

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Mediating Role of Crisis Support in the Effect of Work Stress on Emotional Exhaustion Following Crises and Disasters

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Abstract

The success of businesses is influenced by a number of factors; however, the human factor is arguably the most significant. In the present study, the extant literature on the subject was reviewed, with a view to examining the relationship between job stress, emotional exhaustion and crisis support, and the impact of these factors on employees' behavior and conduct. The objective of the present study is to examine the impact of crises and disasters, particularly the 6 February 2023 earthquake, on individuals and communities. The objective of this study is to examine how crisis and disaster periods affect the emotional exhaustion levels of personnel working in SME in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay. Moreover, the study endeavors to ascertain how crisis support influences this relationship. The findings of the research indicate that job stress exerts a negative and significant influence on crisis support, while emotional exhaustion demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with the same outcome. The findings of the research study indicate that emotional exhaustion from the crisis support is negatively and significantly associated with the outcomes. The research findings demonstrate that subsequent to incorporating the crisis support variable into the model, the analysis conducted reveals that the crisis support variable exerts an effect as an intermediary. However, this effect is deemed to be of negligible significance. Therefore, it can be posited that the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion is partly mediated by crisis support. A study is required to examine the concepts of job stress, emotional exhaustion, and crisis support in relation to the workforce. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the three concepts. The significance of the present study is underscored by the dearth of research in this domain.

Keywords: Crisis, Crisis Support, Job stress, Emotional Exhaustion, SME.

Öz

İşletmelerin başarısını direkt olarak etkileyen ve örgütün en önemli kaynaklarından biri insan faktörüdür. Bu çalışma da örgüt içinde insan faktörünün tavır ve davranışlarını etkileyen iş stresi, duygusal tükenmişlik ve kriz desteği gibi kavramların literatür taramaları gerçekleştirilmiş ve bu üç kavram arasındaki ilişkiler analiz edilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, daha önce özellikle 6 Şubat 2023 depremi olmak üzere kriz ve afet dönemlerinden etkilenmiş olan, Kahramanmaraş ve Hatay ili KOBİ'lerde görev yapan personellerin kriz ve afet dönemleri sonrasında iş streslerinin duygusal tükenmişlik düzeylerini nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koymak ve kriz desteğinin bu etkileşimde nasıl aracı bir rol oynadığını belirlemektir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre; iş stresinin kriz desteğini negatif ve anlamlı olarak, duygusal tükenmişliği ise pozitif ve anlamlı olarak etkilediği görülmüştür. Araştırmanın bir diğer analiz sonuçlarına göre; kriz desteğinin duygusal tükenmişliği negatif ve anlamlı olarak etkilediği ortaya çıkmıştır. Araştırma verilerine göre, aracı değişken olan kriz desteği modele dahil edildikten sonra gerçekleştirilen analizler sonucunda, kriz desteğinin aracı bir etkisi olduğunu ancak bu etkinin anlamlı bir etki olmadığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Dolayısıyla iş stresinin duygusal tükenmişlik üzerindeki etkisinde kriz desteğinin kısmi aracılık rolü olduğu söylenebilir. Kriz sonrası dönemlerde çalışanların iş stresi, duygusal tükenmişlik ve kriz desteği ile ilgili kavramların üçünü birden inceleyen araştırma olmaması araştırmanın literatüre katkı sağlaması açısından önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kriz, Kriz Desteği, İş Stresi, Duygusal Tükenmişlik, KOBİ.

Introduction

Throughout history, individuals and societies have experienced diverse socio-cultural, economic, and environmental transformations that have shaped their futures. With the rapid advancements in information technologies, the dynamics of social development have become increasingly complex. Within these processes of transformation, individuals have occasionally found themselves confronted with various forms of chaos and crises. As integral components of the social system, institutions and organizations have also been affected by these crises and continue to be exposed to their consequences (Aksu, 2009). Uncontrollable phenomena such as earthquakes, fires, floods, volcanic eruptions, soil and water pollution, environmental degradation, and climate change create conditions conducive to crises. These situations are distinguished by their extraordinary nature, their long-lasting societal impact, and the inadequacy of crisis-prevention mechanisms (Pira & Sohodol, 2020; Küçükaltan et al., 2015).

On February 6, 2023, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck at 4:17 a.m. in Pazarcık, Kahramanmaraş, affecting 11 provinces, including Hatay, and causing more than 50,000 deaths. The first earthquake, which occurred at 4:17 a.m. with a magnitude of 7.7, was centered in Pazarcık, Kahramanmaraş, and the second earthquake, which occurred approximately 9 hours later with a magnitude of 7.6, was centered in Elbistan. These earthquakes had economic, social, cultural, and behavioral effects on society. (Erdoğan, 2023). The February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes have secured an important place in Turkish and world history among major earthquakes and disasters. The earthquake resulted in profound human, individual, societal, health, social, economic, architectural, urban, technological, psychological, cultural, agricultural, legal, administrative, and demographic impacts. While first aid and ongoing support continue, we have entered a period where forward-looking action plans are being widely discussed. It is abundantly clear that action plans must be prepared with inclusive and multidisciplinary perspectives and implemented flawlessly. It is vitally important to address the earthquakes

with a multidisciplinary understanding, make assessments, and develop solutions accordingly. The healthy presentation of the human, environmental, architectural, urban, demographic, technological, sociological, psychological, economic, agricultural, health, cultural, legal, and political problems in the emerging picture will reveal the success of the rehabilitation and ensure that the solutions progress in a planned and healthy manner (Aytis, 2023).

