



Modeling the Structural Relationship of Job Stressors and Teachers' Autonomy Support with the Mediation of Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to model the structural relationships between job stressors and teachers' autonomy support with the mediation of emotional exhaustion. This research adopted a descriptive correlational design using the structural equation modelling. The statistical population included all the teachers of the first and second grades of secondary schools in Noor and Chamestan public schools in the academic year of 2019-2020, and based on Cochran's formula and stratified random sampling method, 240 people were selected. The instruments of this research included the job stressor factors questionnaire of Otero-Lopez et al. (2006), Teacher as social context questionnaire of Wellborn et al. (1992), and Teachers' burnout inventory of Maslach et al. (1996). All analyses were done by the structural equation modeling method. The findings indicated that the structural relationship of job stressors and teachers' autonomy support with the mediation of emotional exhaustion in teachers of the first and second grades of secondary schools had an acceptable fit. According to the findings, job stressors directly and indirectly affect teachers' support autonomy through emotional exhaustion. By addressing these factors, it is suggested to improve and resolve issues with teachers' autonomy support in the school environment.

Keywords: Autonomy support, emotional exhaustion, job stressor factors, teachers

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Introduction

One of the most crucial and fundamental professions in any community is teaching. Teachers are crucial to students' scholastic success, learning, motivation, and overall well-being (Monagas et al., 2022). The most effective motivators for educators are students' successful outcomes, which can be crucial in

determining educational policies (Hale et al., 2019). In a successful educational system, considering teachers' essential role, there is a belief that students' good performance depends on their teachers' efficiency and ability. Statistically, about one-seventh of the country's employees are teachers. One of the factors that are effective in increasing teachers' efficiency is the issue of

their autonomy support including such behaviors as providing, choosing, encouraging self-initiating, reducing the use of control, and appreciating and approving others' emotions and perspectives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In other words, autonomy support minimizes the pressure to perform duties in a certain way and encourages initiative as opposed to controlling behavior characterized by deadlines, external rewards, or potential punishments (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The feeling of autonomy while working leads to a special psychological state in which a person feels that their work's outputs are influenced by their own performance and are not controlled by the external environment (Kuvaas, 2009). While most research considers the use of internal rewards as necessary to motivate teachers, they feel that their greatest shortage is the need for security and autonomy (Nero, 1985, cited in Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

One of the theories related to autonomy support is Deci and Ryan's theory of autonomy, from which the factors of motivation and stability in teachers' job activities can be fairly extracted and deduced. In this theory, three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and lack of motivation are distinguished from each other (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In intrinsic motivation, when a person feels free to act in an activity, his interest and delight increase while doing that action, which indicates a high level of autonomy. Extrinsic motivation occurs when the result is more important for people than the act itself. As opposed to that, a lack of motivation happens when a person is not interested in doing an act, which may happen due to the lack of experience or competence or the insignificance of that work and activity (Leon et al., 2019). In fact, autonomy theory explains motivation and behavior based on different levels of motivation, the effect of environmental context, and interpersonal perceptions (Gunnell et al., 2014). Although teachers have various reasons to quit the teaching profession, most of them leave the classroom because their autonomy is not supported (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Studies indicate that when teachers experience autonomy, they can actively and creatively deal with the changes made in the work environment. Therefore, providing teachers with autonomy may decrease their job tensions and stress (Ballet et al., 2006).

The findings of numerous studies, including the research by Peral and Geldenhuys (2016), involving 251 teachers in South Africa, showed a correlation between job autonomy and teachers' sense of significance and participation in their work. According to the findings of some studies, fostering teachers' autonomy helps them fulfill their psychological needs on a basic level and boosts their effectiveness in the teaching-learning

process (Pope & Hall, 2015). In their 2017 study on leadership style and workplace involvement, Deci et al. identified autonomy support as one of the fundamental psychological requirements for greater well-being and improved work outcomes.

