std. Residual</b>	-3.020	1.796	.000	1.000	385
a: Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion	-2.787	2.013	.000	.999	385

First, the linear regression is run to test the first hypothesis. In order to perform the linear regression analysis, there are certain assumptions that need to be met i.e. there should be a linear relationship between variables, there should not be an outlier etc. The minimum and maximum value for standardized residual should lie between -3.29 or +3.29 respectively. The minimum standardized residual value was -2.787 and maximum was +2.013, which satisfies the criteria that there are no outliers in the data. To make sure that the relationship among the variables was linear, the scatter plot was computed. The following scatter plot graph confirms the linearity among respective variables.

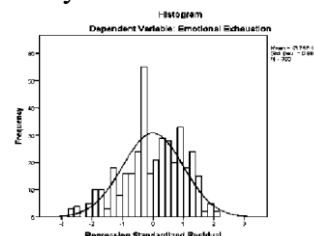


**Figure 1.** Scatterplot

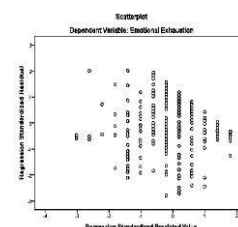
The third assumption is that the data should have independence of observations which is indicated by Durbin Watson value or statistic. It should be between 1 and 3. The value of Durbin Watson is 1.137, so the assumption has been met. The assumption of normality has also been met, as graphs i.e. PP plot, histogram and scatter plot etc. given below illustrate that data is normally distributed.



**Figure 2.** Normal PP Plot



**Figure 3.** Histogram



**Figure 4.** Scatterplot

**Table 4.** Correlations for Work Overload and Emotional Exhaustion

		<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>Work Overload</b>
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	Emotional Exhaustion	1.000	.688
	Work Overload	.688	1.000

<b>Sig. (1-tailed)</b>	Emotional Exhaustion	.	.000
	Work Overload	.000	.

**Table 5. Model Summary**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 <b>Regression</b>	535.617		535.617	343.527	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.688 <sup>a</sup>	.473	.471	1.24867	1.137
a. Predictors: (Constant), Work Overload				1	
Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion		<b>Residual</b>	597.163	383	1.559
		<b>Total</b>	1132.781	384	

**Table 6. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

- a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion  
b. Predictors: (Constant), Work Overload

The Pearson Correlation value is 0.688, which indicates that work overload and emotional exhibit a moderately strong positive correlation. The R Square is .473, which means that 47.3% variance in one's level of emotional exhaustion can be predicted from the degree of work overload. The significance value is 0.000 which indicates that the variables work overload and emotional exhaustion form a significant relationship with each other, confirming the formulated hypothesis.

The standardized coefficient is 0.688, which indicates the model demonstrates a strong relationship. The standardized coefficient beta suggests that for every one standard deviation increase in work overload will be followed by 0.688 of a standard deviation increase in emotional exhaustion.

The sign of unstandardized beta is positive, it means that emotional exhaustion among employees increases as the work overload increases. Hence, it can be said that, for every 1 unit increase in the work overload, the emotional exhaustion increases by 1.896 points.

**Table 7. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.163	.302		-.540	.590
	Work Overload	1.896	.102	.688	18.534	.000

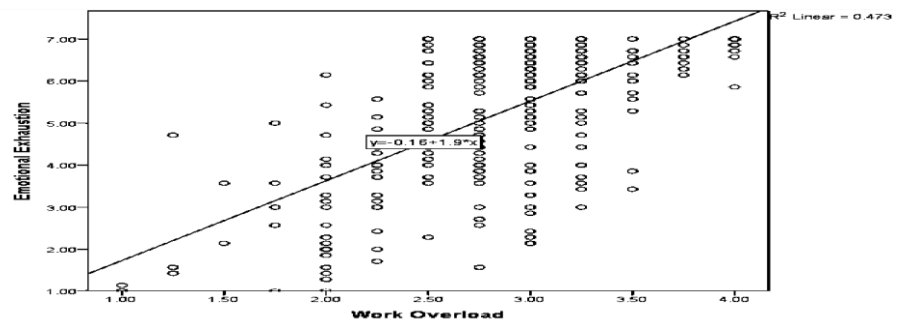
#### 4.3.2 Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 2

#### 8. Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
<b>Predicted Value</b>	1.3443	5.7414	4.4954	1.25868	385
<b>Residual</b>	-3.01819	2.09086	.00000	.93886	385
<b>Std. Predicted Value</b>	-2.503	.990	.000	1.000	385
<b>Std. Residual</b>	-3.042	2.224	.000	.999	385

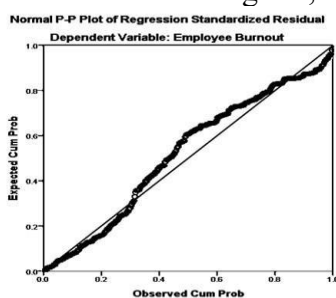
a: Dependent Variable: Employee Burnout

The linear regression analysis is performed to check the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. In order to satisfy the assumption criteria required for running the linear regression, first scatter plot has been constructed on the SPSS. The results confirm that there is a linear relationship between the variables. The minimum standardized residual value is -3.042 and maximum one is 2.224, which implies the data does not have any outliers.

