



# Understanding the Psychological Pathways between Despotic Leadership and Medical Practitioners Burnout: A Mediated Moderated Model

Sundas Khokhar<sup>1\*</sup>, Sami Ullah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Department of Business Administration, University of Sialkot  
[Sundas.khokhar3@gmail.com](mailto:Sundas.khokhar3@gmail.com)

Article Information	Abstract
<b>Article history:</b> Submitted: 15 <sup>th</sup> December, 2025 Accepted: 27 <sup>th</sup> December, 2025 Published: 31 <sup>st</sup> December, 2025	<i>Burnout among medical doctors is a critical occupational challenge. In high-pressure health care environments, the leadership practices shape professional and personal well-being. Drawing on the theories of conservation of resource, social cognitive and work-family spillover model, the study examines work-family conflict as mediator and self-efficacy as a moderator between despotic leadership and burnout. Data were collected from 364 doctors working in public and private sector of Lahore and Sialkot. The hypothesis testing was done using SMART-PLS 4. Results revealed that despotic leadership positively associates with work-family conflict and burnout. Moreover, work-family conflict was shown to partially mediate the relationship between despotic leadership and burnout. The moderating results showed that self-efficacy does not moderate the direct relationship between despotic leadership and burnout but significantly dampens the negative effect of despotic leadership on work-family conflict as well as the indirect effect of work-family conflict on burnout. These findings highlight that toxic leadership style not only directly depletes doctors' psychological resources, but also disrupts their work-life balance which leads to high burnout. The study contributes to the negative leadership style and well-being in the healthcare sector. It also explores the role of self-efficacy as a personal resource which can buffer the negative effect of despotic leadership.</i>
Volume No. 05 Issue No. 02 ISSN: 2790-7899	
<b>Keywords:</b> Burnout; Despotic Leadership; Work-family conflict; Self-efficacy; Healthcare professionals	

## Introduction

Burnout in the medical profession has become a widespread occupational concern. It reflects high level of job demands, emotional labor and time pressures which are reflected in doctors' job (Taranu et al., 2022). The consequences of burnout are severe, affecting well-being of medical professionals and also the quality of patient care and the healthcare system as a whole. The following research delve into the effect of negative leadership style on doctors' burnout using a mediating and moderation model.

Leadership is key in influencing employee attitudes, well-being, and general organizational effectiveness (Murphy, 2024). Although most of the literature has focused on a positive view of leadership styles, there is a new body of literature that has focused on the negative aspect of leadership and the detrimental effects on employees well-being (Octavian, 2023). Despotic leadership is a toxic forms of leadership that has attracted a growing academic concern because of the dire psychological consequences of such leadership on the subordinates (Iqbal et al., 2022). Despotic leaders in the context of high-pressure work environments (e.g., health care, education, and service-based workplaces) can help establish a culture of fear and stress and put the staff in a state of chronic stress and emotional burnout (Khizar et al., 2023).

Work-family conflict (WFC) is one of the important ways, in which despotic leadership can impose its will on employee performance (Nauman et al., 2021). When leaders make unrealistic expectations, express aggression, or neglect the welfare of the employees, the infiltration to personal life is nearly unavoidable (Modise, 2023). Employees usually find it difficult to balance between their professional and family lives, which is why there is a conflict between the two areas. According to previous studies, this role interference is a robust predictor of burnout, an emotional exhaustion state, cynicism, and diminishing professional efficacy (Nazir et al., 2022). Therefore, WFC can be a significant route between despotic leadership and burnout, but this mediating factor is a little-researched topic in empirical studies

Simultaneously, the negative impact of toxic leadership can be mitigated with the help of individual-level resources, including self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, which is a belief of one having the capacity to manage demands, challenges, and stressors (Khan & Saeed, 2024). With increased self-efficacy, employees can be in a better position to endure leader mistreatment, conflicting roles, and ensure the escalation of stress in work does not become family conflict or emotional burnout (Orgambidez et al., 2025). But not much is known on how self-efficacy interacts with despotic leadership to affect WFC, burnout, or indirect relationships between the two (Zhou et al., 2021).

Based on these gaps, the paper explores the direct, indirect, and moderated relationships between despotic leadership, WFC, burnout, and self-efficacy. In particular, we focus on the questions of whether despotic leadership augments WFC and burnout, whether WFC serves as an intermediary in the connection between leadership and burnout, and whether self-efficacy mitigates the adverse outcomes (Naseer et al., 2023; Pandey et al., 2025). In addition, we examine a moderated form of mediation to establish whether an indirect effect of despotic leadership on burnout through WFC differs by levels of self-efficacy (Rafiq et al., 2023). Combining the variables, this study would give a better insight into the role of toxicity in the workplace that transfers into personal life and eventually results in burnout, and how individual psychological resources can alleviate the process. The research study makes its contribution to the body of research on destructive leadership and employee well-being by providing both the empirical support of the mechanisms and the conditions of the boundaries of the hypotheses of the relationship between despotic leadership and burnout (Khizar et al., 2023).