Liu et al. (2021) in their study indicated that there is a direct connection between teachers' autonomy and collaboration with their job satisfaction. Teachers who support autonomy, provide choices of different activities, benefit from non-controlling and instructive feedback, foster inner motivational resources, and they accept the negative expression of feelings (Su & Reeve, 2011). One of the main reasons why teachers use the control strategy, instead of supporting autonomy in the classroom, is the external pressure on them (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to identify and examine the factors affecting teachers' autonomy support. Among these factors, we can refer to job stressor factors and emotional exhaustion.

Teaching is one of the most stressful jobs (Greenier et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2020). Compared to other experts, school teachers experience higher levels of stress (Landsbergis et al., 2020). Teachers' health is at significant risk when they work in environments where stress is encouraged (Roth & Altmayer, 2013). The term "job stress" refers to the unpleasant, negative emotional experiences that teachers go through on the job. These experiences can result in intense physical and mental exhaustion, nervous tension, and/or irritability (Roeser et al., 2013). Teachers who are under stress often feel unpleasant emotions like resentment, anxiety, tension, frustration, and depression as a result of various parts of their work (Kyriakou, 2001). Job stressors are the usual sources of stress that employees face in the work environment and may be good or bad (Fisher, 2001). In the teaching profession, these factors include environmental stressors (students, teachers' relationships with colleagues, constant circulars and rules, crowded classes, low salary and income, and low social status) and personal stressors (negative self-perception, personal abilities, negative life experiences, bad mood, and feeble spirit) (Bertoch et al., 1989). Otero Lopez et al. (2006) in their study introduced student behaviors and disciplinary issues, understanding the teacher's competence and safety, functional and relational aspects of school, teaching, motivations and attitudes, and students' characteristics, an immense workload, the changes that happen in teaching, the teacher's position, working conditions, and structural aspects of school as job stressor factors. The results of several studies indicate that autonomy-related restrictions are positively related to tension, anxiety, and teachers' stress (Bacharach et al., 1986; Blase, 1986; Dworkin et al., 1990). Some results indicate that there is a negative and

significant connection between job autonomy and job stress (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The lack of sufficient resources and lack of autonomy support for teachers not only intensifies negative feelings and stress but also increases emotional exhaustion in them (Chang et al., 2022).

Emotional exhaustion, as the central core of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), is the feelings in which a person has lost emotional energy and is unable to communicate with others (Griffin, 2012). In other words, emotional exhaustion refers to negative feelings and emotional reactions caused by stressor factors (Ladebo, 2009). Teachers are exposed to stressor factors daily, and this constant stress can lead to emotional exhaustion. This exhaustion is a reaction to the numerous demands at work (Maslach et al., 2001). When teachers feel their emotional resources have run out or are excessively depleted as a result of interaction with others, particularly their students, emotional exhaustion as a cumulative reaction to stressor factors in the workplace occurs (Maslach et al., 1996). According to Arches' theory (1991), feeling lack of autonomy and independence at work causes emotional exhaustion. Javadi (2014) in his study concluded that there is an inverse relationship between autonomy support and emotional exhaustion. The results of some studies indicate that there is a significant relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion (Samiei & Bayani, 2014; Hakanen et al., 2006; Kosir, 2015; Bottiani et al., 2020). The study results of Pogere et al. (2019) indicated that job stressors, in addition to their

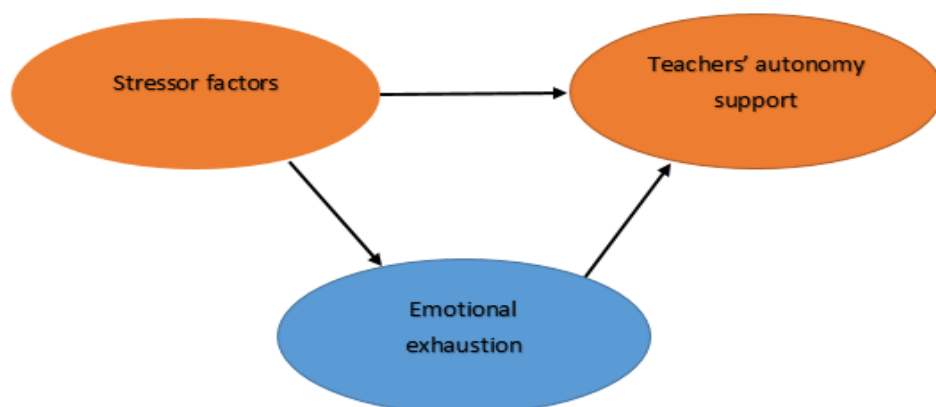
direct effect, indirectly affect autonomy support through emotional exhaustion.