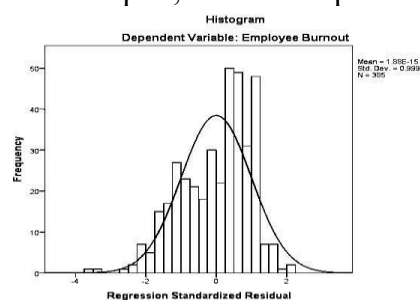


**Figure 5.** Scatterplot

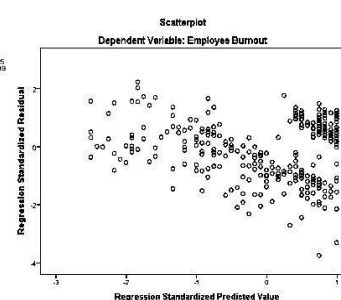
The Durbin Watson value is 1.145, so it can be assumed that data meets the criteria of independence of observations as the value is greater than 1 and less than 3. The normal P-P plot shows that dots are lined up along a 45-degree line that indicates that the data has normality of residuals. The histogram shows that employee burnout that is dependent variable is normally distributed. For normality, these three graphs were constructed i.e. histogram, normal P-P plot, and scatter plot.



**Graph 6.** Normal PP Plot



**Graph 7.** Histogram



**Graph 8.** Scatterplot

The Pearson Correlation is 0.802 which suggests that higher level of emotional exhaustion indicates increased chances of employee burnout, as both variables depicts an extremely strong positive correlation. The sign is positive which means that as the emotional exhaustion increases so does the employee burnout. The significance is 0.000 that implies the model is highly significant. **Table 9.** Correlations for Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Burnout

		Employee Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	Employee Burnout	1.000	.802
	Emotional Exhaustion	.802	1.000
<b>Sig. (1-tailed)</b>	Employee Burnout	.	.000
	Emotional Exhaustion	.000	.

**Table 10. Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.802 <sup>a</sup>	.643	.642	.94008	1.145

a: Predictors: (Constant), Emotional

Exhaustion b: Dependent Variable: Employee Burnout

**Table 11. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	608.357	1	608.357	688.375	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	338.479	383	.884		
Total	946.837	384			

a: Dependent Variable: Employee Burnout b:

Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Exhaustion

**Table 12 . Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coeff.		Standardized Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.612	.156		3.930	.000
	Emotional Exhaustion	.733	.028	.802	26.237	.000

a: Dependent Variable: Employee Burnout

The R-Square is 0.643 that means that 64.3% variability in the employee burnout can be predicted or explained by the emotional exhaustion. The p value or significance value is 0.000 that means that the model is significant as p value is smaller than 0.005. The standardized coefficient beta is 0.802, this value indicates a highly strong relationship among emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. By looking at the value it can be said that for every one standard deviation increase in emotional exhaustion, employee burnout increases by 0.802 of a standard deviation.

The sign of unstandardized beta is positive, it means that employee burnout increases as the emotional exhaustion increases. Hence, it can be said that, for every 1 unit increase in the emotional exhaustion, the employee burnout increases by 0.733 points.

#### 4.4 Mediation Analysis

The process model 4 of PROCESS macro by Andrew Hayes is run to test the mediation effect. Model: 4

Y: Employee Burnout

X: Work Overload

M: Emotional Exhaustion

**Table 13.** Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
1.7052	.0949	17.9744	.0000	1.5187	1.8917	.6764

**Table 14.** Indirect effect(s) of X on Y

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Emotional Exhaustion	1.1062	.0854	.9459	1.2798

The above table (Indirect effect(s) of X on Y) demonstrates the indirect effect of work overload on employee burnout through emotional exhaustion. The effect (co-efficient) value is 1.1062, and that is significant. Because the bootstrap confidence intervals indicate that both values i.e. lower and upper bound do not include zero, both are higher than zero as the effect is positive. The values are 0.9459 to 1.2798. Thus, it concludes that mediation effect exists and it is significant. The significance value that is 0.0000 also confirms this conclusion.