## **Literature Review**

### **Despotic Leadership:**

Despotic leadership is a devastating leadership style where the leaders take advantage of the followers in order to serve their own interests, they are autocratic and egocentric and concentrate in supremacy at the depleting the energy of their

subordinates and causing harm to the organization. Despotic leaders have been termed as arrogant, bossy, manipulative, and unforgiving, which make the work environment to be stressful and uncertain. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, it can be seen that the workers under the reign of the despotic leaders experience a threat to their personal and emotional resources, which has a variety of adverse effects.

### **Despotic Leadership and WFC:**

There is ample evidence that there is a positive correlation between despotic leadership and WFC in the existing literature. The despotism behavior on employees leads to the enhanced work stress and emotional drainage that drains the energy and time reservoir of the employees to meet family demands. This home-based scarcity, which is an immediate consequence of the challenging and unfriendly working conditions preconditioned by the despotic leaders, causes increased WFC (Mehmood et al., 2023). Research has established that tyrannical leaders have negative impacts on the non-work life of their subordinates, which manifests more under some circumstances.

The despotic leadership is a devastating style of leadership that is authoritarian, exploitative, manipulative, and insensitive to the well-being of the followers (Naseer et al., 2023). These leaders require blind compliance, often intimidate their subordinates, and establish psychologically hostile workplaces that suck out the emotional and cognitive resources of the staff. According to the COR theory, the workers in the setting of the despotic leadership face the continual drain of resources, which results into role overload and strain.

There is evidence of a positive association between despotic leadership and WFC. Indicatively, Naseer et al. (2023) have shown that despotic leadership is a major contributor to the WFC among employees because of the emotional exhaustion and strain of resources. Xu and Yang (2021), on the same note, established the spillover of authoritarian and destructive leadership styles into the home sphere of employees related to the enhanced stress and lack of coping resources. Such results conform to the spillover theory, which states that work-related negative affect and strain are spilled over to family life (Yucel & Borgmann, 2022).

**H1:** Despotic Leadership and WFC are positively related

### **Despotic Leadership and Burnout in Employees**

Employee burnout, in particular, emotional exhaustion, being one of the fundamental dimensions of burnout, is a significant antecedent of despotic leadership. Tyrannical leaders provide a difficult environment and cause unnecessary stress, which burns the psychological and emotional strengths of employees in the long run. It has been proven that there is a strong direct and positive correlation between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion (Akhtar et al., 2025; Naseer et al., 2023). This continuous exposure to bad leadership practices makes the employees exhausted, fed up, and incapable of handling work requirements.

Burnout is a mental disorder that includes emotional weakening, depersonalization, and a lack of personal achievement (Nadon et al., 2022). One of the best predictors of burnout is style of leadership. Despotic leadership has been depicted to increase employee stress, emotional fatigue and finally burn out (De Clercq et al., 2021) in a study investigating the different types of dark leadership established that

abusive and exploitative behaviors exhibited by leaders led to a tremendous growth in burnout symptoms amongst the subordinates. Similarly, Peng and Huang (2024) opined that authoritarian leaders exhaust mental resources, increasing the level of emotional fatigue, as one of the major elements of burnout. Therefore, theoretical and empirical justification of H2 exists.

**H2: Despotic Leadership and Employee Burnout are positively related**

**WFC and Employee Burnout:**

WFC has a positive correlation with employee burnout, that is, emotional exhaustion. This tension between work and family matters produces a lot of psychological stress and drainage of resources (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999). In cases when people fail to satisfy the requirements of both spheres, they feel stressed and exhausted, which is a part of the general burnout. Failure to get back resources after work because of family wrangles compounded by work stress makes the experience of burnout worse.

The work-family conflict is among the most reliable predictors of burnout. WFC arises when the work and family roles conflict with each other. Much of the evidence shows that employees with high WFC feel high exhaustion, depersonalization, and lowered well-being. As an example, Allen et al. (2000) established that WFC is one of the best predictors of job strain and burnout. Other more recent studies also substantiate the fact that WFC will result in emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction.

The conceptual basis of COR theory is a good one: WFC is a significant resource loss, which leads to continuous stress and resulting burnout.

**H3: WFC and Employee Burnout are positively related**

**WFC as a Mediator:**

Based on the foregoing, WFC will likely mediate the connection between despotic leadership and employee burnout. According to the literature, the stress caused by despotic leadership initially results in the emotional exhaustion (a factor of burnout), which then transfers to the home area and generates WFC. Nevertheless, the study has also revealed that despotic leadership correlates with WFC through an emotional exhaustion showing a complicated interaction between the two variables where emotional exhaustion is the mediating variable between the despotic leadership-WFC relationship (Nauman et al., 2021). The proposed hypothesis is that there is a mediation between despotic leadership and WFC, which in turn results in burnout. The sequential direction of this way is in line with the COR theory since loss of resources in one aspect (work) influences management of resources in another aspect (family).

Since despotic leadership raises WFC and WFC leads to burnout, researchers are growing in their arguments that leadership mediates between leadership and outcomes of well-being. The studies of destructive leadership tend to reveal that role conflict, emotional fatigue and work-family imbalance are likely to mediate the relationship between leadership behaviors and burnout. Indicatively, Tepper (2000) demonstrated that abusive supervision is an indirect cause of burnout through a rise in stress and depletion in emotional resources.

Despite the fact that there is a lack of direct research on despotic leadership - WFC - burnout, the theoretical justification is high: despotism consumes the resources of employees, which is associated with WFC, and the sustained WFC causes burnout.

