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Emotions in Urban Society: A Call for Papers for Psychological Research on Urban Society (PRoUSt)

Debora Eflina Purba

From Authenticity to Sacrifice: Investigating the Link through Identity Fusion

Aryodi Wahyu Kurniawan, Hamdi Muluk, and Mirra Milla

The Role of Commuting Stress on Job Satisfaction: Burnout as Mediator

Andreas Ari Kristiyanto and P. Tommy Y. S. Suyasa

The Effect of Shinrin Yoku (Forest Bathing) Concept on Decreasing Academic Stress of College Students: A Pre-Experimental Study

Shinta Mustika, Witrin Gamayanti, Fitri Kurniawati, and Ujam Jaenudin

Unraveling the Path from Stress to Coping among Indonesian Emerging Adults: The Role of Cognitive Flexibility

Stephanie Yuanita Indrasari, Sri Hartati Suradijono, and Lucia R.M. Royanto

Psychological Expert Witness Work in Indonesia

Nurul Arbiyah, Nathanael Sumampouw, and Henry Otgaar

Synthesizing Evidence and Testing the Militant Extremist Mindset Across Scales Version

Haykal Hafizul Arifin, Aly Lamuri, Aryodi Wahyu Kurniawan, Mirra Noor Milla, Ali Mashuri, and Bagus Takwin

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[PDF](#) Emotions in Urban Society: A Call for Papers for Psychological Research on Urban Society (PROUST)
Debora Eflina Purba
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[PDF](#) From Authenticity to Sacrifice: Investigating the Link through Identity

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-  **PDF** Psychological Expert Witness Work in Indonesia
Nurul Arbiyah, Nathanael Sumampouw, and Henry Otgaar
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Haykal Hafizul Arifin, Aly Lamuri, Aryodi Wahyu Kurniawan, Mirra Noor Milla, Ali Mashuri, and Bagus Takwin
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The Role of Commuting Stress on Job Satisfaction: Burnout as Mediator

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The Role of Commuting Stress on Job Satisfaction: Burnout as Mediator

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The Role of Commuting Stress on Job Satisfaction: Burnout As Mediator

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Abstract

This study examines the role of commuting stress on job satisfaction, with burnout as a mediating variable. Data were collected from 113 commuting employees in urban areas, primarily within Greater Jakarta, an area known for severe traffic congestion, using a quantitative approach. Participants completed three validated questionnaires: the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) for job satisfaction, the Multimodal Commuting Stress Scale (MCSS) for commuting stress, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) for burnout. Data were analyzed using SEM-PLS and processed using SmartPLS 4.0. The results indicate that CS has a direct negative effect on job satisfaction and is positively associated with burnout, which subsequently reduces job satisfaction. These findings confirm that burnout partially mediates the relationship between CS and job satisfaction. This study has practical implications for urban planning and organizational policy, emphasizing the need to consider commuting conditions as a key factor affecting employee well-being and productivity. By using a multidimensional scale to measure commuting stress, this research strengthens the understanding of psychological mechanisms linking commuting challenges to workplace outcomes.

Keywords

Commuting stress, burnout, job satisfaction, commuting employees, traffic congestion.

Commuting has become an integral part of the daily routines of employees, particularly in urban environments, where millions of workers travel considerable distances to and from their workplaces each day. Commuting refers to traveling between home and work within a specified distance and time frame (Zijlstra & Verhessel, 2021) and can also be defined as a series of movements connecting residential and work locations (Loo & Chow, 2010). Individuals who regularly travel between home and workplace are known as commuters, who may be classified as autochthonous—native residents commuting into the city—or allochthonous—those who previously lived in the city but later moved outside

it).

In large metropolitan areas, such as Jakarta, commuting has become a daily challenge due to severe traffic congestion. Rahardiansyah (2024) reported that traveling 10 kilometers in Jakarta takes an average of 23 min and 20 s, illustrating how congestion significantly prolongs travel time. Despite leaving early or taking alternative routes, commuters often encounter persistent traffic congestion. These conditions reflect the pressures commonly encountered during commuting.