From an organizational perspective, crises may emerge as a result of both internal and external factors, either independently or in combination. Internal factors generally include deficiencies in information resources, the abundance of irrelevant or outdated knowledge, insufficient communication and coordination, the existence of divergent value systems leading to organizational conflict, and inadequate planning. External factors encompass political and legal reforms, technological developments and transformations, socio-economic and cultural changes, scarcity of resources, occupational accidents, corruption, natural disasters, and managerial inefficiencies (Dubrovski, 2016; Güngör, 2020; Asunakutlu & Safran, 2004; Ağca, 2021). Prolonged crisis periods disrupt business processes, diminish managerial effectiveness, and reduce productivity. As a natural consequence, employees develop heightened fears of unemployment and concerns for the future, which may generate organizational panic. Job insecurity, in turn, increases workplace stress and tension, fostering emotions such as hostility, resentment, and anger. These dynamics weaken organizational and interpersonal communication, undermine employees' capacity to make sound and rational decisions, and ultimately lead to emotional exhaustion or disengagement, thereby exerting a detrimental influence on the organizational climate (Ekinici & İzci, 2006). Consequently, the psychological impact of crises on human resources the most critical determinant of organizational success may result in significant adverse outcomes. In this regard, investigating job stress and emotional exhaustion among employees is of considerable importance. Providing organizational support during crises constitutes a crucial mechanism for alleviating or mitigating such negative psychological effects.

This study is expected to make a noteworthy contribution to the literature, as it is conducted within the context of SMEs (Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) and, unlike prior studies, simultaneously examines three interrelated variables: job stress, emotional exhaustion, and crisis support. Moreover, the study is anticipated to serve as a practical guide for SME managers in enhancing organizational performance. Specifically, the aim of this research is to examine how job stress influences the emotional exhaustion levels of employees working in SMEs located in the provinces of Kahramanmaraş and Hatay regions severely affected by previous crises and disasters and to determine the mediating role of crisis support in this relationship. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for improving managerial decision-making processes in organizations.

Literature Review

This section provides background information on job stress, crisis support, and emotional exhaustion, which form the basis of this study.

Crisis and Crisis Support

The term “crisis” has been defined in various ways by researchers working in different disciplines. Studies that address crisis at the organizational level define the concept of crisis as “an unforeseen and unexpected situation that requires immediate response from the organization, which overwhelms the organization's prevention and adaptation mechanisms and threatens its existing values, goals, and assumptions” (Duğan & Koç, 2020; Tagraf & Aslan, 2003). A crisis is also seen as a surprise, panic, uncertainty, shock, fear, threat, and stress (Burnett, 1998). Similarly, Kernisky (1997) defines a crisis as “a major mismatch between an organization's expectations and what is happening in its environment.” A crisis is an extraordinary period with all its characteristics (Tekin, 2015). Information transfer is one of the most important dimensions of crisis management during crisis periods, but it is also a situation that must be planned

before the crisis (Demirtaş, 2000). Crises that disrupt the routine functioning of an organization and arise unexpectedly are a complex process that emerges in different sectors and even completely different systems due to the convergence of many factors, such as deficiencies in the system that affect the economic, social, traditional, psychological, and legal aspects of the organization, natural disasters or epidemics on the other side of the world, or the supply chain. (Antusak, 2005; Dubrovski, 2016; Güngör, 2020). According to Vergiliel (2014), crises should be viewed from three different perspectives. These are, in order, the psychological, socio-political, and technological-structural perspectives. From a psychological perspective, crises are unexpected, uncertain, emotionally charged, and complex events. Both managers, employees, and stakeholders are psychologically affected and harmed by crises. From a socio-political perspective, crises are described as the emergence of cultural symbols and living ideologies. This perspective assigns different meanings to organizational crises and adds various elements to crisis definitions.

The effective management of emerging crises is of great importance for the success of businesses. Crisis management is a systematic, planned, and complex set of activities carried out by a specially formed team in accordance with decisions made before, during, and after the crisis period (Aydın, 2019). When crises are managed well, they can turn into opportunities, but when they are managed poorly, they can turn into disasters along with failure. Crises that sometimes cause serious damage to institutions can result in the institution losing its reputation during the crisis or emerging from the crisis stronger, depending on the institution's response and management strategy during the process. Institutions that make wrong decisions during this period experience a loss of trust and reputation in the eyes of their target audience or employees, which also puts them in a difficult financial situation. Although rapid action is taken to manage crises when time is of the essence, every decision must be carefully evaluated to ensure that it does not cause further chaos. A wrong decision or statement can make the situation even more unmanageable (Çelik & Develi, 2024). The presence of

personnel who feel sufficiently healthy and safe is very important for crisis management (Ekinçi and İzci, 2006). Therefore, crisis support is crucial for employees to recover quickly in the post-crisis period. Crisis support refers to the social support received by victims, especially after a crisis or disaster (Joseph, Williams & Yule, 1992). Andrews and Brown (1988) and Brown et al. (1986) define the concept of crisis support as the presence of individuals who are willing to listen to victims affected by the crisis, provide them with emotional and practical support when needed, and do not make the individual feel worse in any way (Elklit et al., 2001).