**H4: WFC mediates the relationship between Despotic Leadership and Burnout.**

### **Self-Efficacy as a Moderator:**

A very important moderating factor may be self-efficacy which is the conviction that an individual can perform the actions that would lead to achieving certain performance outcomes.

Increased self-efficacy supplies greater coping skills and strength in employees to overcome tough situations. High self-efficacy individuals may see the requirements of a despotic leader as a challenge and not an inescapable threat, which can possibly reduce the harmful effect on their WFC. Thus, an increased self-efficacy will negatively affect the positive correlation between despotic leadership and WFC, and a reduced self-efficacy, in turn, related to a higher sense of vulnerability and loss of resources, will have a positive influence on the relationship.

Self-efficacy is the belief that people have in their capability to handle the tasks and demands. It is generally viewed as a personal strength tool that cushions the impact of stressors. Patients who have a positive self-efficacy better manage the unfavorable circumstances, have lower stress levels, and their psychology functions well.

It has been shown to have a buffering effect in the work-family area. As an example, Siu et al. (2005) discovered that self-efficacy decreases the effects of job stressors on strain. Equally, the authors established that the negative impacts of job demand on emotional exhaustion are alleviated by personal resources such as self-efficacy.

In the context of the leadership, the self-efficacy has been demonstrated to undermine the impacts of the abusive leadership on the negative outcomes. Thus, employees who have greater self-efficacy might be well prepared to deal with stressors generated by despotic leadership, which leads to reduced WFC. This discussion supports

**H5a:** Self-efficacy negatively moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and Burnout, such that higher self-efficacy weakens the relationship, while lower self-efficacy strengthens it.

**H5b:** Self-efficacy negatively moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and work-family conflict, such that higher self-efficacy weakens the relationship, while lower self-efficacy strengthens it.

### **Moderated Mediation:**

The literature confirms the belief that personal differences, including self-efficacy, can have an impact on the reaction of the employees to despotic leadership and the resultant stress mechanisms. It is probable that self-efficacy will mediate the whole indirect impact of despotic leadership on burnout through WFC. In the presence of high self-efficacy, employees are more capable of dealing with the demands, as well as be able to take the edge off the adverse consequences of the leaders behavior, reducing the indirect route to burnout. On the other hand, in employees with low self-efficacy, the impact of despotic leadership on WFC and further burnout is further intensified and the influence is indirect (Khan & Saeed, 2024). The existing literature has examined self-efficacy as an intermediary in a few other settings (e.g., despotic leadership and job satisfaction), but its moderating function in the WFC-burnout relationship in the despotic leadership paradigm should be examined.

When the despotic leadership - WFC relationship is buffered by self-efficacy, then it should also reduce the indirect relationship on burnout downstream. This is in line with the COR theory which opines that individual resources narrow down the

resource-loss cycles (Bandura, 1997). In low self-efficacy employees, the despotic leadership will not disrupt the functioning of their families as much and thus will not cause burnout.

Findings in related areas in research favors moderated mediation. Indicatively, identified that the personal resources mediated the indirect relationships between job demands and burnout via strain (Bakker et al., 2010). Even though there are no specific pieces of evidence concerning mentally oppressive leadership, there is a strong theoretical rationale behind H6: the indirect impact of despotic leadership on burnout through WFC is more pronounced when there is low self-efficacy and weaker when there is high self-efficacy.

**H6:** Self-efficacy moderates the indirect relationship between despotic leadership and burnout via WFC such that the indirect effect is stronger when self-efficacy is low and diminished when self-efficacy is high.

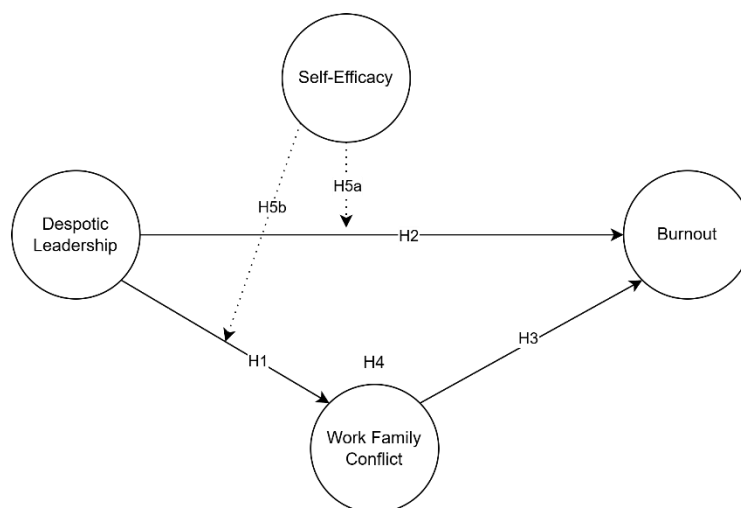


Figure 1: Diagram of the Framework

## Methodology

### Research Design and Sampling:

The target population of this study comprised of medical doctors in public and private hospitals across two cities of Punjab, Lahore and Sialkot. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine key psychological and leadership-related constructs among doctors working in public and private hospitals. The survey link (Google Form) and printed questionnaires were distributed through hospital administrations, departmental focal persons, and professional medical networks. A snowball sampling approach was employed and the participants were encouraged to share with doctors' colleagues.