Traffic conditions are the most common form of challenge/pressure encountered by commuters. They argue that even when they leave early and attempt to take shortcuts, they still encounter traffic jams. According to them, congestion knows no day (Kurnianto, 2024).

Researchers refer to such pressures as commuting stress, which involves physical fatigue, discomfort, insecurity, and other unfavorable

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commuting conditions (Useche et al., 2023). Zijlstra & Verhesteel (2021) found that commuting burden—especially commuting time—negatively affects individual well-being by influencing commuters' physical and mental conditions. Prior research has also shown that commuting stress reduces work engagement (Syahidillah & Archianti, 2019).

Although previous findings indicate that commuting stress reduces well-being, the psychological mechanism underlying this effect remains unclear,

Based on the above research (Zijlstra & Verhesteel, 2021), commuting stress can reduce well-being. However, the psychological mechanism by which commuting stress reduces well-being remains unexplained. Amponsah-Tawiah et al. (2016) contributed to this understanding by showing that commuting stress can lead to physical, emotional, and mental fatigue, commonly referred to as burnout. Their study demonstrated that burnout serves as an explanatory mechanism linking CS to lower job satisfaction.

However, their measure of commuting stress comprised only 10 unidimensional items, primarily focusing on time pressure and accident-related anxiety. In contrast, Useche et al. (2023) developed the Multimodal Commuting Stress Scale (MCSS), consisting of 21 items capturing four dimensions of commuting stress: (a) inefficiency and inconvenience, (b) unsafety and insecurity, (c) congestion and crowding, and (d) psychophysical strain. This broader measure provides a more comprehensive assessment of CS, particularly in urban contexts where diverse stressors co-exist.

This research, situated in an urban commuting context in which stressors such as congestion, crowding, and safety risks are highly prevalent, examines the role of commuting stress in predicting job satisfaction, with burnout as a mediator. Compared to the research of Amponsah-Tawiah et al. (2016), using 21 MCSS statement items, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive measurement of commuting stress across four domains: inefficiency/inconvenience, unsafety/insecurity, congestion/crowding, and psychophysical strain, a more comprehensive identification of commut-

ing stress, and insight for employees in making better efforts to anticipate various pressures/stresses while commuting. These stresses include inefficiency and inconvenience, unsafety, and insecurity, congestion and crowding, and psychophysical strain (Useche et al., 2023).

Several studies (Chng et al., 2016; Demiral, 2018; Hilbrecht et al., 2014; Mahudin & Diana, 2012) have discussed the impact of commuting stress on employees' psychological conditions. Mahudin & Diana (2012) noted that stress related to commuting directly affects job satisfaction. According to Hilbrecht et al. (2014), commuting stress impacts negative psychological experiences such as frustration, anxiety, hostility, and time pressure. These negative psychological experiences adversely affect performance and responsibilities at work if carried over into work. Chng et al. (2016) reported that long and tiring journeys can reduce employees' energy, lowering job satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Demiral (2018) defined commuting stress as perceived stress arising from the adverse effects of traveling to and from work, including reduced job satisfaction, motivation, happiness, and competitiveness.

Commuting to and from the workplace imposes physical and psychological demands on individuals, a phenomenon known as commuting stress. This excessive stress can lead to burnout. From a theoretical standpoint, burnout functions as a mediator because it represents the psychological mechanism through which external stressors—such as commuting stress—translate into negative work-related outcomes. Individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their personal resources, including physical energy, emotional stability, and cognitive capacity, according to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

Commuting stress, which involves prolonged exposure to congestion, unpredictability, and safety concerns, places continuous demands on these resources. Individuals are more likely to experience burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as these resources become depleted (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Burnout is defined as an unpleasant and dysfunctional condition associated with negative responses to work, such as job dissatis-

faction, low work commitment, and intention to leave work (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The various feelings experienced by individuals lead to a negative evaluation of the achievement of job targets, of superiors/colleagues, or of the responsibility tasks that must be completed. Higher burnout is associated with lower job satisfaction (Khan et al., 2020; Lestari & Setyaningrum, 2024; Xu & Wang, 2023). Based on the above thoughts, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Commuting stress is negatively associated with job satisfaction among commuting employees, such that higher commuting stress levels are associated with lower job satisfaction levels.