One of the necessary reasons for examining teachers' autonomy support is that teachers are considered the most important and effective elements in the school and are responsible for the function of their job and the progress of students and purposeful actions in the organization (Baldauf & Cravens, 2002). Teachers' autonomy support during instruction can promote students' academic performance, effectiveness, and learning engagement (Liu, 2021; Nunez & Leon, 2015; Reeve et al., 2004).

Reviewing the past studies shows that teachers' autonomy support has been observed only from some limited aspects. Nonetheless, by conducting multi-dimensional studies and highlighting new structural relationships, some factors involved in reducing teachers' autonomy support become more specific and in this way, it is possible to design methods to increase autonomy support and avert the negative effects of environmental factors. Moreover, identifying the factors that affect teachers' autonomy support is critical due to the sensitivity of the teaching profession, and the fact that the issues related to teaching and school play a significant role in increasing or decreasing teachers' autonomy support. In this respect, the objective of the current research was to model the structural relationships between job stressors and teachers' autonomy support through the mediation of emotional exhaustion, based on the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

The Conceptual Model of the Research



Method

Design

The present study adopted an applied descriptive correlational design using the structural equation modeling.

Participants

The statistical population of the research consisted of all the male and female teachers of the first and second grades of the public secondary schools of Noor and

Chamestan in the academic year 2019-2020. According to Cochran's formula, 240 people were selected as the research sample. To select the participants, stratified random sampling was used according to the grade and gender as the number of male and female teachers was different in the grades.

Instruments

Job Stressor Factors Questionnaire: This questionnaire was created by Otero-Lopez et al. (2006). It contains 66 questions and ten different factors. In the current research, only 3 out of 10 factors were used (concern for students, work overload, and working conditions). These three factors contain a total of 20 questions. The scoring in this questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale from never (0) to always (4). In the current research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, and it was .94 for autonomy support, .83 for choice dimensions, .77 for control, .79 for respect, and .83 for relevance, which indicates the high reliability of the test.

The questionnaire was translated to Persian. Also, the questionnaire was checked by three professors of psychology and educational sciences and two Ph.D. students in educational psychology to confirm the face and content validity of the tool. Moreover, before the main implementation, the questionnaire was presented to several secondary school teachers and some modifications were made to the items to clear up the ambiguities. After ensuring the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, it was administered to the participants.

Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of 42 questions and was created by Welborn et al. in 1992. The specific goal of the questionnaire is to evaluate the elements of teachers' engagement, structure, and autonomy support. Items from the component of autonomy support have four dimensions of choice, control, regard, and relevance and were used in this study. The 12 items in this component range from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (4) on a four-point Likert scale. The autonomous support component's reliability was estimated to be between .72 and .88 (Iglesias-Garcia et al., 2020; Welborn et al., 1992). Also, the creators of the questionnaire reported the tool has good validity and reliability. In the current research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for autonomy support was .94; .83 for choice dimensions, .77 for control, .79 for respect, and .83 for relevance indicating the high reliability of the test.

The Persian version of the questionnaire was used in this study whose validity was confirmed by three professors of psychology and educational sciences and

two Ph.D. students in educational psychology and its reliability was estimated via piloting the instrument with some secondary school teachers with the characteristics similar to the study participants in advance.