The questionnaire had introduction and informed consent in the beginning. participation was entirely voluntarily. Participants were ensured that their confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. There is no personally identifiable

information was collected. Responses were to be used strictly for academic purposes and analyzed in aggregate form.

A one month span of data collection yielded a total responses of 385 to questionnaires. The data screening process consisted of incomplete responses, unengaged responses, and missing values. Therefore, a total of 364 questionnaires were retained for analysis. The final sample had 66.5% female and 33.5% males. Of the total, 51.1% were unmarried and 48.6% married. There was a higher representation of young doctors with 62.6% falling between 26-29%. The 51.5% represented public sector and 48.4% represented the private sector.

### **Measurement Instruments:**

The survey comprised 4 sections measured primarily on 5-point Likert scales. Scales were adopted from previous research. For despotic leadership, we used the scale by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Burnout was measured with 5 items of depersonalization and seven items of emotional exhaustion dimensions of Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1997). For WFC we used scale by work-family conflict scale by (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Finally self-efficacy was captured by generalized self-efficacy scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1995)

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis followed a two-step approach recommended for PLS-SEM. We used SMARTPLS 4 to assess both the measurement model and the structural model. In the first stage, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure that study constructs had sufficient reliability and validity (convergent and discriminant). In the second stage, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized relationships. The analysis included estimating direct effects, indirect (mediation) effects, and moderation effects through interaction terms. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was performed to obtain the significance levels, confidence intervals, and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) of the path coefficients. The explanatory power of the model was evaluated using  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  values for the endogenous constructs, while predictive relevance was assessed using the CV-PAT procedure.

### **Measurement Model Analysis:**

**Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics**

Construct	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Burnout	0.57	0.82	0.69
Despotic Leadership	0.94	0.95	0.76
Self-Efficacy	0.89	0.92	0.65
WFC	0.94	0.95	0.80

Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Table 1 shows the results of the reliability and validity of the measurement model. All the construct meet the threshold for composite reliability ( $CR > 0.7$ ). Therefore, CR indicates that all the constructs have sufficient internal consistency. Similarly, except for burnout ( $\alpha = .57$ ), all of the constructs had adequate Cronbach Alpha values. However for burnout this is not problematic because CR is considered a better indicator of reliability in SEM (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The AVE values as shown in the Table 1 also depicts sufficient convergent value because they exceed the benchmark of 0.5.

**Table 2: Discriminant Validity Using Fornell–Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratios**

Construct	Burnout	Despotic Leadership	Self-Efficacy	WFC
Burnout	<b>0.831</b>	0.668	0.308	0.553
Despotic Leadership	0.484	<b>0.873</b>	0.088	0.267
Self-Efficacy	–0.233	–0.069	<b>0.807</b>	0.134
WFC	0.452	0.252	–0.129	<b>0.892</b>

*Note: Diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE. Below the diagonal are Fornell–Larcker correlations, and above the diagonal are HTMT ratios.*

Table 2 depicts the results of discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. The diagonal values, Square root of AVE, are higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations below the diagonal, indicating that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs, thereby satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the HTMT values (above the diagonal in the table) are all well below the conservative threshold of 0.85, demonstrating that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another (Henseler et al., 2015). Taken together, these results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 3: Direct Effects, Confidence Intervals, and Effect Sizes ( $f^2$ )**

Path	$\beta$	p-value	95% CI	$f^2$
Despotic Leadership → Burnout	0.38	.000	[0.297, 0.456]	0.20
Despotic Leadership → WFC	0.29	.000	[0.203, 0.378]	0.09
Self-Efficacy → Burnout	–0.16	.001	[–0.248, –0.080]	0.04
Self-Efficacy → WFC	–0.13	.019	[–0.232, –0.030]	0.02
WFC → Burnout	0.34	.000	[0.248, 0.423]	0.17
Self-Efficacy × Despotic Leadership → Burnout	0.04	.243	[–0.056, 0.129]	0.00
Self-Efficacy × Despotic Leadership → WFC	–0.18	.005	[–0.282, –0.059]	0.03

Table 3 shows the direct effects, confidence intervals, and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) of the structural model. Despotic leadership has a significant positive effect on both burnout ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and WFC ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a medium ( $f^2 = 0.20$ ) and small ( $f^2 = 0.09$ ) effect sizes, respectively. Therefore, H2 and H1 were accepted. Self-efficacy demonstrates significant negative effects on burnout ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and WFC ( $\beta = -0.13$ ,  $p = .019$ ), although the effect sizes for these paths are small ( $f^2 = 0.04$  and  $0.02$ ). WFC also significantly predicts burnout ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.17$ ), indicating that higher WFC contributes meaningfully to increased burnout. Therefore H3 is accepted.

For the interaction terms, the moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between despotic leadership and burnout is not significant ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $p = .243$ ). However, self-efficacy significantly and negatively moderates the path from despotic leadership to WFC ( $\beta = -0.18$ ,  $p = .005$ ). This shows that moderation hypothesis H5a is rejected but H5b is accepted. Figure 2 shows the graph for the moderating role of self-efficacy between despotic leadership and WFC. The slope lines



for -1 SD to +1 SD shows high self-efficacy weakens the impact of despotic leadership on WFC. In conclusion, while despotic leadership and WFC are strong predictors of burnout, self-efficacy primarily plays a buffering role in reducing the impact of despotic leadership on WFC rather than on burnout.