H2: Burnout mediates the relationship between CS and job satisfaction.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between CS and JS, with burnout as a mediating variable. The correlational design is appropriate for exploring statistical relationships among variables without manipulating them (Creswell, 2018).

Participant

Participants were 113 employees who had worked for at least 1 year and regularly commuted to work, with an average distance of 15 km (kilometers), requiring 1 h and 10 min of travel time under congested traffic conditions. Of these, 62% used public transportation, including buses, public minivans, KRL, MRT, LRT, and online motorcycle taxis; and 38% used private transportation, such as motorcycles or cars. Most participants were female (66%), aged 18–24 years (37%), held bachelor's degrees (66%), and were unmarried (62%).

Sampling Technique

The study used a non-probability, convenience sampling technique in which participants were recruited via social media platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Measures

In this study, three measuring instruments were used: a measuring instrument to measure job

satisfaction (Job Satisfaction), a measuring instrument for commuting stress, and a measuring instrument for burnout. The following paragraphs present psychometric information for the three measurement instruments.

Job Satisfaction. An adaptation of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was used to measure job satisfaction (Weiss et al., in Suyasa, 2007). The MSQ comprises 19 items. Each pair measures the following aspects: (a) urgency, which is the evaluation of the importance of a job facet; and (b) realization, which is the fulfillment of the related facet. An example of a statement on the urgency aspect is "Communicate freely (without feeling pressured) with superiors" Statements on the urgency aspect are scored from 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Important). An example of a statement on the realization aspect, "I can communicate/discuss with my superiors freely (without feeling pressured)"; statements on the realization aspect are scored from 1 (rarely) to 5 (often). The job satisfaction score was obtained by calculating the interaction between the urgency score and the realization score (Job satisfaction = $(\sum [\text{urgency score} \times \text{realization score}]/5)/19$). The higher the score, the greater the likelihood that the participants would experience job satisfaction. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the 19-item pairs was $\alpha = .985$, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Commuting Stress. The participants' level of commuting stress was assessed using items derived from the Multimodal Commuting Stress Scale (MCSS) (in Useche et al., 2023). This measure of commuting stress comprises 21 items, nine of which are positive and twelve negatives. The 21 items are structured by 4 indicators, namely: (a) inefficiency and inconvenience, (b) unsafety and insecurity, (c) congestion and crowding, and (d) psychophysical strain. The inefficiency and inconvenience indicator is measured using seven statement items. An example of an inefficiency and inconvenience statement item is "I witnessed/not witnessed criminal acts, harassment, or assault while traveling to/from work". The second indicator of unsafe and insecurity is measured using five statement items. An example of an unsafe and insecure statement item is "I often/rarely experience the risk of accidents or conflicts

with other users/vehicles when traveling to/from work". The third indicator of congestion and crowding is measured using four statement items. An example of a congestion and crowding statement item is "At the end of my journey to/from there, I feel physically tired/not tired". The fourth indicator of psychophysical strain is measured using five statement items. An example of a psychophysical strain statement item is "The time I spend on transport to/from work makes it difficult/not difficult to interact with my family/loved ones". The item is scored from 1 to 5; participants select the alternative response that best fits the statement in the item, e.g., the response witnessed, often, tired, difficult, etc. (scored 1); on the opposite side are the alternative responses of not witnessing, rarely, not tired, and not difficult (scored 5). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the 21-item commuting stress measure was 0.881.

Burnout. Measurement of burnout variables using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) measuring instrument (in Widhianingtanti, Lucia Trisni; Van Luijtelaar, 2022). The measuring instrument comprises 3 indicators (e.g., emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization), each with 22 statements. There are 7 positive statement items and 15 negative statement items in 22 statements. The emotional exhaustion indicator is measured using nine statements. An example of an emotional exhaustion statement item is "I often feel annoyed with my current job". The second indicator of personal accomplishment was measured using eight statements. An example of a personal accomplishment statement item is "I feel I have no ways/methods to make my work better.". The third indicator of depersonalization is measured using five statements. An example of a depersonalization statement is "I treat clients rather harshly, as if they are nobody to me". The items were rated on a 1-5 scale. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the 22 items was 0.855.

