



## Understanding Restaurant Frontline Employees' Role Overload, Job Stress, Emotional Exhaustion and Work Alienation \*

Restoran Ön Saf Çalışanlarında Aşırı Rol Yüklü, İş Stresi, Duygusal Tükenmişlik ve İşe Yabancılaşmayı Anlamak\*

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze the relationships between role overload, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and work alienation among frontline employees in the restaurant industry. This study focuses on how job-related characteristics can affect the behavior and attitudes of restaurant frontline employees. Surveys were conducted at 40 casual dining restaurants in Diyarbakır, a city located in southeastern Türkiye. Using convenience sampling method, data were collected from 540 restaurant employees through a survey. Path analysis was conducted within the framework of structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables. The findings revealed a significant relationship between role overload and job stress. Additionally, job stress was found to be significantly associated with both emotional exhaustion and work alienation among employees. Furthermore, role overload was directly related to both emotional exhaustion and work alienation. Mediation analyses indicated that job stress partially mediated the relationship between role overload and both emotional exhaustion and work alienation. It is recommended that employees improve their time management and prioritization skills to better manage their workload and role expectations. In addition, strengthening team cohesion and actively using social support networks can be effective in reducing the risk of work alienation and emotional burnout. Furthermore, it is important for industry stakeholders to focus on human resources policies that prioritize employee well-being and stress management to prevent emotional burnout and work alienation.

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## ÖZ

Bu çalışma, restoran sektöründe ön saflarda görev yapan çalışanların maruz kaldıkları aşırı rol yükü, iş stresi, duygusal tükenmişlik ve işe yabancılaşıma düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkileri analiz etmek amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma, işle ilgili özelliklerin restoran ön safha çalışanlarının davranış ve tutumlarını nasıl etkileyebileceğine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin güneydoğu bölgesindeki bir şehirde bulunan 40 adet günlük yemek (casual dining) restoranlarında yapılan anketlerle yürütülmüştür. Kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kapsamında anket tekniği ile 540 restoran çalışanına ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmadaki değişkenler arasındaki varsayılan ilişkileri tahmin etmek için yapısal eşitlik modeli çatısı altında yol analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, rol aşırılığı ile iş stresi arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, iş stresi çalışanların duygusal tükenmişlik düzeyleriyle ve işe yabancılaşıma eğilimleriyle anlamlı şekilde ilişkilidir. Bununla birlikte, rol aşırılığının hem duygusal tükenmişlik hem de işe yabancılaşıma ile doğrudan ilişkili olduğu belirlenmiştir. Yapılan aracılık analizleri ise, iş stresinin aşırı rol yükü ile duygusal tükenmişlik ve işe yabancılaşıma arasındaki ilişkide kısmi bir aracılık işlevi gördüğünü ortaya koymuştur. Çalışanların, iş yükü ve rol beklentilerini daha iyi yönetebilmek için zaman yönetimi ve önceliklendirme becerilerini geliştirmeleri önerilmektedir. Bunun yanında, ekip içi dayanışmayı güçlendirmeleri ve sosyal destek ağlarını aktif biçimde kullanmaları, işe yabancılaşıma ve duygusal tükenmişlik riskini azaltmada etkili olabilir. Ayrıca sektör paydaşlarının, duygusal tükenmişlik ve işe yabancılaşımayı önlemek amacıyla çalışan refahını ve stres yönetimini önceleyen insan kaynakları politikalarına odaklanmaları önemlidir.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive environment, it is of vital importance for restaurant businesses to compete with their rivals, gain competitive advantage and make it permanent (Botten & McManus, 1999). Making maximum use of the talents and skills of employees, who have the most critical and important role in the struggle to gain competitive advantage, provides serious benefits to businesses in this struggle (Abolade, 2021; Davis et al., 2018). In general, the hospitality and tourism industries are characterized by their high labor requirements, with employees on the front lines often encountering multiple workplace challenges (Khelifat et al., 2021). The intense effort that employees put in to meet the high demands and expectations of both managers and customers (Dai et al., 2021), causes an increase in their role overload (Altinay et al., 2019). It is predictable and expected that restaurant workers will experience a certain degree of role overload due to the often high pressure nature of their jobs. Role overload is a state in which employees are cognitively overloaded as a result of having too many responsibilities and tasks under time pressure (Inegbedion et al., 2020). Role overload is divided into two categories: qualitative and quantitative role overload. While quantitative role overload is a situation where employees are expected to fulfill multiple different tasks and responsibilities, qualitative role overload refers to the situation where the tasks and responsibilities given to employees are very difficult (Wang et al., 2019). Overloading employees with job causes increased job stress and, therefore, emotional exhaustion and alienation of employees from work (Jung & Yoon, 2014; Nahir & Vohra, 2012). One of the reasons for the emergence of job stress is role overload. Role overload causes the pressure on individuals to increase, which causes employees to feel overwhelmed by stress and pressure (Kim et al., 2024). As a source of stress can cause excessive role overload causes job stress, poor performance, absenteeism, emotional exhaustion, conflicts between employees, work alienation and the formation or increase in individuals' intention to leave their jobs (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008; Lait & Wallace, 2002).