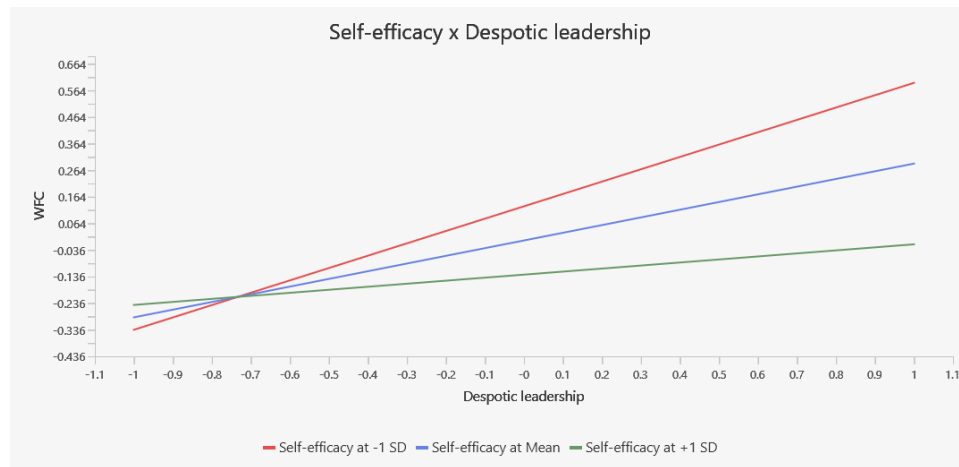


Figure 2: Slope Analysis of Moderation

Table 4 shows the results of the mediation analysis. WFC significantly mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and burnout ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, H4 is accepted. Similarly, WFC mediates the effect of self-efficacy on burnout ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $p = .022$ ). The results also indicate significant mediation of the interaction term (mediation-moderation). Self-efficacy x despotic leadership shows a significant indirect effect through WFC ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Hence H6 was also accepted.

**Table 4: Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects, p-values, and Confidence Intervals)**

Indirect Path	$\beta$	p-value	95% CI
Despotic Leadership $\rightarrow$ WFC $\rightarrow$ Burnout	0.10	.000	[0.061, 0.140]
Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ WFC $\rightarrow$ Burnout	-0.04	.022	[-0.080, -0.010]
Self-Efficacy $\times$ Despotic Leadership $\rightarrow$ WFC $\rightarrow$ Burnout	-0.06	.009	[-0.101, -0.019]

Table 5 presents the results of predictive relevance using CV-PAT along with the explanatory power of the model. For both endogenous constructs, PLS loss values are lower than IA loss values, and the average loss differences are negative and statistically significant. This indicates that the PLS model demonstrates superior out-of-sample predictive performance compared to the IA benchmark. Specifically, the predictive relevance for Burnout (Average Loss Difference =  $-0.174$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and WFC (Average Loss Difference =  $-0.078$ ,  $p = .018$ ) shows that the model has meaningful predictive accuracy for both constructs.

In terms of explanatory power, the  $R^2$  values for Burnout ( $R^2 = 0.378$ ) and WFC ( $R^2 = 0.103$ ) fall within the acceptable range for behavioral research. These results reflect moderate explanatory power for Burnout and weak but acceptable explanatory power for WFC. The adjusted  $R^2$  values closely align with the  $R^2$  values, indicating model stability without overfitting.

**Table 5: Predictive relevance (CV-PAT) and Explanatory power (R<sup>2</sup>)**

Construct	PLS Loss	IA Loss	Average Difference	Loss t-value	P-value	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted
Burnout	0.832	1.006	-0.174	4.867	.000	0.378	0.371
WFC	1.162	1.240	-0.078	2.369	.018	0.103	0.095
Overall	1.067	1.173	-0.106	3.727	.000	—	—

Note. Negative values in "Average Loss Difference" indicate that PLS performs better (lower loss) than IA

Overall, the findings suggest that the structural model not only explains a meaningful proportion of variance in the key outcomes but also exhibits strong predictive capability relative to the IA benchmark.

## Discussion

### Overview of the Findings:

This research paper has investigated the correlations between Despotic Leadership, WFC, Employee Burnout as well as Self-Efficacy using a structural model based on Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) and Work-Family Spillover models (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). All the direct effect and mediating hypothesized relationships (H1-H4) and show that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and WFC and also moderates the mediated effect of WFC leading to Burnout. These results can be used as valuable theoretical and practical information on how negative leadership practices cause psychological strain, and cross-domain stress to employees.

The findings indicate that a tyrannical form of leadership has a substantial positive effect on the experience of WFC by employees. This result is consistent with previous research that identified that the environments created by the destructive leaders are demanding and emotionally exhausting that compelling the employees to devote disproportional resources to work, leaving them with limited time and energy to perform the role of family members (Tepper, 2000). Intimidation, monitoring, and coercion are common methods used by such leaders and increase anxiety and psychological work engagement outside of official working hours.