Emotional Exhaustion Questionnaire: To measure emotional exhaustion, the teachers' burnout inventory of Maslach et al. (1996) was used. This tool has the subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization with 22 items. In this research, the emotional exhaustion subscale was used consisting of 9 items. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported to be between .78 and .90 (Foley & Murphy, 2015; Maslach et al., 1996). Abedi et al. (1999) measured the convergent validity of the questionnaire and correlated the scores of this questionnaire with Geldard's burnout inventory, and found the correlation coefficient between these two questionnaires (.59) was significant at $p < 0.001$. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated with test/retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the coefficients were between .56 and .85. The reliability of this questionnaire in this research through Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Procedure

The sample consisted of 240 male and female teachers of the first and second grades of the public secondary schools. After selecting the participants, they were asked to respond to the questionnaires. In order to ensure confidentiality and reduce the effects of response bias, participants were provided with a cover letter that had a written description of the purpose of the study. They were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and their responses would not be personally identifiable. Then, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS 25 and AMOS 20.

Findings

The sample examined in the current research contained 123 male and 117 female teachers. According to demographic data, 7 of them held an associate's degree, 160 with the bachelor's degree, 69 with a master's degree, and 4 with a Ph.D. Considering their age, 29 people were less than 30 years old, 69 people were between 30 and 40 years old, and 142 people were older than 41 years. Also, 43 people had less than 10 years of work experience, 61 people had work experience between 10 and 20 years, and 136 people had more than 21 years of work experience. Table 1 displays the descriptive indicators of the study variables.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of the Research's Variables

Variable	Number	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Job stress	240	38.763	18.698	0.03	-0.253
Concern	240	17.354	8.564	-0.024	-0.176
Immense workload	240	13.304	6.951	0.083	-0.403
Working conditions	240	8.104	4.162	-0.015	-0.594
Emotional exhaustion	240	35.104	14.447	-0.738	-0.146
Autonomy support	240	30.842	10.222	-0.265	-0.631
Choice	240	7.471	2.741	-0.116	-0.82
Control	240	7.733	2.601	-0.159	-0.69
Respect	240	7.729	2.701	-0.28	-0.75
Relevance	240	7.908	2.806	-0.432	-0.778

According to the Table, the average of the job stress, emotional exhaustion, and autonomy support are 38.763, 35.104, 30.842 and their standard deviations are 18.698, 14.447, and 10.222 respectively. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients for all research indicators are in the

range of (2 and -2), thus, considering these coefficients, the assumption of normality of the data for these indicators is confirmed. Table 2 indicates the correlation coefficients between research variables using the correlation test.

Table 2.
Correlation Coefficients between the Research Variables

	Concern	Immense workload	Working conditions	Job stressors	Choice	Control	Respect	Relevance	Autonomy support	Emotional exhaustion
Concern	1									
Immense workload	**0.608	1								
Working conditions	**0.582	**0.579	1							
Job stressors	**0.904	**0.857	**0.774	1						
Choice	**0.307	**0.373	**0.441	**0.415	1					
Control	**0.289	**0.331	**0.325	**0.361	**0.580	1				
Respect	**0.341	**0.337	**0.434	**0.417	**0.634	**0.587	1			
Relevance	**0.218	**0.270	**0.358	**0.308	**0.612	**0.539	**0.629	1		
Autonomy support	**0.345	**0.393	**0.465	**0.449	**0.847	**0.819	**0.844	**0.829	1	
Emotional exhaustion	**0.279	**0.336	**0.309	**0.354	**0.342	**0.420	**0.404	**0.368	**0.460	1