Based on the presentation of the psychometric properties' characteristics of the three measuring instruments, the Cronbach's alpha and CR values of the three measuring instruments are greater than 0.7 for all constructs. This indicates that the measurement instrument can

produce consistent and stable results with excellent reliability.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted on 3 - 19 November 2024. Data collection procedures in the study included: (i) preparing a questionnaire in the form of a G- Form. (ii) The G-Form was distributed to participants via social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram, as a direct access link. (iii) Participants read the request to participate in the study through an introduction and opening greeting, accompanied by informed consent to be voluntarily involved in the study.

In the informed consent, there is some information, namely: (a) The purpose of the research is stated in disguise, namely, to examine work behavior; (b) an offer to participants if they meet the specified criteria; (c) an explanation to participants that involvement in this study is voluntary; or prospective participants may refuse to participate if they have other activities, and participants are allowed to withdraw from filling out the questionnaire; (d) Each participant will receive a reward of Rp. 20,000 in the form of credit or electronic money; (e) If the participant wants the results of the study, it will be delivered personally by the researcher; (f) Participants are free of charge; (g) Confidentiality will be guaranteed in the personal data of participants.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Tarumanagara, under letter number 166- TIM/KEPTM/3841/FPsi-UNTAR/XI/2024.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SEM-PLS with Smart-PLS version 4.0, following standard procedures for examining direct and mediated relationships.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all research variables are presented (see table 1), including means, medians, and SDs. Based on these analyses, participants reported low levels of commuting stress ($M = 2.868$, $SD = 0.111$), low levels of burnout ($M = 2.642$, $SD = 0.061$), and high levels of job satisfaction ($M = 3.435$, $SD = 0.137$). Inefficiency

Table 1. Participants Characteristics Description

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Sex		
Male		
Female	75	66%
Age	34	30%
25 - 34 years	30	27%
35 - 44 years	7	6%
> 45 years	16	14%
Education	12	11%
SMA/SMK/Equivalent	75	66%
Diploma		
S1		
S2	10	9%
Marital	43	38%
Married		
Single	70	62%

and inconvenience had the highest scores among the dimensions of commuting stress, whereas unsafety and insecurity had the lowest scores. Subdimensions of commuting stress were not analyzed separately because the structural model was designed to treat commuting stress as a second-order construct, consistent with the MCSS's theoretical structure.

The Burnout variable has an average score of 2.642 ($SD = 0.061$), indicating that the overall level of work-related exhaustion among participants remains relatively low (see Table 2). A more detailed analysis of its indicator emotional exhaustion (mean = 2.410; $SD = 1.328$), depersonalization (mean = 2.256; $SD = 1.366$), and reduced personal accomplishment (mean = 2.530; $SD = 1.500$)—also places all three in the low category.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 2, commuting stress ($M = 2.868$, $SD = 0.111$) was negatively related to job satisfaction ($M = 3.435$, $SD = 0.137$), $\beta = -0.506$, $SE = 0.059$, $p < .001$. These results indicate that higher commuting stress levels are associated with lower employee job satisfaction levels, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2. A mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether burnout ($M = 2.642$, $SD = 0.061$) mediates the relationship between commuting stress ($M = 2.868$, $SD = 0.111$) and job satisfaction ($M = 3.435$, $SD = 0.137$). The indirect effect of commuting stress on job satisfaction through burnout was significant, $\beta = -0.226$, $SE = 0.036$, $p < .001$. This indicates that commuting stress increases burnout, which, in turn, decreases job satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Effect Sizes

Effect sizes (f^2) for each relationship (0.204–0.054) indicated medium to small effects. All factor loadings were statistically significant at $p < .001$, confirming convergent validity. The subdimensions of commuting stress were not analyzed separately because the structural model was designed to use commuting stress as a second-order construct, consistent with the MCSS theoretical structure. This rationale has been added for clarity.

Overall

The path analysis and mediation results remained significant, providing further support for both hypotheses (see Table 3).