Despotic leadership increases role demands, emotional tension that spills over and extends to family life (Aryee et al., 1999). Workers with dictatorial leaders are forced to be available all the time which brings a clash between work and family time.

Moreover, the analysis established a strong positive relationship between despotic leadership and burnout. This corresponds to the long history of research in which toxic leadership styles negatively affect the well-being of the employees, increase stress and foster emotional fatigue (Nauman et al., 2021). Under the COR Theory, fear, uncertainty, and constant vigilance by the despotic leadership deplete the psychological resources of the employees (Hobfoll, 1989). The natural result of the continuous depletion of resources without replacement is burnout. Totalitarian leaders can instigate uncertainty and punitive working environments, which diminishes the feeling of control in the employees, a factor that leads to chronic stress.

It has been substantially proven that WFC contributes significantly to burnout. This affirms the decades of research that inter-role conflict reduces the capacity of employees to participate in recovery behavior that would make them psychologically

healthy (Allen et al., 2000). Work that infiltrates the family life causes the employees to experience increased stress, reduced emotional support and reduced chances of disengaging themselves with the work demands.

According to the Work-Family Spillover Model, the experiences negatively experienced in one area are carried along to another, which raises the strain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) Workers with work-related stressors will be unable to meet their family needs, which will result in the development of guilt, dissatisfaction, and emotional depletion- all the causes of burnout.

The findings of the mediation show that WFC mediately partly provides the despotic leadership-burnout relationship. It implies that despotic leaders do not only act as the direct cause of burnout, but they also play an indirect role in burnout through enhancing WFC. This agrees with the fact that leadership effects go beyond the work place and may interfere with personal and family functioning (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999) The partial mediation proposes that there exist two parallel pathways:

Direct emotional influence - Despotic leadership creates psychological stress which brings on burnout.

Indirect cross-domain pathway-- Despotic leadership enhances WFC which subsequently results in burnout.

These findings lend credence to Stress Spillover Theory which posits that stress in one area of life influences functioning in another (Usman et al., 2020). Therefore, partial mediation is established.

The moderation is found to be that self-efficacy undermines the positive influence of despotic leadership on WFC. This is in line with Buffering Hypothesis which states that personal resources minimize the adverse impacts of stressors (Tremblay & Messervey, 2011). High self-efficacy employees have an advantage to handle challenging tasks and manage their emotions and boundaries between work and family. Individuals with high self-efficacy believe and act more like the behaviour of a despot as a challenge and never take it as a threat (Bandura, 1997), take on proactive coping measures and do not allow work stress to seep into their personal lives.

On the other hand, low-self-efficacy employees are more vulnerable to encountering the WFC situation when they are led by despotic leaders because they do not possess the self-confidence to handle conflicting demands.

Although, contrary to our exaptation self-efficacy was not moderator when it comes to relationship between despotic leadership and burnout. the moderated mediation test proves that self-efficacy moderates the intensity of the indirect relationship between despotic leadership and burnout through WFC. Specifically: In low self-efficacy, despotic leadership has a significant positive impact on WFC, which in turn results in greater burnout. With a high level of self-efficacy, the indirect impact is much less, which implies that employees with high levels of self-efficacy can suppress the work-related pressure more easily than it will evolve into burnout.

This observation is consistent with the general body of knowledge on personal resources which indicates that self-efficacy positively correlates with the development of resilience, emotion regulation and boundary management in various areas of life (Siu et al., 2005) The findings highlight the importance of self-efficacy in reducing the negative impacts of despotic leadership, but it does not eliminate the impact of the work stress on family strain and burnout.

### **General Discussion:**

This paper aimed at examining the intricate workings between Despotic Leadership, WFC, Employee Burnout, and Self-Efficacy in the workplace. The results

are constantly employed in proposing that despotic leadership is a robust predictor of both WFC and burnout that validates the fact that the adverse influence of toxic supervisory behavior is far-reaching. Despotic leaders create the environment of fear, low autonomy, unpredictability and strain. Such circumstances not only exhaust psychological capacities of the staff but also distort the capacity of the employees to balance work and family. The positive significant correlation between despotic leadership and burnout affirms literature that demonstrates that a destructive leader has no motivational power, job satisfaction and emotional strength among employees.

Another conclusion in the paper is that WFC is a highly significant intermediary variable between despotic leadership and burnout relationship. This raises a major cross-domain process: The strain created by bad leaders does not confine itself to the work place but it extends into the family life of the employees making them feel overworked and more burnt. The semi-mediation that is observable in this study implies that burnout is both directly caused by emotional strain because of despotic leadership and indirectly caused by inter-role conflict. The provided result justifies the significance of investigating the issue of leadership in employment and in regards to its broader effects on individual wellbeing.

The discovery of self-efficacy as one of the protective personal resources is also one of the most critical contributions of this study. The findings show that self-efficacy plays a significant role in WFC and burnout and as a buffer that subdues the negative role of despotic leadership. Employees with higher self-efficacy would be able to cope with their emotions, reconcile the conflicting demands, and escape work stresses as one of their family aspects. Moreover, the mediating role of the despotic leadership on the burnout via WFC is mediated by self-efficacy, i.e. the personal confidence in the possibility to execute decreases the entire process of stress. Despite that fact that self-efficacy does not counteract the real emotional damage caused by the despotic leaders, it reduces the probability of work stress being transferred to personal area hence reducing the burnout.

