

Stress and Burnout among Healthcare Workers: an Organizational Culture Perspective

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Abstract

Stress and burnout are increasingly prevalent among healthcare workers, exacerbated by high workloads, emotional demands, and systemic inefficiencies—issues that have been further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. While traditionally examined through an individual lens, this study repositions stress and burnout within the broader framework of organizational culture, arguing that systemic and cultural factors are critical in understanding and addressing these challenges. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, this research highlights how an imbalance between excessive job demands and insufficient resources contributes to burnout. It further investigates how different types of organizational culture—Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy, as defined by the Competing Values Framework—uniquely shape healthcare professionals' experiences of stress. The findings underscore that Clan Culture, which emphasizes support, teamwork, and psychological safety, is most effective in mitigating burnout. Adhocracy Culture fosters innovation and adaptability, promoting resilience in dynamic healthcare environments. In contrast, Market Culture, with its performance-driven focus, can exacerbate stress through intense competition and pressure. Hierarchy Culture offers structure and stability but may suppress open communication and flexibility, limiting collaborative stress resolution. Empirical studies support these associations, demonstrating that organizational culture directly affects job satisfaction, mental health, team dynamics, and care quality. Recommendations include fostering a hybrid organizational culture that integrates the strengths of all four culture types, enhancing leadership training to support emotionally intelligent and culturally responsive management, implementing comprehensive mental health programs, and encouraging collaborative practices that counteract hierarchical rigidity. By adopting these strategies, healthcare organizations can create resilient, supportive work environments that prioritize staff well-being, improve retention, and enhance patient outcomes. Ultimately, this study calls for a paradigm shift—from viewing burnout as an individual burden to recognizing it as a systemic issue deeply embedded in organizational culture, requiring strategic, culture-driven interventions at the institutional level.

Keywords: Burnout, Organizational Culture, Healthcare Workers, Job Demands-Resources Model

Introduction

The phenomenon of stress and burnout among healthcare workers are important issues that have received significant attention, particularly in the high-stress environments characteristic of healthcare settings. The health and quality of care provided to patients are greatly influenced by the well-being of healthcare providers. These phenomena have emerged as critical concerns, drawing significant attention from researchers and practitioners, hence understanding the root causes and impacts of stress and burnout on healthcare professionals is essential for developing effective management strategies. These issues are not merely individual challenges but are deeply rooted in the organizational culture and team dynamics of healthcare settings. This study examines how organizational culture impacts stress and burnout among healthcare professionals, stressing on the importance of cultural dynamics in healthcare environments. The stress and burnout extend beyond the personal toll on healthcare workers has profound implications for organizational efficiency, employee retention, patient satisfaction, and overall healthcare outcomes (Shanafelt et al., 2020)¹. Plus, the pandemic has increased existing stressors and introduced new ones, placing healthcare professionals under immense pressure and spotlighting the critical role that organizational behaviour plays in addressing these challenges (Sasangohar et al., 2020)².

Understanding stress and burnout from an Organizational Behaviour perspective offers a holistic view of the problem, emphasizing that solutions must go beyond individual interventions to encompass organizational strategies and cultural changes. McKinsey & Company (2023) emphasised the significance of prioritising the mental health and well-being of nurses, stating that organizational leadership and support systems are essential in reducing stress and burnout³. A study published in *Scientific Reports* (2023) demonstrated that interventions targeting the reduction of burnout in clinical nurses are successful, pointing to the need for organizational changes to promote a supportive work environment⁴. Shanafelt et al. (2020) support for the implementation of organizational strategies that target the root causes of burnout, noting the need for a systemic approach to improve healthcare workers' job satisfaction and well-being¹.

Theory Overview

Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Model: The JD-R Model fits best. This model offers a structure for understanding the interactions among job demands, job resources, and how these affect burnout and engagement. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, created by Demerouti et al. in 2001, suggests that employee well-being is influenced by the interaction between job demands and job resources. Job demands are the physical, psychological, social, or organisational components of a job that need continuous effort and are linked to specific physiological and psychological consequences.