Restaurant employees frequently experience role overload due to high customer expectations and the fast-paced nature of the industry. This study aims to examine the relationships between role overload, job-related stress, emotional exhaustion, and work alienation among restaurant staff. Accordingly, the research model is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources Theory. Within this framework, role overload is conceptualized as a critical job demand that requires sustained physical and psychological effort. When such demands exceed employees' available resources, they initiate a health-impairment process characterized by increased stress, emotional exhaustion, and psychological disengagement from work. Thus, the JD–R perspective provides a robust theoretical basis for explaining how excessive job demands in restaurant settings undermine employee well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Many studies on role overload have mainly concentrated on exploring the influence of role overload and job stress employees turnover intentions (Akgunduz, 2015; Chen et al., 2011; Karatepe, 2013). For instance, Chen et al. (2011) discovered that role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload significantly impact job stress, making employees experiencing higher stress levels more inclined to consider leaving their jobs.

Job stress has becoming into a concerning issue. So-called stress is one of the frequent issues that workers face in the workplace everywhere in the globe. The 24/7 business world of restaurant businesses causes the stress that individuals working in this sector are exposed to to be more intense and severe. Stress can cause a person to experience imbalance, sadness, and difficulties such role ambiguity, workplace conflict, and workload (Kim et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2025). Structural changes in restaurant businesses such as role ambiguity and role overload can cause job stress (Üngüren & Arslan, 2021) and this situation affects the performance and productivity of employees (Bi et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022). Emotional exhaustion is a key aspect of burnout that arises from work-related stress and can negatively impact job performance. Work environments with high levels of role conflict or excessive workload can be challenging and unpleasant, as they demand greater effort to complete tasks. Such conditions can contribute to emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

This research is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources Theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) to develop a conceptual model examining emotional exhaustion and work alienation, with job stress serving as a key mediating variable. The study seeks to explain how role overload, conceptualized as a critical job demand, contributes to emotional exhaustion and work alienation through increased job-related stress. Accordingly, the model incorporates four core variables: role overload, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and work alienation.

This study is based on the assumption that front-line employees in restaurants, who interact directly with customers, experience more intense job stress, burnout, and job alienation due to high role overload and emotionally demanding working conditions. The research was conducted in casual dining restaurants in southeastern Turkey, where the pace of work is high and working conditions are relatively challenging; this population was chosen because it allowed for clearer observation of these relationships. Front-line employees were selected instead of chefs and stewards because this group is caught between both customer expectations and managerial demands. The originality of the study lies in its holistic model that addresses the variables of role overload, job stress, emotional burnout, and job alienation specifically in the context of front-line employees.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **1.1. Role Overload and Job Stress**

Restaurant businesses play a crucial role in delivering high-quality service and meeting diverse customer demands. As one of the busiest service industries, restaurants expose employees to intense service interactions and demanding work conditions, which may lead to role overload. Role overload occurs when employees' time, resources, and energy are insufficient to fulfill the multiple tasks and responsibilities expected from their roles (Coverman, 1989). Role overload constitutes a significant source of stress, and its effects are often experienced intensely by restaurant employees (Kim et al., 2019; Sales, 1970). In the restaurant industry, job performance is strongly influenced by service-related role stressors such as role overload (Wong, Kim, & Xu, 2025). Situations such as staff shortages and increased responsibilities during peak service periods further exacerbate role overload, leading to elevated stress levels, job dissatisfaction, and diminished work performance. Previous studies consistently indicate that role overload is a critical antecedent of job stress (Chen et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2015). Supporting this view, Dewi and Riana (2019) demonstrated that role overload significantly predicts job stress, which in turn contributes to employee burnout.

In the light of all the information, one of the hypotheses of this study is as follows:

**H1.** Role overload positively and significantly affects job stress.

### **1.2. Role Overload and Emotional Exhaustion**

The success of businesses operating in the service sector depends on the performance of employees who play an active role in the business. The role of employees is very important in achieving company success; what needs to be considered is employee performance, that is, service. If the employee experiences emotional exhaustion, then good performance will definitely not be created (Dewi & Riana, 2019).

Maslach and Jackson (1981) conceptualized burnout as consisting of three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. The emotional exhaustion dimension reflects the depletion of emotional resources due to persistent stress, frustration, and disappointment. In other words, it signifies a state of being emotionally drained, mentally fatigued, and psychologically overextended by one's job responsibilities. Emotional exhaustion is particularly prevalent among individuals engaged in people-oriented professions, as the continuous emotional demands of such roles can lead to profound emotional exhaustion, a core characteristic of burnout syndrome. Employees suffering

from heightened emotional exhaustion often feel incapable of further psychological investment in their work due to the depletion of their emotional resources. While the three-dimensional model of burnout is widely recognized, emotional exhaustion is generally considered the most critical and defining element of the burnout experience.