To ensure organizational integrity after a crisis, an assessment should be conducted following the crisis to identify the organization's weaknesses, investigate their causes, and develop restructuring strategies (Balaban, 2018). On the other hand, financial advantages in achieving goals should be explored, and considering opportunities and threats, how resources will be protected and utilized should be determined, and new measures should be taken against threats (Tutar, 2021).

Job Stress

The concept of stress has undergone changes in meaning throughout history. In the 17th century, "stress" was used to describe negative situations such as calamity, sorrow, misfortune, and grief. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the meaning of this concept expanded to include meanings such as pressure, difficulty, and hardship, and it was considered a situation that affected individuals, organs, objects, and mental structures (Kaya, 2010). Stress can be defined as the totality of physiological and psychological responses that the organism gives to harmful stimuli when faced with problems and demands that the individual cannot cope with using their current resources (Burman & Goswami, 2018). In this context, job stress refers to the negative effects of employees' emotional responses, such as anxiety, worry, tension, reluctance, and irritability related to work, on their work behavior (Navas & Vijayakumar, 2018).

In the relevant literature, job stress is also expressed with different concepts such as workplace stress, organizational stress, and occupational

stress (Spielberger & Reheiser, 2020; Troesch & Bauer, 2017; Burman & Goswami, 2018). In other words, job stress is the employee's perception of stress sources in the work environment and the responses they develop to this perception. This situation makes it difficult for the employee to perform their normal functions and leads to both physical and mental responses (Gül, 2007). Incorrect policies implemented within an organization can cause stress not only for employees but also for managers. In environments where job stress is intense, job satisfaction decreases, productivity declines, and absenteeism rates increase (Aydın, 2002; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). To cope with this stress, individuals must become aware of stress management and, if necessary, receive training (Demir, 2022). Common psychological problems among individuals experiencing job stress include constant irritability, tension, interpersonal conflicts, inability to participate in teamwork, feelings of failure, depression, distraction, anxiety, and intense worry (Delice, 2018; Işıksan, 2003). In addition, it has been found that employee turnover rates are high in organizations with high levels of job stress (Chen et al., 2011).

Another factor contributing to the emergence of stress is the urban living problems and transportation difficulties specific to the city in which the individual lives. Environmental issues such as air, water, and soil pollution, as well as inadequacies in waste and garbage management, can increase anxiety levels in individuals and lead to the emergence of stress (Eren, 1998; Özgan, 2011; Yamangil, 2024). However, an individual's lifestyle is also an important factor affecting their relationship with stress. Individuals who stray from a natural lifestyle can sometimes create their own sources of stress (Aydoğan, 2008).

Social support refers to the presence of people in an individual's environment who trust, value, and care for them. Being able to benefit from these support systems is of great importance for both the physical and mental health of the individual. It is stated that in situations where social support is insufficient, various physical and psychological disorders may arise in individuals (Batıgün, 2011).

In conclusion, job stress can have a wide range of serious effects on individuals. Although stress

can serve as a source of motivation for individuals in some cases, when this effect becomes excessive, stress can become a potential threat. If no intervention is made in such cases, the negative effects of stress can become long-term and permanent (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Emotional Exhaustion

The main focus of the burnout literature is based on clinical and social psychological perspectives. From a clinical perspective, burnout symptoms and related health issues, and from a social psychological perspective, the situational context of service professions and the relationships between service providers and recipients form the starting point for burnout research (Maslach et al., 2001). Herbert Freudenberger (1974) is considered the founding father of the burnout syndrome. The concept of "burnout," first used by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 to describe a specific type of work-related stress, was employed to explain the emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, and decreased commitment to work among young workers who volunteered. The author defined burnout as the depletion of internal resources resulting from failure, loss of energy, loss of power, and unmet desires (Maslach et al., 2001; Çakınberk, 2011). Burnout essentially represents a mismatch between what a person wants to do and what a person needs to do, thus emerging when there is a significant mismatch between the nature of a person's job and the characteristics of the person doing the job (Liang, 2012). Kristensen et al. (2005) argue that the basis of burnout in the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory is fatigue and exhaustion.

The symptoms of burnout manifest themselves in different ways and degrees from person to person. Although burnout occurs suddenly, it develops continuously. In order to achieve the set goal, the individual has struggled for days, weeks, months, and even years (Ören & Türkoğlu, 2006). This situation typically arises one year after the individual begins working at the organization, due to the emergence of certain factors (Freudenberger, 1975). Among the most commonly discussed organizational consequences of burnout are absenteeism, decreased organizational commitment, job

dissatisfaction, and increased employee turnover (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998). (Arı et al., 2010) found that emotional exhaustion positively predicts job turnover, while job commitment negatively predicts it.