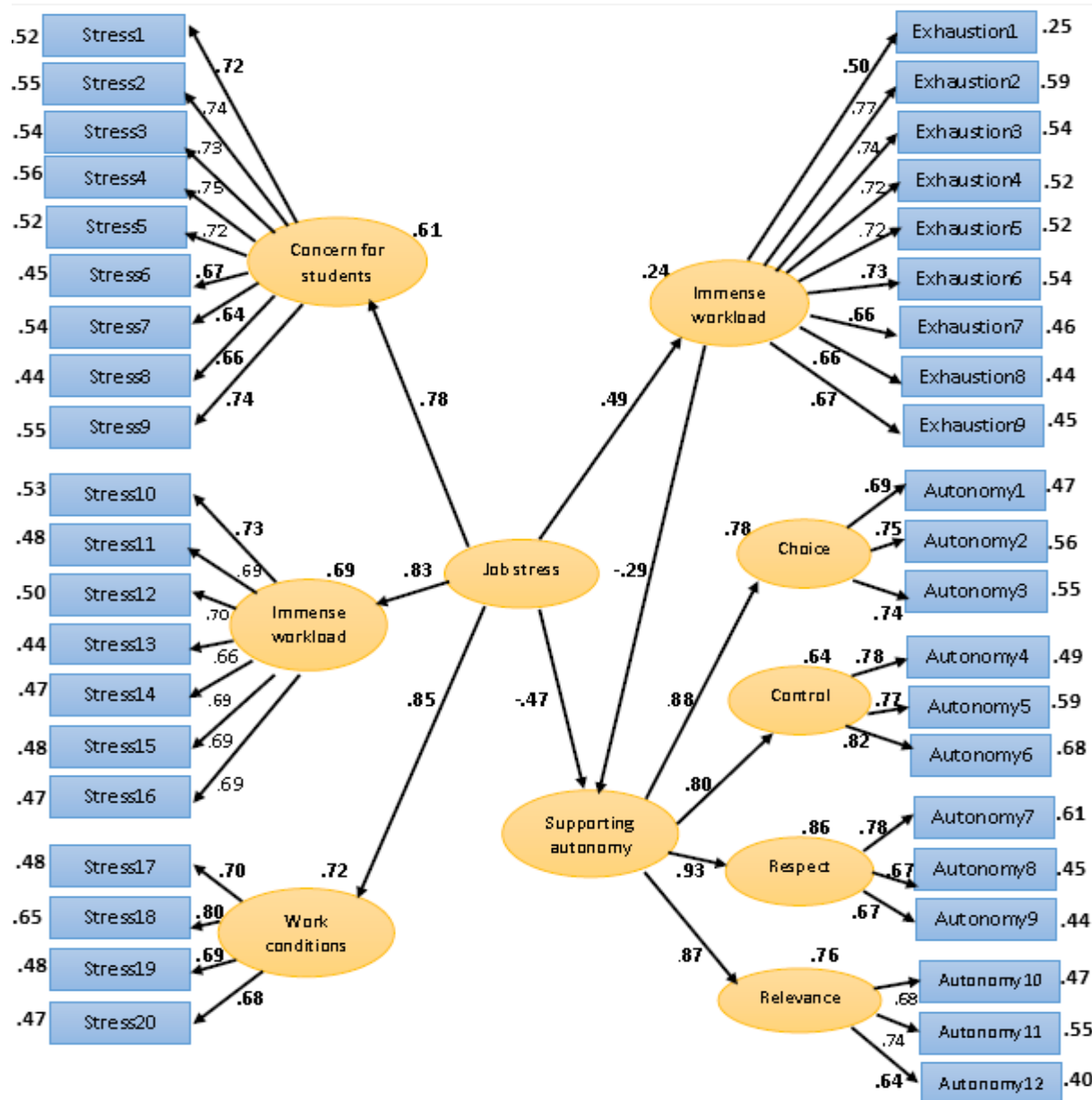
As observed in Table 2, the correlation coefficient between the main research variables is significant at 0.01.