Table 2. Description of Commuting Stress, Burnout, and Job Satisfaction Variables

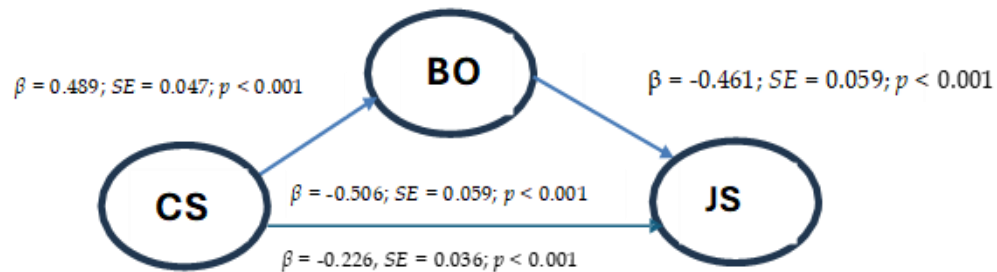
Variables & Indicators	Mean	SD	95% CI	Category
Commuting Stress (CS)	2.868	0.111	2.98 - 3.02	Low
Inefficiency and	2.894	1.372	2.75 - 3.25	Medium
Unsafety / Insecurity	2.487	1.122	2.79 - 3.21	Low
Congestion/Crowding	2.735	1.160	2.79 - 3.21	Low
Psychophysical Strain	2.841	1.252	2.77 - 3.23	Medium
Burnout (BO)	2.642	0.061	2.99 - 3.01	Low
Job Satisfaction (JS)	3.435	0.137	2.98 - 3.02	High

Note. Range of measurement scales (CS, BO, JS) = 1 - 5

Table 3. Results of multivariate linear regression models

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p-value	β	SE	p-value
CS $\rightarrow$ JS	-0,506	0,059	0,000			
CS $\rightarrow$ Burnout $\rightarrow$ JS				-0,226	0,036	0,000

Note. CS = Commuting Stress, JS = Job Satisfaction

**Figure 1.** Research Framework

Note. CS = Commuting Stress; BO = Burnout; JS = Job Satisfaction

Discussion

Commuting stress is negatively related to job satisfaction

Commuting stress was negatively associated with job satisfaction. Consistent with previous correlational findings (Han et al., 2022; Hansson et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), stressful commuting experiences—such as unpredictability, congestion, and discomfort—appear to negatively shape employees' perceptions of their work. This indicates that the higher the level of stress experienced by employees during the journey to and from work, the lower the level of job satisfaction felt. This result is in line with several previous studies, which state that work trips that cause psychological stress, such as traffic jams, uncertainty of travel time, and lack of comfort during travel, can have a negative impact on individuals' perceptions of their work (Han et al., 2022; Hansson et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Based on the descriptive analysis, the Commuting Stress variable showed an average score of 2.868 ($SD = 0.111$), indicating that overall, participants experienced relatively low levels of stress related to commuting. However, the examination of the constituent indicators reveals some noteworthy variations. The *Inefficiency and Inconvenience* indicator has an average score of 2.894 ($SD = 1.372$), placing it in the moderate category, suggesting that although the overall

commuting stress is low, a subset of participants experiences discomfort or inefficiency during their commute. In contrast, the *Unsafety/Insecurity* indicator had a low average score of 2.487 ($SD = 1.122$), indicating that most participants reported feeling safe while commuting. The *Congestion/Crowding* indicator also falls in the low category ($M = 2.735$, $SD = 1.160$), suggesting that traffic congestion or crowding is not perceived as a major source of stress for most respondents. Meanwhile, the *Psychophysical Strain* indicator has a moderate score ($M = 2.841$, $SD = 1.252$), implying that a notable portion of participants experience some degree of physical or psychological strain associated with commuting.

Overall, these findings indicate that while commuting stress is generally low among the participants, specific aspects of commuting, such as inefficiency and psychophysical strain, contribute more substantially to perceived stress. This highlights the importance of examining commuting stress subdimensions to identify areas that may require intervention, even when overall stress levels appear low.