According to Lee and Ashforth (1996), emotional exhaustion, which constitutes an important dimension of burnout, is a complex process. Emotional exhaustion refers to "the depletion of an individual's emotional and physical resources." In other words, emotional exhaustion occurs when individuals feel they no longer have sufficient emotional resources to manage interpersonal stress factors (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Emotional exhaustion represents the personal dimension of stress (Yıldızhan, Ören, Erdoğan & Bal, 2018). Individuals experiencing emotional exhaustion tend to become indifferent towards the people they work with and serve. When looking at their attitudes towards themselves, they see themselves as inadequate, unsuccessful, and worthless. This situation will also cause them to gradually distance themselves from life and their life goals. Additionally, they may exhibit a tendency to create unrest, conflict, and tension in their surroundings. However, it is not only workplace factors but also individual factors that can contribute to emotional exhaustion. For example, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and psychological issues can play a significant role in the development of emotional exhaustion (Kim et al., 2009). Feelings of burnout can lead to cynicism toward work as employees try to emotionally distance themselves from their jobs as a way to cope with stress (Bakker et al., 2004). The mere obligation to go to work the next day can be a major source of anxiety for someone who is already tense and anxious. For this reason, situations such as not arriving at work on time, not going to work, absenteeism, quitting work, etc., result in inefficiency for both the employee and the company (Yavaş, 2012).

Hypothesis Development

Due to the significant socioeconomic impacts of crises, efforts must be made to develop solutions for addressing and preventing crises at both the national and international levels (Koyuncu and

Şenses, 2004; Küçük & Bayuk, 2007; Bakan et al., 2011). Donnellan et al. (2024) found in their research that social support increases self-efficacy and compassion satisfaction levels but reduces burnout and stress levels. Akçınar & Koçyiğit (2023) examined healthcare workers' perceptions of hospitals' crisis management activities and found no significant differences based on gender, marital status, education, or experience, but significant differences based on age and healthcare worker profession. Bakan et al. (2011) found that there were significant differences in the perceptions of economic, health, and social life between individuals who stated that they were affected by the crisis and those who believed that the crisis had no effect on them. Elklit et al. (2001) conducted research to measure social support after a crisis and found that women received less support than men immediately after the trauma and later on. Young victims received the least support in the acute phase, but this situation reversed later on. Özdevcioğlu (2002) conducted a study on industrial enterprises operating in Kayseri and found that during crisis periods, authority becomes centralized, organizational communication breaks down, fear and panic increase among organization members, the quality of decisions deteriorates, and relationships between the functional departments of the enterprise break down. Among the findings obtained is that, while there is no coordination breakdown caused by the crisis itself during crisis periods, there is a general coordination breakdown. Ekinici & İzci (2006) found that as managers age, gain experience, and rise in educational level and management rank, they become more convinced of the impact of employee mental health protection policies on crisis resolution. Gül Eşki (2024) noted in her study that even in the most deadly crisis situations, effective and successful crisis management is quite important in reducing employees' fears and increasing their satisfaction levels. Uçkun et al. (2021) noted in their research that transformational and spiritual leaders are more effective during crises and stressful periods. Gürel (2016) revealed in his research that there is a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and work stress and work-family conflict, and a negative relationship between work commitment

and work-family conflict. Sütütemiz et al. (2009) noted in their study that there is a positive correlation between small business owners' feelings of hopelessness and depression during times of crisis, that married individuals are more hopeless than single individuals, and that business owners' psychological states are influential in their perception of the global crisis. Based on this information, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is a negative and significant effect between crisis support and emotional exhaustion.

H₂: There is a negative and significant effect between job stress and crisis support.

Stress is an important factor affecting work life and can be shaped according to the family structure of individuals, the characteristics of the job, and the individual characteristics of the person. Work stress is a situation that arises when individuals cannot meet work-related demands and results in emotional or physical reactions (Yamangil, 2024). When examining studies on work stress and emotional exhaustion, Thompson et al. (2005) found that the support managers show to employees reduces role stress factors that lead to family harmony and conflict through emotional exhaustion, but the support shown by colleagues does not reduce stress factors. According to the results of the research conducted by Bayarçelik et al. (2019), job stress levels increase the two sub-dimensions of burnout, namely emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while employees' positive psychological capital levels only reduce emotional exhaustion and do not affect depersonalization. Another finding indicates that female employees have higher job stress levels than male employees. Onay & Kılıcı (2011) found that emotional exhaustion positively affects the intention to leave the job. Akdu and Akdu (2016) noted in their research that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional labor, job stress, and burnout. Based on these results, they stated that as job stress increases, so do burnout and emotional labor levels, and as emotional labor levels increase, so do burnout and job stress levels. Karadirek (2021) found in his research that job satisfaction and professional emotional commitment have a significant and negative relationship with job stress and pro-