The Fit of the General Research Model

After examining the descriptive statistics and normality of the data, the structural equation modeling was used to

examine the research hypotheses and the statistical model's fit. The relationship between study variables and their coefficients are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
The Suggested Model with Standard Coefficients



*Chi-square=808.813; DF=771; P-value=0.170; GFI=0.865; CFI=0.992; RMSEA=0.14

According to the model fit in Figure 2, it can be observed that the items of the questionnaires of job stressors, teachers' autonomy support, and emotional exhaustion have proper factor loading since if the calculated factor load for each question is higher than 0.3, the validity of that question is confirmed (Esfidani & Mohsenin, 2018) which is applicable in the conceptual model of the current research.

The Fit of the Research Model

Model fit determines the degree to which the variance-covariance data supports the structural equation

modeling. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation Index (RMSEA) is one of the main indicators of goodness of fit in structural equation modeling. In the strictest case, the value between 0 and 0.8 is considered the acceptance range of a good fit of the model. But most researchers use this rule: if this index is smaller than 0.1, the validity of the model is approved.

Another important indicator is the ratio of chi-square to the degree of freedom, which most often has a value between 1 and 3. Other indicators include the incremental fit index (IFI), comparative fit index (CFI),

normed fit index (NFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and non-normed fit index (NNFI) and for the final model to be accepted, the permissible value of these indicators should be about

0.9 or higher (Esfidani & Mohsenin, 2018). In the current research, considering the value of this index is 0.014 and it's less than 0.08, it is safe to say that the fit of the model is verified.

Table 3.
Fit Indicators of the Suggested Research Model

Indicators	Acceptable value	The value of research	Desirability
Chi - square χ^2	-	808.413	Model validation
P-Value	-	0.170	Model validation
df	$df \geq 0$	771	Model validation
χ^2/df	$\chi^2/df < 3$	1.049	Model validation
RMSEA	RMSEA < 0/09	0.014	Model validation
NFI	NFI > 0/09	0.897	Model validation
AGFI	AGFI > 0/09	0.902	Model validation
GFI	GFI > 0/09	0.911	Model validation
CFI	CFI > 0/09	0.992	Model validation
IFI	IFI > 0/09	0.992	Model validation
TLI	TLI > 0/09	0.991	Model validation
SRMR	The closer to zero	0.057	Model validation

In general, the fit of the model cannot be explained by one of the indicators alone and they must be interpreted in conjunction with one another. The model in this study has an extremely excellent condition overall

in terms of explanation and fitting, according to the values found for these indicators. The outcomes of the direct paths of the aforementioned model are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Results of the Direct Effects of the Model

Direct route	Standard coefficients	t Amounts	P value	Results
The effect of Job stressors on Autonomy support	-0.47	-5.037	0.005	meaningful
The effect of Emotional exhaustion on Autonomy support	-0.29	-3.820	0.024	meaningful
The effect of Job stressors on Emotional exhaustion	0.49	5.553	0.034	meaningful

As seen in Table 4, the coefficient of the standard direct route of the job stressors on autonomy support is -0.47, the t-value is -5.037, and the P-value is less than 0.05; accordingly, the variable of job stressor has a significant and negative effect on autonomy support. The coefficient of the standard direct path of the emotional exhaustion variable on autonomy support is -0.29, the t-value is -3.820, and the P-value is less than 0.05; and thus, it can be claimed that emotional exhaustion has a significant and negative effect on autonomy support. The coefficient of the standard direct path of the job stressors on emotional exhaustion is 0.49,

the t-value is 5.553, and the P-value is less than 0.05; accordingly, it can be stated that the job stressor has a significant and positive effect on emotional exhaustion.

To investigate the indirect effects or mediating role of the emotional exhaustion on the relationship between job stressors and autonomy support, the bootstrapping method (self-regulatory sampling) was used. This method has better statistical power than other classical statistical methods such as Sobel, Baron-Kenny tests, etc. It is worth mentioning that 2,000 times of resampling were done using this method.