The “Total effect of X on Y” table 13 shows the total value of co-efficient which is 1.7052. And the indirect effect is 1.1062. The indirect effect accounts for a certain percentage of the total effect that x has on y. In order to understand that, the calculation is done by dividing indirect effect from total effect ( $1.1062/1.7052=0.6487$ ). The value computed after calculation is 0.6487 or 64.87%, it basically indicates that the proportion of the total effect of work overload on employee burnout that operates indirectly is 64.87%. The remaining percentage that is (100-64.87) 35.13% of the relationship operates directly. So the work overload accounts 35.13% of the outcome of the employee burnout but 64.87% is managed through the emotional exhaustion.

#### 4.5 Moderation Analysis

In order to test the third hypothesis of the study, the moderation analysis was performed using PROCESS macro by Andrew F. Hayes.

Model: 1

Y: Employee Burnout

X: Emotional Exhaustion

W: Ethical Leadership

**Table 15.** Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates

	Constant	Emotional Exhaustion	Ethical Leadership
Int_1			
Constant			.0098
Emotional Exhaustion	.2727	-.0414	-.0657
Ethical Leadership	-.0414	.0065	.0101
	-.0657	.0101	.0170
			.0026

Int\_1 .0098 -.0016 -.0026 .0005 **Table 16.** Model Summary

R	R-Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
<b>.8864</b>	.7857	.5325	465.7109	3.0000	381.0000	.0000

**Table 17.** Model

	Unstandardized Co-efficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Constant</b>	2.6478	.5222	5.0706	.0000	1.6211	3.6745
<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	.6453	.0809	7.9771	.0000	.4862	.8044
<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	-.2708	.1302	-2.0792	.0383	-.5268	-.0147
<b>Int_1</b>	-.0637	.0213	-2.9881	.0030	-.1056	-.0218

Int\_1 : Emotional Exhaustion \* Ethical Leadership

**Table 18.** Model Summary

	R2	F	df1	df2	p
<b>X × W</b>	.0050	8.9286	1.0000	381.0000	.0030

The above tables show the results of regression that are generated after executing moderation analysis in SPSS. The value of R-Square is 0.7857 which basically means that 78.57% variance in employee burnout is explained by the interaction between emotional exhaustion and ethical leadership. The overall value of significance (pvalue) is 0.0000 which implies that the model is significant.

To check the moderation effect, the interaction term is examined and individual values of coefficients and p are usually ignored. The interaction term indicates the interaction between emotional exhaustion and ethical leadership on employee burnout. The interaction term is significant which suggests that effect of emotional exhaustion on employee burnout is moderated by ethical leadership, thus confirming the hypothesis 3. The unstandardized coefficient is -.0637, negative sign implies that when the ethical leadership is practiced in the workplace, it weakens the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout. Hence again, it confirms our hypothesis. The same sign of LLCI and ULCI points out that our hypothesis of moderation effect is accepted.

#### 4.6 Moderated Mediation Analysis

The process model 14 of Andrew Hayes is used to test the moderated mediation effect on the model of the study.

Model: 14

Y: Employee Burnout

X: Work Overload

M: Emotional Exhaustion

W: Ethical Leadership

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Emotional Exhaustion

**Table 19.** Model Summary

R	R-Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6876	.4728	1.5592	343.5266	1.0000	383.0000	.0000

**Table 20.** Model

	Unstandardized Coefficient	se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-5.4626	.3015 18.1170		-.0000	-6.0555	-4.8698
Work Overload	1.8960	.1023 2.0971	18.5345	.0000	1.6948	

**OUTCOME VARIABLE:** Employee Burnout

**Table 21.** Model Summary

R	R-Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.8963	.8034	.4898	388.2479	4.0000	380.0000	.0000

**Table 22.** Model

	Unstandardized Co-efficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.0475	.2366	12.8832	.0000	2.5824	3.5126
Work Overload	.4665	.0798	5.8465	.0000	.3096	.6233
Emotional Exhaustion	.3756	.0365	10.2916	.0000	.3039	.4474
Ethical Leadership	-.5754	.0409	-14.0743	.0000	-.6558	-.4950
Int_1	-.0723	.0205	-3.5280	.0005	-.1126	-.0320

Int\_1 : Emotional Exhaustion x Ethical Leadership

The above given model table 22 shows that work overload emerged as a significant and positive predictor of employee burnout as value of significance (p-value) is 0.000. The unstandardized coefficient is 0.4665 which suggests that for every 1 unit increase in work overload, the employee burnout level rises by 0.4665 points. The significance value of emotional exhaustion and ethical leadership indicates that both variables are significant predictor of employee burnout as their pvalue is 0.0000. The unstandardized co-efficient statistic for the interaction term is -0.0723. The significance (p-value) is 0.0005 which is less than 0.05, thus indicates that the model is significant. This implies that it is evident from the co-efficient of the interaction term (-0.0723) that ethical leadership is moderating the effect of emotional exhaustion on employee burnout. **Table 23.** Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s)

	<b>R2-chng</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df1</b>	<b>df2</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>M*W</b>	.0064	12.4468	1.0000	380.0000	.0005