Emotional exhaustion refers to individuals' feeling that their emotional resources have been depleted (Shauffelli et al., 2009). The outset of burnout syndrome and a work-related strain, emotional exhaustion the depletion of emotional resources brought on by increased job demands or pressures (Dogantekin et al., 2022).

Prior studies support the idea that role overload is a significant stressor associated with a variety of harmful psychological responses, including emotional exhaustion (Barling & Macintyre, 1993; Lin & Ling, 2018). Emotional exhaustion can lead to negative job outcomes such as poor job performance, job dissatisfaction, decreased organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover (Pu et al., 2024). Role overload and emotional exhaustion are prevalent issues among employees in the hospitality industry. Many studies on role overload indicate that job-related stressors contribute significantly to exhaustion among hotel employees (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker et al., 2014; Ghosh, 2022). Grobelna (2021) confirmed emotional exhaustion is significantly influenced by role overload, which in turn has a major effect employees' propensity to leave, which lowers the quality of service performance.

In light of this information, the following hypothesis are proposed:

**H2.** Role overload positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion.

### **1.3. Role Overload and Work Alienation**

Alienation is a fundamental concept in contemporary thought regarding the human being and their place in the world. A detached, pessimistic, and even distressing attitude toward one's work is referred to as work alienation. The concept of alienation, first defined by Hegel (1910) as the individual's separation from their environment and their own self, was later extensively examined by Marx (1932). Following the works of Hegel and Marx, alienation has become a significant topic in theology, sociology, philosophy, literature, and psychology (Nair & Vohra, 2010). According to Marx, creative activity is a fundamental element of human nature and this need is satisfied through the work process, which is a meaningful activity in itself. However, in the capitalist system, the labor-capital relationship hinders the creativity of the individual and turns work into a meaningless activity; therefore, alienation is a natural part of this system and is inevitable (Turgut & Kalafatoğlu, 2016).

Restaurant employees are instrumental in building positive customer experiences that are vital elements of the customer satisfaction as well as the evaluation of the service quality. Intense role overload at the workplace adversely impacts the employees and lessens their association with the work, consequently causing work alienation. Work alienation can be defined as employees' indifference and apathy towards the goals of the organization they work for, the principles and rules required by their jobs, their co-workers, themselves and organizational problems and it is one of the most common problems caused by both job stress and role overload. Studies on burnout in the hospitality industry show that emotional exhaustion and work alienation are common among employees (Gordon & Adler, 2022; Shi et al., 2021; Ye & Chen, 2024).

Based on this information, the following hypothesis are proposed:

**H3.** Role overload positively and significantly affects work alienation.

### **1.4. Job Stress on Emotional Exhaustion and Work Alienation**

The perception or emotion of a person's own incapacity brought on by occurrences in the workplace is known as job stress. Job stress occurs when a worker's personal traits combine with job-related elements to cause changes in their psychological or physical state that impair their ability to operate (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). According to McGrath (1982), job stress is a state in which an employee is forced to perform their tasks beyond their capacity or the availability of adequate resources; as a result, there is a significant discrepancy between rewards and the requirement to perform the duties. Employees experience high levels of stress due to a variety of variables, including long and unpredictable work hours, anti-social shift rotations, few and brief breaks, and an overwhelming task (Chan et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2021). Stress factors experienced at work are among the main factors that cause negative outcomes such as burnout, dissatisfaction with work, low performance and quitting the job (Dodanwala et al., 2022; Maslach & Schaufeli, 2018).

The problem of job stress in the restaurant businesses has been the subject of comparatively few empirical investigations (Chen & Qi, 2022; Salama et al., 2022; Wen et al., 2020). Salama et al., (2022) confirmed that a favorable correlation between job stress and job burnout. According to Wen et al. (2020), burnout and the intention to leave the hotel industry are significantly influenced by job stress, and burnout, which in turn causes turnover intention, is statistically significantly impacted by job stress. The link between role stress and turnover intention is entirely mediated by burnout.