Commuting stress not only predicts physical conditions, such as fatigue, but also increases irritability and decreases work motivation. This can lead to lower performance and increased intention to leave the job in the long run. Thus, commuting stress can be a significant risk factor

for reduced job satisfaction, particularly in work environments that require regular physical presence. Murphy et al. (2022) found that commuting stress, including commuting time and traffic congestion, affects employee well-being, job satisfaction, health, and personal time use. Meanwhile, Emre & De Spiegeleare (2019) in their research on work-life balance mentioned that commuting stress interferes with employees' personal time or freedom. Employees who experience CS are more likely to feel depressed and dissatisfied with their jobs.

The results align with prior findings that CS has a detrimental effect on employee outcomes. In an urban setting where commuting is often unavoidable, the stress experienced in daily travel has broader implications for organizational policies. Companies in urban areas may consider flexible work arrangements, remote work policies, or commuting support programs.

Burnout Mediates the Relationship between Commuting Stress and Job Satisfaction

This study also demonstrated that burnout mediates the relationship between CS and job satisfaction. The results are consistent with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals strive to maintain their psychological resources. Prolonged commuting stress depletes these resources, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, which in turn lowers job satisfaction. This is consistent with the findings of Amponsah-Tawiah et al. (2016).

This finding indicates that participants do not experience substantial emotional fatigue, cynicism toward their work, or significant declines in personal accomplishment, which constitute the core dimensions of burnout as conceptualized in prior research. According to Maslach et al., burnout comprises three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism (or depersonalization), and reduced personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 2009).

Meanwhile, the job satisfaction variable, categorized as high, indicates that most participants are satisfied with their jobs. This finding indicates that, despite moderate levels of commuting stress, participants' job satisfaction remains high, and commuting-related stress does not significantly diminish overall job satisfaction.

Burnout, which includes exhaustion, negative attitudes toward others (depersonalization), and feelings of inadequacy or a decline in personal accomplishment at work, significantly mediates the relationship between commuting stress and job satisfaction. This finding indicates that stress during the journey to and from work depletes individuals' psychological resources, thereby reducing job satisfaction. Amponsah-Tawiah et al. (2016) showed that commuting stress is positively related to burnout and turnover and indirectly related to job satisfaction through burnout.

This study extends the application of COR theory to urban commuting contexts and offers empirical support for burnout as a mediating factor in organizational psychology. Organizations should recognize the impact of commuting on their workforce. These findings underscore the importance of considering commuting as an occupational stressor in organizational policy and urban planning.

Conclusions

This study concludes that CS is associated with lower job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly through burnout. These findings highlight burnout as a key psychological mechanism linking daily commuting conditions to WB.

Employees experiencing high levels of commuting-related stress are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, diminishes their job satisfaction. These findings are especially relevant in urban settings where commuting challenges are prominent and emphasize the psychological toll of urban commuting and highlight burnout as a crucial mechanism through which commuting stress reduces job satisfaction.

Burnout mediates the effect of commuting stress on job satisfaction. Commuting stress indirectly affects job satisfaction by increasing burnout.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting this study's findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships among CS, burnout, and JS. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data, which may be subject to common-method bias and social desirability bias.

Third, the sample was relatively small and drawn from a single cultural context, potentially limiting the results' generalizability to other populations or settings. Fourth, the study treated commuting stress as a second-order construct without analyzing its subdimensions separately in the structural model, which may have obscured specific relationships between stressors and outcomes. Finally, the study did not account for potential moderating variables, such as individual coping strategies or organizational support, which could influence the observed relationships.

Suggestion

Building on the present study's limitations, future research could adopt longitudinal designs to better capture the causal relationships among commuting stress, burnout, and job satisfaction. The incorporation of larger, more culturally diverse samples would enhance the generalizability of the findings across diverse work contexts. Additionally, examining the subdimensions of commuting stress separately may provide a more nuanced understanding of the specific stressors that most strongly influence employee outcomes. Future studies could also include moderating or mediating variables, such as coping strategies, resilience, or organizational support, to clarify the mechanisms through which CS affects BO and JS. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive and refined understanding of the factors that influence employee well-being in relation to commuting experiences.

Conflict of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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