Table 5.*Examining the Indirect Effects or Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion Based on Bootstrapping*

	Type of effect	coefficient	P value	Results
The effect of Job stressors on Autonomy support	Direct effect	-0.467	0.002	meaningful
	Indirect effect through emotional exhaustion	-.0143	0.001	meaningful
	Total effect	-0.610	0.001	meaningful

As it is displayed, the direct effect of job stressors on autonomy support is -0.467, the indirect effect of job stressors on autonomy support through emotional exhaustion is -0.143, and the total effect is -0.610. Considering the point that the P-value for direct and indirect paths and the total effect is less than 0.05, it can be claimed that emotional exhaustion has a significant mediating role in the effect of job stressors on autonomy support.

Discussion

In this study, emotional exhaustion in teachers of the first and second grades of secondary schools was regarded as a mediator to model the structural relationships between job stressors and autonomy support of the teachers. The results of the structural equation modeling showed that teachers' autonomy support was directly and indirectly affected by the predictor variables of the job stressors and emotional exhaustion. In this study, all fit indices were reported to be acceptable, and the model had a good fit. It showed that there was a significant relationship between the latent variables and constructs.

It was shown that job stressors have a direct and negative effect on teachers' autonomy support; therefore, the higher the job stressors, the lower the teachers' autonomy support. This finding is consistent with the results of Blasé (1986), Hakanen et al. (2006), Otero-Lopez et al. (2010), and Pogere et al. (2019). It is believed that job stressors are considered as threatening factors for teachers' autonomy support (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Pogere et al., 2019).

Based on the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan, the feeling of job autonomy support reduces the stressors due to providing more freedom of action in working and making decisions. This feeling leads to a special psycho-cognitive state while doing the job, making a person feels that the work's outputs are influenced by their performance (Kuvaas, 2009). According to Bolt et al. (2006), when teachers experience autonomy, they can actively and creatively deal with the changes made in the work environment. When teachers feel that they have full responsibility for teaching in the classrooms, the instructive environment is a two-way interactive space and they are not

controlled by outside environmental factors, they feel autonomous. The teacher's autonomy support demonstrates the interpersonal sentiments and behaviors that while instructing, they identify, nurture, develop, strengthen, and vitalize students' inner motivational resources.

Job stressors are one of the primary causes of decreasing teachers' autonomy support. The idea was supported by Pogere et al. (2019) reporting that job stressors can result in decreasing autonomy support in teachers' in work places.

The results of structural equation modeling indicated that emotional exhaustion directly has a significant and negative effect on teachers' autonomy support. Based on this, the higher the level of emotional exhaustion, the lower the autonomy support of teachers. This finding is compatible with the results of Chang (2013) and Javadi (2014). In explaining this finding, it can be stated that when teachers work in a suitable environment with more satisfaction and good relationships between staff, they feel more autonomously supported and emotionally less exhausted. Those teachers who put their greatest effort into fulfilling their job duties, are satisfied with their profession, and have the full support of the principal and their colleagues in the school environment may feel less exhausted while doing their job. In case of emotional exhaustion, a person does not have the emotional and personal strength to accomplish their work, and their inner motivation, the quality, and quantity of useful activities, interest, and diligence are drained, and he/she quickly gets exhausted of doing any activity (Taris et al., 2004).

Mukundan and Ahour (2011) held that teachers' emotional exhaustion leads to providing negative tendencies while teaching, reducing the quality of education, decreasing the flexibility to accept and meet the different needs of students, and interacting ineffectively with the students. In this regard, the results of Javadi's research (2014) indicated that the autonomy of teachers has an inverse relationship with the feeling of emotional exhaustion. In other words, the more teachers feel responsible for teaching students and guiding them, and feel more enthusiastic and delightful while doing their job, the more they feel autonomous and the less emotional exhaustion they experience.