Conversely, workplace resources refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational elements that help achieve work goals, reduce job pressures, and nurture human growth, learning, and development (MindTools., 2024)²³. Bakker and Demerouti (2021) expand on the JD-R model, for modern work environments²⁴. They highlight how job demands and resources interact to promote employee well-being and prevent burnout.

Application to Healthcare

JD-R model offers a thorough framework for understanding healthcare professionals' particular pressures. In high-stress environments like healthcare settings, high job demands include long working hours, emotional strain from patient care, and the pressure of making critical decision, while job resources can range from supportive leadership, opportunities for professional development, and a positive organizational culture that values teamwork and employee well-being.

The JD-R model shows how high job demands and low job resources can cause healthcare professionals burnout. For instance, when the demands of patient care exceed the resources available to healthcare professionals—such as support from colleagues, access to necessary equipment, or sufficient recovery time—stress and burnout are likely outcomes. Conversely, increasing job resources can reduce burnout and boost healthcare worker engagement and happiness. This research supports the model's relevance in healthcare settings, particularly in nursing, where effectively managing work demands and enhancing job resources are crucial for reducing stress and burnout (BMC Nursing, 2022)²⁵. Specifically, in nursing contexts, the excessive demands of patient care, when not matched with adequate resources such as collegial support, access to necessary equipment, and adequate recovery time, can precipitate stress and burnout. This theory shows the importance of organizational interventions in healthcare settings aimed at balancing job demands with adequate resources, highlighting the necessity for healthcare organizations to cultivate a culture that aligns with the JD-R model's principles to enhance staff well-being, patient care quality, and overall organizational performance. This theory shows the importance of organizational interventions in healthcare settings aimed at managing job demands and augmenting job resources.

Factors Influencing Stress and Burnout Among Healthcare Workers

Healthcare organisational culture greatly affects employee stress and burnout. This culture—including values, beliefs, norms, and principles—affects healthcare professionals' well-being, job satisfaction, and mental health. Factors such as the organization's history, the types of services provided, market demands, technological advancements, national culture, the composition of healthcare professionals, leadership styles, and the broader national healthcare context play a crucial role in shaping this culture. The Competing Values Framework by Robert E. Quinn and Kim S. Cameron provides a useful lens for understanding the four types of organizational culture within healthcare environments.

Recent studies reveal that organisational culture has many complicated effects on stress and burnout. High levels of stress and burnout negatively impact mental health, quality of work, relationships with co-workers, and patient care, emphasising the need for organisational support and resources to address burnout and mental health concerns (Kober and Chang, 2024)²⁶. Boitet et al. (2023) found that burnout, moral distress, and compassion fatigue were significant predictors of post-traumatic stress in clinical and nonclinical healthcare workers²⁷. Their findings emphasise trauma-informed leadership to support the healthcare workforce (Boitet et al., 2023)²⁷. Budzyńska and Moryś (2023) found increased stress and burnout among Polish healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁸. Researchers recommend psychological support and workshops to address challenging situations, emphasising organisational culture's role in addressing them (Budzyńska & Moryś, 2023)²⁸.

Lastly, Das et al., (2023) examined the relationship between depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout among healthcare workers in India during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁹. They found a high prevalence of mental health problems, showing the need for psychological support and interventions from the healthcare system (Das et al., 2023)²⁹. These studies collectively illustrate the significant impact of organizational culture on stress and burnout among healthcare workers.