The authors make the following hypothesis in light of the literature:

**H4.** Job stress positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion.

**H5.** Job stress positively and significantly affects work alienation.

Restaurant employees experience high levels of stress due to various variables in service processes where production and consumption are simultaneous. For example, the intensity of role overload is considered a source of stress. Job stress is defined as the adverse physiological and psychological responses, as well as subjective experiences, resulting from various job-related stressors (Lee, Hwang ve Lee, 2019). When employees experience job stress, they are likely to develop a range of negative emotional reactions (Chen et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). Role overload may have a direct influence on emotional exhaustion and work alienation, but it may also have an indirect influence through stress on that two variables. It is well known that restaurant frontline employees are under job stress. It has been demonstrated that restaurant workers who feel overworked are more likely to experience stress, especially when the job demands exceed the workers' capacity to handle them (Sampson & Akyeampong, 2014). When these conditions occur, employees express feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement or, in other words, become alienated from their work (DiPietro & Pizam, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is also a common problem in restaurant business. Restaurant employees often experience role overload for various reasons, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. The restaurant industry is characterized by high workloads. When job demands do not match employees' capabilities, the risk of work stress and emotional exhaustion increases. In this context, restaurant employees who experience role overload are expected to be more likely to suffer from emotional burnout under stress (Grobelna, 2021). In short, it can be said that the role overload experienced by restaurant workers will create stress, leading to alienation from their work and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

**H6:** Job stress has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between role overload and emotional exhaustion.

**H7:** Job stress has a significant mediation effect on the relationship between role overload and work alienation.

The purpose of this study is to empirically test the relationships among among role overload, emotional exhaustion, work alienation, and job stress in frontline employees of casual dining restaurants (Figure 1).

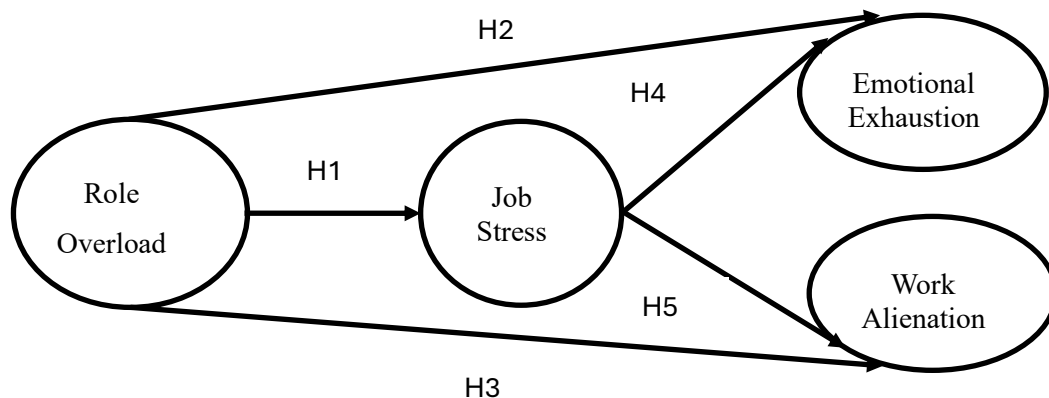


Figure 1. Conceptual model

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Sample and Data Collection

The study population consists of frontline employees working in casual dining restaurants operating in Diyarbakır, Türkiye. The study sample was selected from this population using a non-probability sampling approach based on accessibility. Frontline restaurant employees who voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the study. The research was conducted in Diyarbakır, a city located in the southeastern region of Türkiye, due to the researchers' convenient access to the data collection process. In addition, Diyarbakır has attracted increasing attention in recent years owing to its strong gastronomic identity and the growing demand in the food and beverage sector, making it a relevant and appropriate setting for the research. Ethical approval for data collection was obtained from the Batman University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 17.04.2025-206170). Managers of 40 casual dining restaurants in Diyarbakır were contacted and asked to grant permission to collect data from frontline employees. At the outset of the data collection process, participants were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, to be used solely for scientific and statistical purposes. Participants were also reminded that there were no right or wrong answers and that responding freely and honestly was essential to ensure the reliability of the research findings. Data were collected in person between March and April 2025 using a self-administered questionnaire, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete. A total of 540 valid questionnaires were obtained and included in the analysis. Descriptive statistics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

### 2.2. Measurements

The questionnaire used in this research was adapted from the original measurement scales. The role overload (RO) scale, adapted from Chen et al. (2011), consisted of 3 items. Job stress (JS) was measured using a 6-item scale adopted from Lait and Wallace (2002). Emotional exhaustion (EX) was assessed with 7 items developed by Park and Kim (2021). Work alienation (WA) was measured using a 6-item scale adopted from Nair and Vohra (2010). A pilot test of the overall instrument was conducted prior to the main data collection. According to Hair et al. (2010), a minimum of 50 participants is recommended for pilot testing. In line with this guideline, the questionnaire was pretested with 50 individuals who had worked in the restaurant industry within the past year. None of the participants reported any difficulty in completing the questionnaire or interpreting the items; therefore, no modifications were made to the instrument. Additionally, all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency.