fessional burnout dimensions (decrease in personal success, desensitization, emotional exhaustion). Ülbeği et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between job stress and emotional burnout in their research. Stordeur et al. (2001) found in their studies that stress originating from the physical and social environment is significantly related to increased levels of emotional exhaustion. Günüşen et al. (2014) found in their research that there is a relationship between job stress and emotional exhaustion. Alonso et al. (2020) suggested in their research that work stress and emotional exhaustion levels may negatively affect the performance of employees in the workplace. Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler (1986) found that emotional exhaustion positively predicts the desire to leave a job. Many authors have found that women are at greater risk of burnout syndrome than men (Aslan & Bektaş, 2016). Saxton et al. (1991) also found that young people are more likely to experience burnout syndrome. Chong & Monroe (2015) determined that excessive workload positively predicts employees' emotional exhaustion levels. Erdoğan, Gelmiş, Katar & Gürfidan (2024) found in their study on teachers that job stress has a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion, desensitization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Candar & Aksöz (2025) found in their research results that the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion is positive and strong, and also noted that perceived managerial support has a moderating effect on the relationship between job stress and emotional exhaustion. Bilben & Demirelli (2025) found in their research on healthcare workers that job stress statistically significantly and positively affects the dimensions of burnout and intention to leave the job. Sakallı, Temur & Özcan (2025) found in their research on occupational safety experts that stress has positive effects on burnout. Yalçın & Yılmaz (2024) determined from the findings obtained from their research data that job stress and burnout syndrome significantly affect employee performance. Based on this information, the remaining hypotheses of the study were formulated as follows:

H₃: There is a positive and significant effect between job stress and emotional exhaustion.

H₄: Crisis support has a mediating role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to reveal how the work stress of personnel working in SMEs in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces, which were previously affected by crises and disasters, affects their emotional exhaustion levels after crises and disasters, and to determine how crisis support plays a mediating role in this interaction. With this objective in mind, this section presents information on the analysis results obtained using SPSS and AMOS software.

Research Model and Hypotheses

To achieve the research objectives, a quantitative data analysis-based research method and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used in the causal survey design. SEM is a method that enables both theoretical and empirical research to be conducted in a more statistically advanced manner. It has been proven by Iacobucci (2007) that SEM provides much more consistent results in detecting mediation effects. Therefore, SEM was preferred for testing the research hypotheses. SPSS 25 software and IBM Amos 24 software were used for the analysis of the research data. As a result of the literature review, the model in Figure 2 was created to test the following hypotheses.

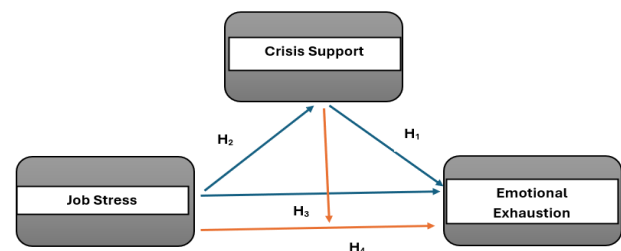


Figure 1. Research Model

H₁: There is a negative and significant effect between crisis support and emotional exhaustion.

H₂: There is a negative and significant effect between job stress and crisis support.

H₃: There is a positive and significant effect between job stress and emotional exhaustion.

H4: Crisis support has a mediating role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion.

Research Universe and Sample

The research universe consists of personnel working in SMEs in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces that have been affected by previous crises and disasters. Convenience sampling was used in the sample selection. According to Sekaran's (2000: 95) acceptable sampling approach, the sample size should consist of 384 participants for a population of 100,000 or more. Therefore, the sample size was set at 384, and convenience sampling was used in the sample selection process. Accordingly, a sample size of 435 participants was deemed sufficient at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The survey questions were created both online and on paper. These survey questions were distributed to participants through SME managers. Ethical approval for this study was obtained on August 28, 2025, at the 15th meeting of the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iskenderun Technical University, with decision number 5.

Research Scales

To achieve the objectives of the study, the local and foreign literature was reviewed, and the necessary scales for the research were determined. A questionnaire form was prepared as the data collection method, and the questionnaire questions were prepared according to a 5 point Likert scale. First, participants were asked to read the informative paragraph and then answer the questions. The validity and reliability of the scales used in the study were tested. The questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section of the questionnaire includes statements related to participants' demographic information, such as gender, age, and marital status.

Job Stress Scale: In the second section of the questionnaire, Tortumlu's (2016) 13 item, single dimensional "Job stress" scale was used. In his Tortumlu study, he found the reliability analysis value for the job stress scale to be 0.939.

Emotional Exhaustion Scale: The third section of the questionnaire uses the 6-item, single dimensional "Job related emotional exhaustion" scale developed by Günay (2021). Reliability analysis of the scale, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.903.

Crisis Support Scale: In the fourth and final section of the questionnaire, the "crisis support" scale developed by Elklit, Pedersen, and Jind (2001), consisting of 7 items and a single dimension, was used to determine the level of crisis support perceived by employees. As a result of the factor analyses conducted in this study, the sixth item of the scale was removed, and the scale was used as a single-dimensional scale with a total of six items. Reliability analysis of the scale, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.820.