Four types of Organizational Culture

1. Clan Culture: Characterised by a family-like environment that emphasizes mentoring, nurturing, and participation, is crucial for nurturing loyalty, tradition, and teamwork within organizations. This culture views the organization as a large family, with leaders acting as mentors or parental figures, focusing on internal maintenance with flexibility and a deep concern for people and customer sensitivity. Recent studies have provided empirical evidence supporting the significance of such a culture in various contexts. Wahyuwardhana and Wisesa (2024) highlighted the pivotal role of Democratic Transformational Leadership in supporting Clan Organizational Culture, showing that leadership styles that emphasize participative decision-making, open communication, and collaborative, employee-focused approaches are instrumental in promoting a clan culture (Wahyuwardhana & Wisesa, 2024)³⁰. Thomas et al. (2024) explored the associations between organizational culture in healthcare and moral distress in healthcare professionals. They stressed on the importance of psychological safety, ethical climate, and patient safety in reducing moral distress, which is consistent with the clan culture's focus on nurturing and supportive environments (Thomas et al., 2024)³¹. Watanabe et al. (2023) looked at the person-organization fit in Japan and showed that clan culture, which values harmony between people, has a positive impact on employee's well-being, especially for those who depend on others a lot. This supports the focus of clan culture on harmony and well-being (Watanabe et al., 2023)³². Lee (2023) examined how organizational culture affects performance in healthcare organisations. He showed that a good organisational culture, which includes clan culture, can enhance operational performance by making risk management and internal control better, pointing to the clan culture's role in operational success (Lee, 2023)³³.

2. Adhocracy Culture: Healthcare organizations with an adhocracy culture are distinguished by their dynamic and innovative approach to medical care and healthcare delivery. These organizations are agile, willing to take calculated risks, and constantly seeking new ideas to improve patient outcomes and healthcare services. Leaders in these settings are viewed as pioneers and facilitators of change, encouraging creativity and flexibility to navigate the rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. The emphasis is on using technological advancements, research, and development to enhance care quality and efficiency. Recent studies further support this perspective. Thakur and Hossain (2023) study and list the important factors that lead to technological advances in the delivery of healthcare services. They show how organisational culture, such as adhocracy, can promote innovation and improve the standard and efficiency of care³⁴. This study reveals the role of adhocracy in establishing a culture that is receptive to innovation, hence enhancing healthcare delivery and patient outcomes (Thakur & Hossain, 2023)³⁴. Similarly, Parveen et al. (2023) study the influence of cultural dynamics, particularly adhocracy, in encouraging open innovation within organizations³⁵. Their research reveals how adhocracy culture positively impacts innovation by establishing an environment that encourages creativity and flexibility. This finding correlates with the characteristics of

adhocracy culture in healthcare organizations, where the focus is on innovation and adaptation to improve healthcare services (Parveen et al., 2023)³⁵. Furthermore, Chidziwa et al. (2023) explore the transition from bureaucracy to adhocracy in the public sector, noting adhocracy's impact on improving organizational efficiency and capability through innovation and creativity. The shift to adhocracy is believed to be crucial for healthcare organisations seeking to enhance operations and strategy by implementing new methods (Chidziwa et al., 2023)³⁶.

These findings collectively affirm the significance of Adhocracy Culture in healthcare organizations, emphasizing the need for leadership styles and organizational practices that nurture this culture to enhance innovation, adaptability, and overall healthcare delivery. The findings confirm the shift from bureaucracy to adhocracy in the public sector, emphasizing the role of adhocracy in enhancing organizational functionality and capability through innovation and creativity (Chidziwa et al., 2023).

3. Market Culture: In a market culture, healthcare organizations prioritize competition, the achievement of specific targets, and securing success in the healthcare market. This culture values efficiency, productivity, and results, with a strong emphasis on meeting patients need in a timely and effective manner. Leaders within these settings are often competitive and goal-oriented, driving the organization towards enhanced performance, patient satisfaction, and financial sustainability. The focus is on external performance metrics, such as patient outcomes, service quality, and market share. Recent studies provide evidence and theoretical perspectives that reinforce the significance of Market Culture in healthcare organizations. Maarse and Jeurissen (2024) investigate the outcomes of market reform in Dutch healthcare, emphasising the relationship between competition, healthcare delivery, and cost control. Their analysis reveals the challenges and shifts in policy narrative towards greater cooperation and state direction, reflecting on the delicate balance between market competition and regulatory mechanisms in healthcare (Maarse & Jeurissen, 2024)³⁷.