**Table1.** Sample profile

Demographic	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	425	78.7
	Female	115	21.3
Age	18-29 years	281	52
	30-39 years	169	31.3
	40-49 years	72	13.3
	50 years and over	18	3.3
Marital Status	Married	184	34.1
	Single	356	65.9
Educational qualification	Primary education	56	10.4
	High school	167	30.9
	Associate degree	222	41.1
	Bachelor's degree	86	15.9
	Master's degree	9	1.7
Working period	1-3 years	256	47.4
	4-6 years	109	20.2
	7 years and more	175	32.4

**Source:** Created by authors

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The proposed research model was examined using covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM). Prior to factor analysis, data suitability was assessed and confirmed. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) statistic reached 0.883, demonstrating an adequate sample size for factor extraction. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded statistically significant results ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that the correlation matrix was appropriate for factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a well-defined four-dimensional structure based on the eigenvalue criterion exceeding one. Together, these factors explained 68.097% of the total variance. All measurement items loaded strongly on their intended constructs, with standardized factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. It was checked whether the data showed a normal distribution and whether it had a multicollinearity problem. The normality test is performed by evaluating Skewness and Kurtosis values in SPSS. All the items with skewness values (-.862 to -.733) and kurtosis values (+.021 to +.303) are in an appropriate range. The results indicate that the normality of data exists in this research with skewness and kurtosis values under the acceptance range  $-1$  to  $+1$  (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Multicollinearity was assessed by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) values in SPSS. The findings showed that all constructs had VIF values below 2, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the present study (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

In this study, the approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the reliability and factor loadings of each scale used in the study. In this line, the goodness-of-fit values, as well as the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model, were verified. After establishing acceptable levels of convergent and discriminant validity, the second step involved testing the structural model (SEM) to examine the hypothesized relationships between the constructs.

## **2.4. Common Method Bias**

Due to the cross-sectional design of this study, Harman's single-factor test was employed to assess the presence of common method variance (CMV). The results of the principal axis factoring analysis showed that the total variance explained by a single factor was below the 50% threshold (35.31%), indicating that CMV was not a significant concern (Kock et al., 2021).

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1. Measurement Model**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the measurement model, and the results indicated a satisfactory fit of the model ( $\chi^2 = 543.916$ ,  $df = 195$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.789$ ), with the following fit indices: RMSEA = 0.058, RMR = 0.057, and CFI = 0.963 (see Table 1). The reliability of the measurement model was evaluated by examining the factor loadings at the item level, along with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability (CR) at the construct level. Outer loadings of 15 items are above 0.7, but the loads of 7 items (RO 1, JS3, EX1, WA2) are between 0.6 and 0.7. They were retained due to their sufficient contribution to better results in CR and AVE values. Hair et al. (2017). Nevertheless, we decided to retain these indicators as the composite reliability for all latent variables was above the 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Zientara, Adamska-Mieruszevska and Bąk, 2023) (see Table 2).

The composite reliability values for all constructs were above the recommended threshold of 0.70, with the lowest value being 0.783 (see Table 2) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2016). Fornell and Larcker (1981) state that convergent validity is achieved when the AVE of a construct exceeds 0.50. In this study, all constructs meet this criterion except job stress (AVE = 0.489). Nevertheless, CFA guidelines indicate that standardized factor loadings above 0.45–0.50 are acceptable (Bentler & Wu, 1993). Moreover, all item t-values for job stress are significant, and its composite reliability (CR) is high (0.851) (Wu et al., 2014). Thus, the job stress construct demonstrates adequate convergent validity (see Table 2).

Discriminant validity was assessed for each pair of the four constructs by comparing the square root of the AVEs with the correlations between the latent variables. Discriminant validity was supported, as the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations between any pair of constructs, and the inter-correlations between the constructs were lower than the square roots of the AVEs (Kim et al., 2022) (see Table 3).

**Table 2.**Confirmatory factor analysis: Items, standardised factor loadings, AVE and CR

Construct	Item	Standart loading	T-values	CR	AVE
<b>Role Overload (RO)</b> (Cronbach's alpha .783)	RO1	.696	10,785	.783	.547
	RO2	.770	10,379		
	RO3	.751	12,511		
<b>Job Stress (JS)</b> (Cronbach's alpha .871)	JS1	.652	13,977	.851	.489
	JS2	.776	11,565		
	JS3	.749	12,338		
	JS4	.666	13,877		
	JS5	.709	13,684		
	JS6	.634	13,846		
<b>Emotional Exhaustion (EX)</b> (Cronbach's alpha .897)	EX1	.767	14,038	.893	.547
	EX2	.742	14,057		
	EX3	.796	13,114		
	EX4	.769	13,695		
	EX5	.706	14,514		
	EX6	.730	14,102		
	EX7	.660	14,604		
<b>Work Alienation (WA)</b> (Cronbach's alpha .945)	WA1	.982	7,197	.939	.727
	WA2	.611	16,235		
	WA3	.908	14,814		
	WA4	.929	14,323		
	WA5	.626	16,220		
	WA6	.975	9,116		