M = Focal predict: Emotional Exhaustion

W= Moderating variable: Ethical Leadership

**Table 24.** Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s)

<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>se</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
<b>-1.2388</b>	.4652	.0524	8.8793	.0000	.3622	.5682
<b>.0000</b>	.3756	.0365	10.2916	.0000	.3039	.4474
<b>1.2388</b>	.2860	.0348	8.2274	.0000	.2177	.3544

#### INDIRECT EFFECT:

Work Overload -> Emotional Exhaustion -> Employee Burnout

**Table 25.** Conditional indirect effects of X on Y

<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>BootSE</b>	<b>BootLLCI</b>	<b>BootULCI</b>
<b>-1.2388</b>	.8820	.0892	.7330	1.0875
<b>.0000</b>	.7122	.0658	.5965	.8533
<b>1.2388</b>	.5423	.0637	.4203	.6687

**Table 26.** Index

of moderate d mediation

<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	<b>Index</b>	<b>BootSE</b>	<b>BootLLCI</b>	<b>BootULCI</b>
	-.1371	.0331	-.2081	-.0773

The results shown in “index of moderated mediation” table 26 determine that whether the moderated mediation is taking place in the model or not. In order to confirm this, the bootstrap confidence intervals are examined. The values of LLCI and ULCI (confidence intervals) lies outside of the zero or are a nonzero value as the values are -0.2081 and -0.0773, which indicates that moderated mediation effect is significant. As the upper bound (ULCI) is negative it can be concluded that indirect effect through mediating variable is being negatively moderated by ethical leadership. The index value (which is co-efficient value) of moderated mediation effect is -0.1371. The negative sign of index indicates that indirect effect of work overload on employee burnout through emotional exhaustion decreases with higher levels of ethical leadership.

#### 5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of ethical leadership on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and burnout among employees. The primary data was collected and then examined in order to draw conclusions. The sample chosen for the study was teaching staff of public HEIs, as public universities’ teachers were assumed to be more prone to burning out because of the demanding and increased work load, and they exhibited lower levels of job satisfaction according to research (Ayub, 2010). There were four variables in total in the study, and the conceptual model constituted moderated mediation relationship among variables. All four hypothesis were proven to be true after running regression analysis. The first hypothesis was confirmed by running simple linear regression, and it was deducted that work overload causes employees to feel emotionally exhausted. Both variables formed positive relationship, which suggested that when work load increases, so does levels of emotional exhaustion experienced by employees. Second hypothesis was also approved as the results of the simple linear regression for the second hypothesis



implied that emotional exhaustion is positive significant predictor of employee burnout. For the third hypothesis, the mediation analysis using PROCESS macro was run. This hypothesis was also validated as both the confidence intervals (LLCI and ULCI) were non-zero (both were lower than zero), thus, the mediation effect of emotional exhaustion was significant. The moderation analysis confirmed that ethical leadership was acting as a moderator on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout such that when ethical leadership was high it weakened the relationship between the two and when it was low the relationship was stronger. In order to test the conceptual model of the study, which was whether the indirect effect of work overload on employee burnout differs as the levels of ethical leadership varies, where ethical leadership is acting as a moderator on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee burnout, the moderated mediation analysis was performed. The test results indicated that the model was significant. So the conclusion can be made that indirect effect through emotional exhaustion was being moderated by ethical leadership.

### 5.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study will help the managers to better understand the concepts of work overload and the direct and serious effect it has on the mental health of employees. It will allow them to take necessary steps i.e. practicing ethical leadership to avoid employees from burning out so their satisfaction and productivity can be enhanced. The managers can learn from these insights and can formulate better and effective strategies to make the workload more manageable for their employees so that they won't feel stressed out.

### 5.2 Limitations

Like most studies, this research has certain limitations. First, the sample chosen for the study was teaching faculty working at public HEIs, and this restricts us from making generalizations about other occupations or professions. Then the data was collected from the public sector universities of two cities of Pakistan only i.e. Islamabad and Wah Cantt, this also imposes some limitations. As there was a time constraint and sample size could not be expanded. Future studies could try to be more inclusive of other occupations and they can reach other cities or countries as well.

### 5.3 Future Research and Recommendations

The future research can focus on including occupations other than teaching faculty of public HEIs. The future work should explore the conceptual model of this research in different work contexts so that external validity of the results of this research can be enhanced. The future studies could conduct research including the sample from all the cities of Pakistan to make the findings more generalizable. The future research should also explore other determinants of employee burnout i.e. ostracism, depersonalization etc. The future studies can be longitudinal study in nature. As the concepts of emotional exhaustion and employee burnout are difficult to assess, studying these behaviors at different points in time would allow to draw more significant and meaningful conclusions.

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