Findings

The analyses were performed using SPSS 25 and Amos 24 software. To test the suitability of the variables, a structural model was first created using structural equation modeling. After determining the suitability and validity of the structural model created for the variables, an instrumental model was created. Frequency analysis was performed on the data obtained. Frequency analyses were first performed on the demographic information of the participants. Of the participants who completed the questionnaires, 280 were male, 155 were female, 219 were married, 216 were single, 64 were primary school graduates, 90 were high school graduates, 99 were associate degree graduates, 146 were bachelor's degree graduates and 36 were post graduates. 209 participants were 18-30 years old, 159 were 31-40 years old, 57 were 41-50 years old, 10 were 41-55 years old. 169 participants worked in administrative positions, while 262 did not. Table 1 presents correlation information for the variables.

In terms of the mean values indicated in Table 1, crisis support has the highest mean (3.46) and job stress has the lowest mean. According to the correlation values, there are positive and significant relationships between job stress and emotional exhaustion (P= .889, p<0.01).

Table 1. Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

Dimen- sion	Mean	Std D.	Job Stress	Emo- tional Exhaus- timent	Crisis Sup- port
Job Stress	3.1549	.68067	1	.889**	-.512**
Emo- tional Exhaus- timent	3.1724	1.05938	.889**	1	-.433
Crisis Support	3.4625	.80703	-.512**	-.433**	1

Std.D. = Standard Deviation N= 471; **p<0.01; Bold Values in Parentheses = $\sqrt{AVE}$

According to the analysis results on the relationship between job stress and crisis support, a negative and significant relationship was found between job stress and crisis support ($P = -.512$, $p < 0.01$). The analysis results also show a negative relationship between crisis support and emotional exhaustion ($P = -.433$, $p < 0.01$).

Reliability and Factor Analyses

Cronbach Alpha values were examined to determine the reliability of the measurement tools used in the research. It is seen in Table 3 that the Cronbach Alpha values of the variables are sufficient in terms of reliability. It was examined whether the scales had multicollinearity problems, and it was seen that the VIF values had values that confirmed that there was no multicollinearity problem between independent variables ($VIF < 5$) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine the suitability of the data for normal distribution. If these values are between +2.0 and -2.0, it means that the data are suitable for normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2019). As a result of the analyzes, it was seen that the data conformed to the normal distribution according to the specified values.

Before testing the hypotheses in the study, the analysis processes recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) were applied. In this context, firstly, the analysis was performed with the structural equation modeling approach from the Maximum Likelihood Estimation module of AMOS software. Before analyzing the constructed structural model, as stated by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the appropriateness of the measurement

model in terms of validity and reliability was examined.

The model fit values obtained from the model fit analyses are shown in Table 2 (Munro, 2005; Hooper and Mullen, 2008; Schumacker and Lomax, 2010).

Table 2. Conformity Indices and Evaluation Criteria

Conformity Index Criteria	Normal Values	Acceptable Values
χ^2	$p > 0,005$	-
χ^2/sd	< 2	< 5
GFI	$> 0,95$	$\geq 0,90$
AGFI	$> 0,95$	$\geq 0,90$
CFI	$> 0,95$	$\geq 0,90$
RMSEA	$< 0,05$	$\leq 0,08$
RMR	$< 0,05$	$\leq 0,08$
SRMR	$< 0,05$	$\leq 0,08$

As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) applied to the measurement model, it was seen that acceptable fit indices were obtained: (CMIN/DF) $\chi^2/df = 4.011$, RMSEA = 0.083, CFI = 0.825, GFI = 0.961, NFI = 0.873, TLI = 0.889. These values are within the limits accepted in the literature in terms of both construct validity and reliability of the scales used in the research (Schermerle-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003; Meydan & Şeşen, 2015; Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016).

Following the CFA analysis of the measurement model of the study, the scales were evaluated in terms of concurrent and discriminant validity. For the convergent validity of the scales, the factor loadings should be higher than 0.50 and the factor composite reliability (CR) should be equal to or greater than 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). On the other hand, the average variance explained by the constructs of the items themselves (AVE) should be greater than the unexplained variance ($AVE > 0.50$) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In addition, the square root of the AVE values calculated for discriminant validity should be higher than the correlation value of the variables in the relevant column (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Looking at Table 3, where the reliability and concurrent validity values of the scales are given, it is seen that the scales used in the measurement model provide a very strong concurrent validity. In addition, the α values of the scales are greater than .70, indicating that the validity is supported.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Items	Factor Value	α	CR	AVE
Job Stress	JOBS1	,797	.867	.857	.787
	JOBS2	,756			
	JOBS3	,868			
	JOBS4	,804			
	JOBS5	,867			
	JOBS6	,741			
	JOBS7	,747			
	JOBS8	,614			
	JOBS9	,785			
	JOBS10	,761			
	JOBS11	,819			
	JOBS12	,619			
	JOBS13	,783			
Emotional Exhaustion	EMO1	,852	.920	.863	.811
	EMO2	,854			
	EMO3	,885			
	EMO4	,927			
	EMO5	,757			
	EMO6	,661			
Crisis Support	CRS1	,832	.879	.886	.833
	CRS2	,788			
	CRS3	,698			
	CRS4	,829			
	CRS5	,792			
	CRS6	,848			

Analysis of the Structural Model

The mediation model analysis is based on Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach. In this context, the mediation effect was analyzed using the bootstrap method in line with Baron and Kenny's approach. 5000 Bootstrap was determined as the sample and

data analysis was performed using the maximum likelihood module of Amos 24 software.