Taken together, the findings present the importance of radical shifts in leadership behavior as a contributor to employee well-being. In the research, it is apparent that the toxic leadership is not only impactful on the job performance, it is infamous in its relation to the functioning of the family, the emotional stability, and the psychological well-being of the workers in the long-term. Firms that fail to address the issue of despotic leadership are likely to create a habitually stressful work environment which decreases employee engagements, retention and performance.

The practical implication of this research is that, to take proactive steps to avoid the occurrence of despotic leadership and offer healthier working environments organizations must take into account proactive actions. Emphasis on leadership training, ethical governance, open communication and supportive supervisory behavior should be enabled to reduce WFC and prevent burnout. Moreover, the fact that self-efficacy was found to be a buffering factor can also indicate that programs related to the growth of personal resources, such as coaching, mentoring, and resilience-building programs, may also serve as helpful tools to have the employees go through the problematic leadership situations.

Despite the multitude contributions of the study, it also gives direction into the potential research in the future. This model explains that there are large burnout differences and relatively minor differences in WFC, further implying that the model has many more factors, which should be further taken into account in the future research. Longitudinal design/ multi-wave study would also be more practical in terms of causal

inference and provide a clearer picture of the dynamics of the relationships over the time.

On the whole, such a study sheds some light on a series of events after which tyrannical leadership contributes significantly to burning the employees and how personal resources can mitigate, but not entirely swing the undesirable effects, to its negative effects. The understanding of the significance of the WFC and the role of self-efficacy enable the organizations and researchers to gain a better understanding of the stress of working and develop more comprehensive strategies that will enhance the health of the employees. Lastly, the findings justify the hypothesis that to achieve resilience, healthy, and sustainable working conditions, there is need to foster encouraging leadership and empower employees with individual resources.

### **Theoretical Contributions:**

The given study enriches the knowledge of destructive leadership because it shows it influences not only WFC but also burnout, which confirms the existing evidence that despotic leadership creates pressure on the working and personal life of employees especially when it comes to medical profession. Nevertheless, the use of established theories and measures make it possible to generalize the finding of the study (Lucas, 2003). The use of WFC as a mediating factor progresses the work-family interface theory because it indicates how toxic leadership interferes with the boundaries of the family and overall well-being. The results also further develop the personal resource theory as it shows that self-efficacy not only minimizes WFC and burnout but also mediates the direct relationship between leadership and WFC, but not able to completely mitigate the direct emotional damage of despotic leaders. The moderated mediation findings have conceptual addition as they bring to the fore the nature of interaction between personal resources and the toxic leadership to bring about other effects on employee outcomes that are more complex than just direct.

### **Practical Implications:**

The findings affirm that the hospital administration need to enhance leadership selection and development to avert disruptive tendencies and support ethical and positive supervision. The spillover of work stress can be limited by improving the work-family support, i.e. flexible schedules, lower number of after-hours work requirements, and workload management. Training and mentoring employees can also help them increase their self-efficacy, which can also decrease their susceptibility to stress transmission. A consistent observation of burnout and WFC, especially in a team with authoritarian supervisors, may help in early intervention and prevention against long-term injury.

### **Limitations:**

The cross-sectional design cannot cause an inference, and future researches must use longitudinal or experimental designs. The burnout scale displayed a relatively low internal reliability indicating that more stronger scales should be used in subsequent studies. The low  $R^2$  of WFC can be interpreted to mean that there are other predictors including the job demands, time pressure or the family responsibilities, which are important to add. Lastly, the results might not be extrapolated to other cultural or industry-based settings, hence the importance of replication in other contexts.

## References

- Akhtar, N., Adnan, N., Pervaiz, U., & Amjad, A. (2025). Impact of Despotic Leadership on Workplace Deviance: Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics. *Policy Journal of Social Science Review*, 3(8), 408-422.
- Allen, T. D., Herst, D. E., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: a review and agenda for future research. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 5(2), 278.
- Aryee, S., Luk, V., Leung, A., & Lo, S. (1999). Role stressors, interrole conflict, and well-being: The moderating influence of spousal support and coping behaviors among employed parents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 54(2), 259-278.
- Bakker, A. B., Boyd, C. M., Dollard, M., Gillespie, N., Winefield, A. H., & Stough, C. (2010). The role of personality in the job demands-resources model: A study of Australian academic staff. *Career Development International*, 15(7), 622-636.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control* (Vol. 35). W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co.
- Carlson, D. S., & Perrewé, P. L. (1999). The role of social support in the stressor-strain relationship: An examination of work-family conflict. *Journal of management*, 25(4), 513-540.
- De Clercq, D., Suhail, A., Azeem, M. U., & Haq, I. U. (2021). Citizenship pressure and job performance: roles of citizenship fatigue and continuance commitment. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 59(3), 482-505.
- De Hoogh, A. H., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2008). Ethical and despotic leadership, relationships with leader's social responsibility, top management team effectiveness and subordinates' optimism: A multi-method study. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(3), 297-311.
- Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of management review*, 25(1), 178-199.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(3), 382-388.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of management review*, 10(1), 76-88. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/258214>
- Hair Jr, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Sage publications.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115-135.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American psychologist*, 44(3), 513-524.
- Iqbal, J., Asghar, A., & Asghar, M. Z. (2022). Effect of despotic leadership on employee turnover intention: mediating toxic workplace environment and cognitive distraction in academic institutions. *Behavioral sciences*, 12(5), 125.
- Jerusalem, M., & Schwarzer, R. (1995). Generalized self-efficacy scale. *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs*, 35-37.