**Table 3.** Correlations and square roots of AVE

Construct	RO	JS	EX	WA
RO	<b>.740</b>			
JS	.394**	<b>.699</b>		
EX	.402**	.578**	<b>.740</b>	
WA	.386**	.367**	.452**	<b>.852</b>
Mean	4.08	4.09	4.03	4.08
SD	0.746	0.722	0.807	0.841

Note: **Bold** = square root of the AVE; Correlations are below the diagonal; \*\*: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 3.2. Structural Model

Bootstrapping technique was assessed for the significance of the path coefficients based on 5000 bootstrap samples. Table 4 standardised path coefficients, t-value and significance of the hypothesised paths. The results indicate that role overload has a significant positive influence on employees' job stress (Path coefficient = 0.477,  $t=8.034$ ,  $p<0.001$ , thus H1 was supported. Role overload has a significant impact on emotional exhaustion (Path coefficient=0.211,  $t=4.190$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and on work alienation (Path coefficient= 0.316,  $t=5.685$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), therefore H2 and H3 were supported. Furthermore Job stress positively influenced emotional exhaustion (Path coefficient= 0.590,  $t=9.658$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and work alienation (Path coefficient=0.210,  $t=3.915$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), thus H4 and H5 were supported. Fig. 2 presents the results of the structural model.

Table 3 reports the R-square ( $R^2$ ) values, which indicate the amount of variance explained. The  $R^2$  value for job stress is 0.227, indicating that role overload explains 22.7% of the variance in job stress. The  $R^2$  value for emotional exhaustion is 0.512, suggesting that role overload and job stress together explain 51.2% of the variance in emotional exhaustion. Finally, the  $R^2$  value for work alienation is 0.208, indicating that role overload and job stress jointly account for 20.8% of the variance in work alienation.

**Table 4.** Hypotheses testing

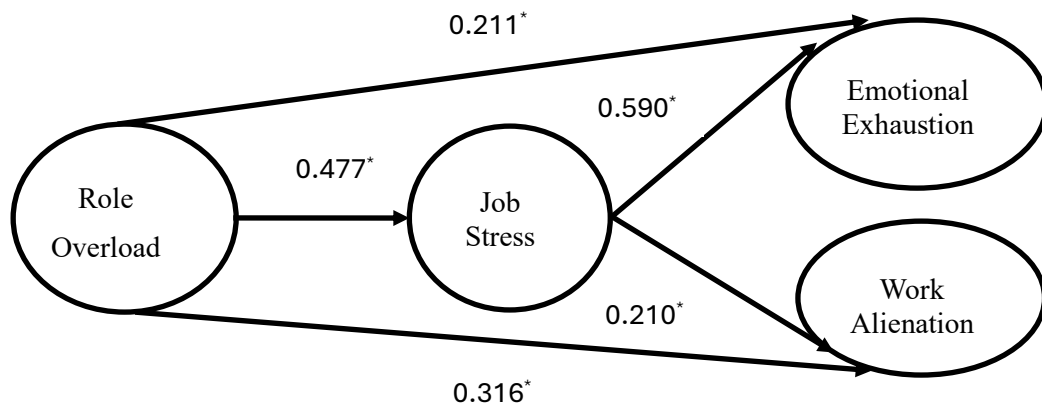
Hypotheses	Unstandardized estimates	Standardized estimates	t-values	Results
<b>Hypothesis 1.</b> Role overload positively and significantly affects job stress	0.43	0.47	8.034*	Supported
<b>Hypothesis 2</b> Role overload positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion	0.26	0.21	4.190*	Supported
<b>Hypothesis 3.</b> Role overload positively and significantly affects work alienation	0.45	0.31	5.685*	Supported
<b>Hypothesis 4</b> Job stress positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion	0.82	0.59	9.658*	Supported
<b>Hypothesis 5.</b> Job stress positively and significantly affects work alienation	0.33	0.21	3.915*	Supported
<b>Note(s):</b> R-square( $R^2$ ): Job stress (0.227); Emotional exhaustion (0.512); Work alienation (0.208). * $p < 0.001$				

### 3.3. Mediating Effects of Job Stress

To examine mediation and classify its type, the present study employed a moderated mediation model using the PROCESS Macro for SPSS with 5,000 bootstrap samples, as recommended by Hayes (2013). The analysis estimated the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator (c), as well as the direct effects from the independent variable to the mediator (a), from the mediator to the dependent variable (b), and from the independent variable to the dependent variable (c') (Bulut & Karabulut, 2018). The mediation analysis adhered to the framework proposed by Zhao, Lynch Jr., and Chen (2010), following the equation:  $c = c' + (a \times b)$ . The findings indicated that role overload exerted a significant total effect on emotional exhaustion ( $c = 0.4353$ ,  $t = 10.19$ , CI [.35, .51]) and work alienation ( $c = 0.4358$ ,  $t = 9.72$ , CI [.34, .52]). Furthermore, role overload emerged as a significant positive predictor of job stress ( $a = 0.39$ ,  $t = 9.93$ , CI [.30, .45]). In turn, job stress significantly predicted both emotional exhaustion ( $b = 0.55$ ,  $t = 13.33$ , CI [.47, .63]) and work alienation ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $t = 6.06$ , CI [.20, .39]). Upon introducing job stress as a mediator, the direct effects of role overload on emotional exhaustion ( $c' = 0.19$ , CI [.14, .24]) and work alienation ( $c' = 0.10$ , CI [.06, .14]) were attenuated, though they remained statistically significant. Given that all mediation effects were