In the study, the mediation model was created as shown in Figure 2. As a result of the path analysis, it was seen that some parameters related to goodness of fit values were not in the desired range and the modifications suggested by the program were made respectively (e4 and e16), (e22 and 25). The fit indices of the final model were $\chi^2/df=3.433$, GFI=.968, CFI=.914, NFI=.821, TLI=.909, RMSEA=.097. These values indicate that the mediation model has acceptable good fit indices.

Table 4 presents the analysis results related to the main research model. According to the analysis results between the variables in the table, it is seen that the independent variable of work stress negatively and significantly affects crisis support (-.432, $p<0.001$) and positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion (.989, $p<0.001$). According to another analysis result of the study, crisis support negatively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion (-.569, $p<0.001$). Based on these results, the following hypotheses were accepted.

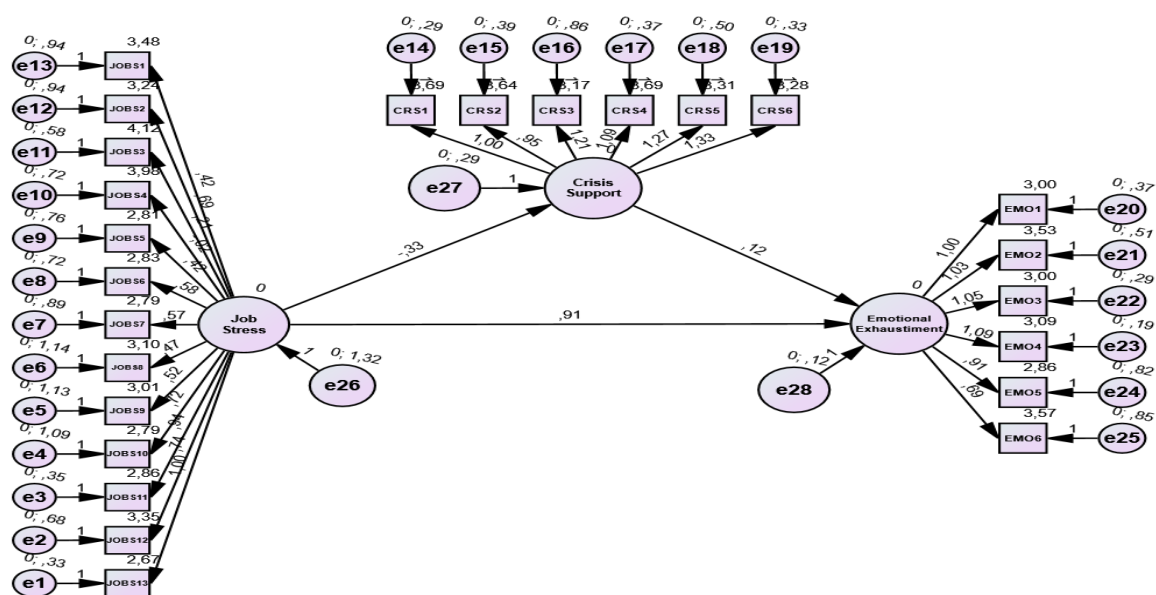


Figure 2. Main Model of the Research

Table 4. Direct Relationship Analysis Results

			Coefficient ¹	S.E.	K.O.	P
Crisis_Support	←	Job_Stress	-.432	,030	-1,160	***
Emotional_Exhaustion	←	Crisis_Support	-.569	,052	-2,210	***
Emotional_Exhaustion	←	Job_Stress	.989	,042	2,341	***

¹Standardized coefficients are given; ***p<0.001; S.H.=Standard Error; K.O.= Critical Ratio

H₁: There is a negative and significant effect between crisis support and emotional exhaustion.

H₂: There is a negative and significant effect between job stress and crisis support.

H₃: There is a positive and significant effect between job stress and emotional exhaustion.

The values in Table 3 show that the prerequisites for the mediation model are met. The results of the analysis conducted with the bootstrap method (5000, Bootstrap sample size, .95 confidence interval) to reveal whether crisis support plays a role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion are given in Table 4.