- Khan, A. T. A., & Saeed, B. B. (2024). Examining the mediating effect of workplace ostracism on the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion in public HEIs. *Journal of Business and Management Research*, 3(1), 416-432.
- Khizar, H. M. U., Tareen, A. K., Mohelska, H., Arif, F., Hanaysha, J. R., & Akhtar, U. (2023). Bad bosses and despotism at workplace: A systematic review of the despotic leadership literature. *Heliyon*, 9(9).
- Lucas, J. W. (2003). Theory - testing, generalization, and the problem of external validity. *Sociological Theory*, 21(3), 236-253.
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *Maslach burnout inventory*. Scarecrow Education.
- Mehmood, S., Husin, N. S., & Aziz, A. (2023). Do despotic leadership and workplace incivility predict turnover intention: A mediation by work-family conflict? *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 23(2), 120-135.
- Modise, J. M. (2023). Ineffective Leaders are Unable to Carry Out Leadership Actions Successfully and Exhibit Incompatible Leadership Traits. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technol*, 8(8), 2333-2350.
- Murphy, K. A. (2024). Assessment of employee well-being on organisational effectiveness & productivity: A literature review. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 19(3), 26-33.
- Nadon, L., De Beer, L. T., & Morin, A. J. (2022). Should burnout be conceptualized as a mental disorder? *Behavioral sciences*, 12(3), 82.
- Naseer, S., Chughtai, M. S., & Syed, F. (2023). Do high-performance work practices promote an individual's readiness and commitment to change? The moderating role of adaptive leadership. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 36(6), 899-916.
- Nauman, S., Zheng, C., & Basit, A. A. (2021). How despotic leadership jeopardizes employees' performance: the roles of quality of work life and work withdrawal. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 42(1), 1-16.
- Nazir, T., Umer, M., Najam, M., Nawab, S., Maqsoom, A., Shafi, K., Munir, Y., & Nawaz, I. (2022). Impact role stress on turnover intentions of Pakistan's healthcare workers: Mediating and moderating role of organizational cynicism and self-efficacy. *Plos one*, 17(12), e0279075.
- Netemeyer, R., Boles, J., & McMurrian, R. (1996). Development and Validation of Work-Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict Scales. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(4), 400-410.
- Octavian, S. M. (2023). About the impact and effects of toxic leadership on employees and organizations. *European Review Of Applied Sociology*, 16(27), 87-93.
- Orgambidez, A., Borrego, Y., Cantero - Sánchez, F. J., & León - Pérez, J. M. (2025). Relationship between psychological capital and nursing burnout: A systematic review and meta - analysis. *International nursing review*, 72(3), e13072.
- Pandey, A., Sekar, S., & Mukhopadhyay, S. (2025). Shaping subordinate's adaptive performance-impact of supervisor's empowering leadership: a moderated mediation effect. *Personnel Review*, 1-21.
- Peng, S., & Huang, Y. (2024). Teachers' authoritarian leadership and students' well-being: the role of emotional exhaustion and narcissism. *BMC psychology*, 12(1), 590.

- Rafiq, N., Sarwar, A., & Rasheed, M. (2023). Disruption in family life due to despotic leadership and COVID-19: the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. *Kybernetes*, 52(7), 2305-2328.
- Siu, O.-l., Spector, P. E., Cooper, C. L., & Lu, C.-q. (2005). Work stress, self-efficacy, Chinese work values, and work well-being in Hong Kong and Beijing. *International Journal of stress management*, 12(3), 274.
- Taranu, S. M., Ilie, A. C., Turcu, A.-M., Stefaniu, R., Sandu, I. A., Pislaru, A. I., Alexa, I. D., Sandu, C. A., Rotaru, T.-S., & Alexa-Stratulat, T. (2022). Factors associated with burnout in healthcare professionals. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(22), 14701.
- Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of management journal*, 43(2), 178-190.
- Tremblay, M. A., & Messervey, D. (2011). The Job Demands-Resources model: Further evidence for the buffering effect of personal resources. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 37(2), 10-19.
- Usman, M., Ali, M., Yousaf, Z., Anwar, F., Waqas, M., & Khan, M. A. S. (2020). The relationship between laissez - faire leadership and burnout: Mediation through work alienation and the moderating role of political skill. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration*, 37(4), 423-434.
- Xu, Z., & Yang, F. (2021). The impact of perceived organizational support on the relationship between job stress and burnout: a mediating or moderating role? *Current Psychology*, 40(1), 402-413.
- Yucel, D., & Borgmann, L.-S. (2022). Work–family conflict and depressive symptoms among dual-earner couples in Germany: A dyadic and longitudinal analysis. *Social Science Research*, 104, 102684.
- Zhou, X., Rasool, S. F., Yang, J., & Asghar, M. Z. (2021). Exploring the relationship between despotic leadership and job satisfaction: the role of self efficacy and leader–member exchange. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(10), 5307.