Similarly, Boyacı (2023) analyses healthcare reforms and competition within Turkey's private hospital sector. The study addresses how market culture influences healthcare delivery and organizational performance, stressing the competitive dynamics within the sector (Boyacı, 2023)³⁸.

Rosengren and Carlström (2023) also talk about the pros and cons of changing healthcare spending and regulations in response to person-centred care (PCC). This clarifies how market culture affects European healthcare delivery. This study examines the impact of market dynamics on the adoption and diffusion of PCC, reflecting the market culture's focus on innovation and patient-centred outcomes (Rosengren & Carlström, 2023)³⁹. Furthermore, Trottmann et al. (2023) also explore healthcare industry competition-regulation balance. A framework is suggested to adjust regulation levels based on submarket characteristics, emphasizing the role of market culture in navigating the complex landscape of competitive dynamics and regulatory needs to optimize healthcare delivery (Trottmann et al. 2023)⁴⁰. Yadav (2023) provides informations into how cultural factors influence innovation and competition in the Indian start up ecosystem, relevant to understanding the dynamics of market culture in healthcare organizations seeking innovation and efficiency. This article

shows that cultural elements can significantly impact the strategic direction and competitive stance of healthcare organizations within a market culture (Yadav, 2023)⁴¹.

These findings collectively affirm the significance of Market Culture in healthcare organizations, emphasizing the need for leadership styles and organizational practices that nurture this culture to enhance innovation, adaptability, and overall healthcare delivery.

4. Hierarchy Culture: Hierarchy-based healthcare organisations focus on formalised and structured care. These organisations value efficiency, stability, and protocol compliance.

Hierarchy leaders coordinate, organise, and ensure safe and consistent healthcare delivery. Stability, control, and defined authority and responsibility are key to internal maintenance. Awar et al. (2023) emphasise the need of a safe psychological environment and a speak-up culture in basic care. This review supports the hierarchical culture's focus on safety and consistency in healthcare delivery by emphasising the relevance of a supportive psychological climate in improving patient outcomes and organisational performance (Awar et al., 2023)⁴². Opuala-Charles and Jack (2023) analyse how hierarchy culture influences business performance, by studying the effects of formalised structures and adherence to established procedures on organisational outcomes. The study highlights the emphasis of the hierarchical culture on efficiency and stability in attaining business success (Opuala-Charles & Jack, 2023)⁴³. Treichler et al. (2023) investigate the challenges of implementing collaborative care models in environments with a strong hierarchy culture, such as the military. This analysis reflects how hierarchy culture impacts mental healthcare service, emphasising the importance of clear communication and policy considerations in organised environments (Treichler et al., 2023)⁴⁴. The study by Clifford et al. (2023) study on the efficacy of non-hierarchical learning partnerships challenges traditional Hierarchy Culture in healthcare, suggests a transformative shift within Hierarchy Culture by promoting inclusivity, open communication, and collaboration⁴⁵. This initiative suggests blending hierarchical structures with participative approaches to enhance organizational culture and effectiveness by integrating more flexible practices into the rigid frameworks of Hierarchy Culture, signalling a move towards a more dynamic and responsive healthcare environment. They point out the necessity for leadership styles and organisational practices that support this culture to improve innovation, adaptability, and overall healthcare delivery.