Teachers' emotional exhaustion has many consequences because this exhaustion can lead to inefficiency, withdrawal from student-teacher relationships, and feelings of incompetence, which unintentionally cause problems in the classroom (Chang, 2009). In explaining the direct effect of job stressors on emotional exhaustion, the obtained results are in line with those of Samiei and Bayani (2014), Russell et al. (1987), Hakanen et al. (2006), Kosir et al. (2015), Bottiani et al. (2019), as well as Kim and Kweon (2020). Maslach et al. (2001) considered emotional exhaustion as the main component of burnout and believed that whenever people talk about their burnout, they mean the experience of exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of excessive exhaustion and being under pressure and loss of emotional resources in an individual, which leads to dissatisfaction with the job and leaving the profession and exhaustion in the person (Ladebo, 2009). To explain the results, it can be stated that teaching is a stressful job. In the daily life of the school, teachers face different challenges, obstacles and pressures that threaten their self-confidence, motivation and their performance. Some teachers are successful in dealing with these pressures while others are not as successful. Every teacher can tolerate stressful factors up to their threshold of tolerance. But if the stress exceeds the limits, it becomes unbearable and causes physical and mental damages, such as emotional exhaustion. When teachers struggle to cope with a significant amount of job stress, they may attribute their work failure to the inability to teach or other related factors causing them to feel emotional exhaustion (Yu et al., 2015). The results of Russell et al.'s (1987) study indicated that teachers who experienced more stress reported more emotional exhaustion. Therefore, teachers show more emotional exhaustion when faced with high levels of job stress (Aldrup et al., 2017).

According to the study's findings, emotional exhaustion acts as a mediator between job stressor factors and teachers' autonomy support. In his research, Javadi (2014) discovered that emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on teachers' support for their autonomy. Additionally, Pogere et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between job stressors, teachers' autonomy support, and emotional exhaustion. Consequently, it can be said that in explaining this result, on the one hand, teachers must contend with many demands from schools, coworkers, student management, society, and students' families. They experience professional pressure and emotional exhaustion when they believe that their current resources and skills are insufficient to satisfy the demands of their jobs. On the other hand, it is difficult for teachers to get a significant

return on a large amount of investment. Therefore, the lack of balance between work investment and material and immaterial return easily leads to emotional exhaustion and reduces enthusiasm for work in teachers (Zhou & Li, 2021).

Teachers who experience emotional fatigue, develop negative, pessimistic and apathetic attitudes towards their students and consider themselves less effective at work. They think that they can no longer help their students achieve their goals. The obtained findings support the conceptually suggested model that was presented and verified in the research.

Conclusion

The workload, working conditions, and inadequate relationships between teachers and students cause emotional exhaustion in teachers. The teachers who experienced more stress reported more emotional exhaustion, and this exhaustion can lead to inefficiency, withdrawal from student-teacher relationships, and feelings of incompetence, which unintentionally cause problems in the classroom and school. When teachers work in a suitable instructional and educational environment, they feel more autonomy support and less emotional exhaustion. The research results have indicated that emotional exhaustion can be a good predictor for understanding teachers' autonomy support. Teachers who put their greatest effort into fulfilling their job duties, are satisfied with their profession, and have the full support of the principal and their colleagues in the school environment may feel less exhausted while doing their job (Taris et al., 2004). Therefore, according to the findings, when teachers are constantly faced with job stressors, they experience emotional exhaustion, and this exhaustion affects their autonomy support. In other words, emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between job stressors and teachers' autonomy support.

This study was limited by the use of self-report measures which are prone to bias. As the statistical population was limited to secondary school teachers in Noor and Chamestan, the results should be generalized to teachers in other grades and cities with caution. Future studies can recruit primary and private teachers and compare the results with those of the present study. Also, the role of intervening variables was not investigated in this study which can be investigated in forthcoming investigations. Several factors affect teachers' autonomy support, which was not possible to survey in this research. It is suggested to study the relationship between other variables affecting teachers' autonomy support. Also, it is suggested that future research use experimental design in interpreting the results. In the future studies, it is possible to compare male and female teachers in

autonomy support in gender-separated studies. Thus, it is suggested that educational authorities should take measures to arrange educational workshops and specialized meetings for teachers and school administrators, taking into account the role of job stressors and emotional exhaustion in teachers' supporting autonomy.

Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest declared.

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