both positive and significant, they align with the classification of “complementary” or “partial mediation,” as outlined by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010). Therefore H6 and H7 were supported. Following Nitzl, Roldan and Cepeda (2016), when both direct and indirect paths are statistically significant, the strength of mediation can be assessed by dividing the standardized indirect effect by the standardized total effect, yielding the variance accounted for (VAF). Values above 80% suggest strong mediation, whereas lower values indicate partial mediation. In the present study, the VAF value for H6 was 44%, indicating partial mediation. Similarly, the VAF value for H7 was 25%, also supporting partial mediation.

**Figure 2.** Results of the hypotheses tests.



**Indirect effect size (Hypothesis 6):** Effect = .1955 BootSE=0.0262 BootLLCI =.1463 BootULCI=.2493

**Indirect effect size (Hypothesis 7):** Effect = .1000 BootSE=0.0204 BootLLCI =.0630 BootULCI=.1437

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among excessive role overload, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and work alienation among frontline employees in the restaurant industry in Türkiye. Grounded in the Job Demands–Resources Theory, the findings demonstrate how excessive job demands initiate a health-impairment process that translates into adverse psychological outcomes in labor-intensive service environments. By jointly examining emotional exhaustion and work alienation, rather than treating strain outcomes in isolation, the study reveals the partial mediating role of job stress and provides a more nuanced understanding of employee strain in restaurant settings.

The results show that excessive role overload is a strong predictor of job stress. This finding aligns with earlier research in hospitality contexts suggesting that high task demands, time pressure, and limited staffing heighten employees’ stress perceptions (Chen et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2015). In restaurants, frontline employees are typically required to juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously, such as interacting with customers, coordinating with kitchen staff, and responding to service failures. When these demands exceed employees’ available resources, role overload shifts from a situational challenge to a persistent stressor. From a Job Demands–Resources perspective, limited job resources—particularly low autonomy over work pace and task sequencing—further intensify this strain, amplifying the negative effects of role overload on employee well-being.

Importantly, excessive role overload was found to influence emotional exhaustion and work alienation not only indirectly through job stress but also directly. This suggests that the accumulation of work demands may exhaust employees even before stress is fully cognitively processed. Emotional exhaustion, which represents the core dimension of burnout, reflects the gradual depletion of emotional energy under sustained pressure

(Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the context of restaurant work, where emotional labor is continuous, this depletion may occur relatively quickly.

The direct relationship between role overload and work alienation reflects the broader cognitive and attitudinal consequences of excessive job demands. Work alienation involves feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and psychological distancing from work (Nair & Vohra, 2010). From a Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) perspective, sustained role overload functions as a chronic job demand that drains employees' psychological resources and reduces their capacity to remain cognitively and emotionally engaged with their work. Under continuous service pressure, restaurant employees may increasingly perceive their work as externally driven and fragmented, leading to disengagement and alienation as part of a broader health-impairment process.

Consistent with the burnout literature, job stress was found to significantly increase emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2018). However, the positive association between job stress and work alienation deserves particular attention. While emotional exhaustion reflects depleted emotional resources, work alienation captures a more cognitive withdrawal from work itself. The findings suggest that prolonged stress may alter how employees interpret their relationship with their jobs and organizations, gradually weakening psychological attachment and identification. In this respect, work alienation emerges as an important yet still underexplored outcome of job stress in restaurant environments.

Finally, the mediation analysis shows that job stress partially mediates the relationships between excessive role overload and both emotional exhaustion and work alienation. In line with the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, role overload functions as a critical job demand that triggers a health-impairment process by increasing stress and depleting employees' psychological resources. These findings suggest that excessive job demands undermine employee well-being not only through stress-induced exhaustion but also by directly fostering work alienation, thereby extending the JD–R framework beyond burnout to broader strain-related outcomes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study examined the interrelationships among role overload, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and work alienation among frontline employees in the restaurant industry in Türkiye. The findings indicate that excessive role overload represents a central job demand that shapes employees' psychological experiences at work. Specifically, role overload was found to increase job stress and, both directly and indirectly, contribute to emotional exhaustion and work alienation. The partial mediating role of job stress suggests that excessive work demands affect employee well-being through multiple and overlapping processes rather than a single stress pathway. These results highlight that, in labor-intensive restaurant settings, excessive workloads do not merely generate short-term strain but may gradually erode employees' emotional resources and their sense of connection to work. By integrating emotional exhaustion and work alienation within a single model, this study provides a more comprehensive view of the psychological consequences of workload-related stressors. Overall, the findings point to the importance of job designs that balance performance demands with employees' capacity to maintain psychological engagement, particularly in service environments characterized by continuous interpersonal interaction. Importantly, the findings should be interpreted in light of the specific characteristics of restaurant work in Türkiye, where frontline employees often operate under conditions of high customer contact, limited staffing flexibility, and relatively low job autonomy. In such contexts, role overload is not merely a quantitative increase in tasks but a qualitative strain that constrains employees' ability to experience control, meaning, and personal responsibility in their work. The results suggest that interventions focused solely on stress reduction may be insufficient unless underlying job design issues particularly workload distribution and autonomy are also addressed.