Discussion

The literature review explores the impact of organisational culture on stress and burnout in healthcare workers by analysing the correlation between the four forms of organisational culture and the well-being of healthcare professionals. Kober and Chang (2024) and Boitet et al. (2023) show that stress and burnout harm healthcare workers' well-being and patient care quality, demonstrating the need for supportive organisational cultures. Each culture type affects healthcare workers' stress and burnout differently, as shown by the Competing Values Framework. Clan Culture, which prioritises a family-like environment and supportive leadership, seems to reduce stress and burnout by promoting psychological safety and interpersonal harmony (Wahyuwardhana & Wisesa, 2024; Thomas et al., 2024). In contrast, Adhocracy Culture's focus on innovation and flexibility may reduce stress by encouraging creative problem-solving and adaptability in the face of healthcare difficulties (Thakur & Hossain, 2023; Parveen et al., 2023).

Market Culture, which prioritises competition and efficiency, could lead to increased stress levels by focussing on performance measures and outcomes (Maarse & Jeurissen, 2024; Boyacı, 2023). However, this culture could potentially enhance healthcare delivery by promoting a results-oriented approach. The Hierarchy Culture, characterised by its structured and formalized approach, provides stability and clear expectations, hence reducing uncertainty and stress (Awar et al., 2023; Clifford et al. 2023). Rigid hierarchies have the ability to hinder collaboration and innovation, which lead to stress. Future research could explore the impact of remote work arrangements on stress levels among healthcare administrative staff, focusing on how different organizational cultures facilitate or impede the transition to remote work. Additionally, studies could also examine how digital health technologies affect organisational culture and stress among healthcare workers, particularly in Adhocracy and Market cultures that prioritise innovation and efficiency. Leadership styles in different organisational cultures and healthcare professionals' mental health and job happiness are another subject for study.

Recommendations to the Organization

Promote a Positive Organizational Culture: Healthcare organizations should aim to combine the most beneficial aspects of each culture type to create an environment that prioritises innovation, teamwork, efficiency, and effective communication. Forming cross-functional teams with a variety of cultural attributes can improve problem-solving abilities and increase employee satisfaction.

Implement Stress Management Programs: Introduce comprehensive stress management and mental health support programs specifically designed to address the issues in healthcare settings. These programs could include mindfulness training, resilience seminars, and access to mental health professionals.

Improve Team Performance: Promote strategies that boost team unity and cooperation, such as regular team-building activities and open discussions for sharing ideas and concerns. This method can reduce the isolating effects of hierarchy and market pressures by promoting a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Enhancing Leadership Training: Develop leadership training programs that equip leaders with the necessary skills to manage the complex organizational culture in healthcare. Training should focus on emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and strategies to promote a supportive and inclusive work environment.

Implementing these recommendations can help healthcare organizations establish a more supportive and adaptive culture that reduces stress and burnout in healthcare staff, ultimately leading to improved patient care and organisational performance

Conclusion

The factors influencing stress and burnout among healthcare workers from an organizational culture perspective has pointed out that organizational culture has a major impact on mental health and job satisfaction. We have explored how Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy cultures each uniquely affect stress and burnout among healthcare professionals. Recent studies show that supportive, innovative, and efficient organisational strategies are essential

to a healthy work environment for healthcare personnel. Implementing the suggested ideas could transform healthcare organisations. Promoting a healthy organisational culture, stress management programmes, team performance, and leadership training can make employees feel valued, supported, and motivated. This shift towards a more positive organizational culture will not only improve the well-being of healthcare workers but also lead to more effective and compassionate patient care. Integrating these cultural concerns can assist healthcare organisations adapt and develop worker-friendly environments, boosting healthcare delivery and success.

This study contributes theoretically by extending the application of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model through its integration with the Competing Values Framework, offering a richer understanding of how organizational culture shapes stress and burnout among healthcare workers. Contextually, it provides sector-specific insights by illustrating how different cultural orientations, Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy, which uniquely influence well-being, resilience, and performance in healthcare settings. These findings not only advance scholarly discourse on organizational behavior in high-stress professions but also equip healthcare leaders with actionable strategies to cultivate supportive, adaptive cultures that mitigate burnout and enhance patient care outcomes.

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