Table 5. Analyses on the Mediating Model

Hipoteses	Direct Effect ¹ β	Direct Effect ² β	Indirect Effect ¹ β	Moderation Effect
H ₄ : Job Stress → Crisis Support → Emotional Exhaustion	.989	.910	.079	Partial Mediating Role

***p<0.001, β: Beta

When the values indicated in Table 5 are examined, it is seen that work stress positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion (.989, p<0.001) before the mediator variable crisis support is included in the model. After the mediating variable of crisis support was included in the model, it was observed that job stress positively and significantly (.907, p<0.001) affected emotional exhaustion and that there was an increase in the β coefficient (.079, p<0.001). Based on these results, it was found that crisis support has a mediating effect, but this effect is not significant. Therefore, it can be said that crisis support plays a partial mediating role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion. Based on these results, **H₄:** Crisis support has a mediating role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion was rejected.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the severity of the crisis increases, employees' mental health deteriorates further and they are unable to assess problems in a healthy manner. In addition, the failure to listen to the causes of uncertainty and anxiety at work puts employees under even more stress, which in turn deepens the crisis. Furthermore, the negative impact of managers' reactive behaviors during a crisis feeds the crisis. Work stress is caused by factors such as an employee bearing an excessive workload, failing to fulfill their responsibilities adequately, an unsuitable work environment, and similar reasons. An ef-

fective improvement program helps individuals experiencing stress to respond to it and relax. As the individual relaxes, their attention span expands, thereby reducing work accidents and absenteeism, increasing job satisfaction and motivation, lowering healthcare costs, and reducing the turnover rate, which is a significant financial burden on the business (Çelik, 2009). Additionally, individuals experiencing stress show a decrease in their desire to go to work and an increase in absenteeism (Margolis et al., 1974; Gupta & Beehr, 1979).

In this study, analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS programs to determine how work stress levels affected emotional exhaustion levels among personnel working in SMEs in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces that had previously been affected by crises and disasters, and to identify how crisis support played a mediating role in this interaction. According to the analysis results, the independent variable of work stress negatively and significantly (-.432, p<0.001) affects crisis support, while it positively and significantly (.989, p<0.001) affects emotional exhaustion. According to another analysis result of the

study, crisis support was found to have a negative and significant effect ($-.569, p < 0.001$) on emotional exhaustion. According to the study results, before the mediating variable of crisis support was included in the model, work stress was found to have a positive and significant effect ($.989, p < 0.001$) on emotional exhaustion. After the mediating variable of crisis support was included in the model, it was observed that work stress positively and significantly affected emotional exhaustion ($.907, p < 0.001$) and that there was an increase in the β coefficient ($.079, p < 0.001$). The results of this study show similarities with other studies conducted on the relationship between work stress and emotional exhaustion (Erdoğan, Gelmiş, Katar & Gürfidan, 2024; Candar & Aksöz, 2025; Bilben & Demirelli, 2025; Sakallı, Temur & Özcan, 2025; Yalçın & Yılmaz, 2024).

In addition to these results, it was found that crisis support has a mediating effect, but this effect is not significant. Therefore, it can be said that crisis support plays a partial mediating role in the effect of job stress on emotional exhaustion. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies (Yamangil, 2024; Thompson et al., 2005; Bayarçelik et al., 2019; Onay and Kılıcı, 2011; Ülbeği et al., 2019; Stordeur et al., 2001; Günüşen et al., 2014; Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986; Chong & Monroe, 2015).

As the crisis period prolongs, disruptions occur in work processes. Management effectiveness and work productivity decrease. As a natural consequence, fear of job loss and uncertainty about the future spreads among employees, leading to panic. The psychology created by the expectation of layoffs leads to increased tension among employees and the emergence of feelings such as violence, hatred, and resentment. These, in turn, cause organizational and individual communication to weaken and break down. This situation negatively affects the organizational climate by reducing or eliminating employees' ability to make healthy and correct decisions about their work and themselves (Ekinici & İzci, 2006). It can be argued that being prepared for crises and being able to cope with them has become a fundamental responsibility of business managers in every sector. Studies on crisis management generally indicate that crises are

inevitable for every business at some point and that businesses must therefore be prepared for possible crises (Kash & Darling, 1988; Fink, 1986; Okumuş, 2003).

As a recommendation based on the research findings, if the factors causing stress in businesses can be eliminated, employee emotional burnout can be prevented. Especially in SMEs, organizing crisis support activities for employees after crisis periods can have a positive psychological effect on employees and may increase the success levels of the business. Another recommendation is that, based on literature and content analysis data, the relationship and effects of work stress on psychological factors such as psychological resilience, employee performance, work motivation, organizational commitment, life satisfaction, career expectations, psychological well-being, and burnout syndrome can be examined in relation to crisis support.

This study has various limitations, such as the negative structures of the concepts under investigation, the potential insecurity of employees during data collection, and concerns that the organization's responses may cause bias. In addition, the study only collected data through surveys, which limited the number of participants and generalizability. Due to time constraints, qualitative and cross-sectional data collection methods were not used. To improve future studies, the subject could be applied to smaller populations/sample groups using different research methods. The study's results may also vary depending on organizational structures, size, and legal status; non-organizational businesses may be potentially more negatively affected. Therefore, it is recommended that the differences in the research model be examined according to the size and legal status of the business.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iskenderun Technical University (15th meeting, Decision No. 5, August 28, 2025).

Informed Consent: Participants were informed about the study via an introductory paragraph, and completion of the questionnaire was voluntary; consent procedures followed the approved protocol.

Data Availability: The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Disclosure: No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the conception, analysis, writing, or figure preparation of this study. All content was produced by the author in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.

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