## 5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This research provides important theoretical contributions to the tourism literature, especially the food and beverage management literature. According to the data obtained from this research role overload positively and significantly affects job stress. Similarly, past studies also support that role overload causes job stress (Bi et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2015; Sales, 1970). Restaurant employees who feel role overload are bound to experience job stress if job demands exceed their capacity. Findings from our study have practical implications for management department in the restaurant sector. One of the most important role in any organization or system is managerial role. Especially in the service industry such as the restaurant sector fair distribution of tasks is one of the key factor for employee well being (Mirzaei et al., 2016). The amount of work or the difficulty of the work as a role load produces negative effects on restaurant workers as a direct source of occupational stress and both direct and indirect sources of work alienation and emotional exhaustion (Bowling & Kirkendall, 2012). Another result obtained from this research is job stress positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion and work alienation. This result is parallel to the results of past studies (Chen & Qi, 2022; Wen et al., 2020).

## 5.2. Managerial Implications

In the work environment, the presence of social support can help an individual cope with a heavy role load. The emotional (trust, love, and empathy), informational (information and advice provided in a certain area), and instrumental (money and time) assistance provided to an individual by those around him can directly reduce the size of that role load within the individual employee (Ben-David & Leichtentritt, 1999; Örs).

The hiring process plays a critical role in organizational effectiveness. Ensuring that individuals are placed in roles that align with their competencies and at appropriate times can significantly influence perceptions of workload. A persistent mismatch between job demands and employee capabilities often reflected through role overload—may point to underlying deficiencies within the organization's recruitment and selection procedures. Specifically, elevated levels of qualitative workload can suggest that current employees lack the requisite knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSAs) to meet job expectations. Alternatively, such workload imbalances may highlight the necessity of increasing workforce capacity by recruiting additional personnel (Bowling & Kirkendall, 2012; Ishaq et al., 2021).

The impact of role overload on the emotional exhaustion among restaurant staff is still unknown and requires further research. Therefore, this research is one of a limited number of studies examining to ascertain role overload affect restaurant's staff's emotional exhaustion and work alienation. This study revealed that role overload positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion. Grobelna (2021) also confirmed emotional exhaustion is significantly influenced by role overload. Therefore, our study contributes to the existing literature on food and beverage management by bringing more clarity to the effects of role overload on the concepts of job stress, emotional exhaustion and work alienation, drawing on Job Demands–Resources Theory. Restaurant managers have critical responsibilities for the motivation of their employees. Building good relationships with employees are key factor for employees' performances at work. Management support is obviously an important source in strengthening internal communication and participatory management approach and ensuring the well-being of employees by supporting their professional development. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that restaurant managers and operators implement fair task allocation, adequate staffing planning, and supportive leadership practices to reduce job stress by balancing the roles and workloads of frontline employees. It is also crucial for industry stakeholders and policymakers to develop and promote regulations that consider working hours, rest periods, and psychosocial risks to strengthen employee well-being in the service sector.

### 5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study offers important implications on employee, it has some limitations that need to be awareness for future studies. First, the sample consisted of frontline employees at casual dinings as a part of the foodservice industry. And the data were only collected from Diyarbakir destination. Therefore, the generalizability of the results for the whole Türkiye may be limited in those reasons. For future studies, data can be collected from other restaurant types (e.g. fine dinings or ethical restaurants) and different cities (e.g. Ankara or Istanbul). Also related results can also be designed as a comparative research model.

Although statistically CMV test was performed, in terms of procedural strategy social desirability response bias may be mentioned for methodological limitations. From a methodological perspective, all strategies should be handled sensitively when it comes to detecting and limiting social desirability bias.

Future research needs to explore the different triggers on job stress to understand EE and WA including the qualitative research design. This study focused only on the effects of restaurants employees' job stress, emotional exhaustion and work alienation and neglected the effects of employees' personality traits. Thus, future studies should employ the role of personality traits. Finally, as a limitation of the study, it can be stated that the empirical evidence is based only employees, in future studies, gathering data from both the managers and the employees will provide different and comperative approach.

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