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The Impact of Work Connectivity Behavior After-hours on Employees' Mental Health

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Abstract:

Objective: *To explore the effect of work connectivity behavior after-hours on employees' mental health, the mediating effect of job burnout and the moderating effect of leader-member exchange between the two, so as to provide a reference for enterprises to improve employees' mental health.*

Methods: *Employees were measured by Work Connectivity Behavior After-hours Scale, Maslach Job Burnout Inventory General Survey, 12-items General Health Questionnaire, Leader-Member Exchange 7 questionnaire.*

Results: *Work connectivity behavior after-hours was positively correlated with job burnout and mental health ($r=0.136$, 0.164,$p<0.05$). Job burnout played a complete mediating role between non-working time connectivity and employee mental health ($p<0.01$). Leader-member exchange moderated the relationship between work connectivity behavior after-hours and job burnout ($\beta=0.305$, $p<0.01$).*

Conclusion: *The mental health problem of employees in enterprises is prominent. In order to improve the situation, the work connectivity behavior after-hours can be controlled, the relationship between leaders and employees can be handled well, and relevant measures can be taken to reduce employee job burnout.*

Keywords: *Connectivity Behavior After-hours, Mental Health, Job Burnout, Leader-member Exchange, Enterprise Employee.*

1. BACKGROUND

The unclear boundary between work and rest time is a worldwide management challenge. Work Connectivity Behavior After-hours (WCBA) refers to the use of mobile communication devices by members of an organization to deal with work matters or contact work-related people during non-work hours, such as before or after work, weekends or holidays (K. Richardson & Benbunan-Fich, 2011), research have shown that WCBA can have a negative impacts, such as leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced work-family balance satisfaction, and work-family conflict(He & Yu, 2020; Wu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Among them, emotional exhaustion is a significant manifestation of job burnout, it can be hypothesized that an increase in WCBA can lead to burnout, which is a combination of symptoms of emotional exhaustion, de-personalization, and a low sense of personal fulfillment due to the inability of employees to effectively cope with the constant stress of their jobs (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Job burnout can lead to imbalances in an individual's psychological structure, mental activity, and psychological regulation, triggering restlessness, affecting personality, and decreasing an individual's mental health (Zhang, 2015; Huang, 2019). Further, we can speculate that WCBA indirectly affects mental health through job burnout, and mental health refers to the optimal state in which an individual can fully release positive psychological emotions without mental illness (Wang et al., 2016).

Research has shown that WCBA may also have a positive impact on employees, such as increasing employee creativity, work vitality, and learning perceptions (Zhang et al., 2020; Shi & Zheng, 2021). Leader-member Exchange (LMX) as a situation in which a leader cannot treat all his subordinates in the same way because of time pressures, resources, and other constraining factors (Graen et al.,

1972).Therefore, a leader will keep close and high exchange relationship with some subordinates, and keep ordinary low exchange relationship with other subordinates, and a good leader-member exchange relationship has a positive impact on individual's emotion and motivation (Graen et al., 1972). Based on related research, it is known that when employees have a good relationship with their leaders, they can alleviate the impact of work stress on job burnout (Zhou et al., 2020), so we further hypothesize that leadership-member exchange negatively regulates the impact of WCBA on job burnout, and then alleviates the impact on mental health.

This research tries to explore the status quo of WCBA and its impact on employees' mental health, the mediating role of job burnout between the two and the moderating role of LMX between WCBA and job burnout, so as to provide scientific theoretical guidance and practical references for improving employees' mental health.

2. METHODS

2.1. Samples

Taking the enterprise employees as the research samples, a total of 263 questionnaires were collected on the questionnaire star platform using the random sampling, and after excluding the invalid questionnaires, the valid questionnaires were 232, with a validity rate of 88.21%.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. General Information Questionnaire

The demographic variables measured the respondents' gender, marital status, age, Level of Education, length of service, position, and nature of unit.

2.2.2. WCBA Scale

In this research, we used the Chinese scale revised by Ma et al. (2013) based on Richardson's off-hours work connectivity behavior measurement scale (Richardson & Thompson, 2012), with three items, with scores from 1-5 indicating "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "very frequently", and the higher the score, the higher the frequency of WCBA among employees. The Cronbachs' alpha coefficient for this questionnaire in this study was 0.824.

2.2.3. Job Burnout Scale

The Chinese version of the MBI-GS scale revised by Li and Shi (2003) was used. The scale is divided into three dimensions, with 15 items, including "Work makes me feel physically and mentally exhausted" and "I feel exhausted when I leave work", of which 5 items are emotionally exhausted, 4 items are depersonalization, and 6 items are reduced personal accomplishment. A 5-point scale of 1-5 indicates "never,""rarely,""sometimes," and "often," respectively, "The higher the score, the higher the level of burnout among the respondents. The Cronbachs' alpha coefficient of the questionnaire in this study was 0.941.

2.2.4. GHQ-12

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used. The questionnaire has a total of 12 items, items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 12 are positive items, such as "Have you been able to concentrate on things in the past two weeks?" Items 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11 are negative items, such as "Have you had trouble sleeping in the past two weeks due to excessive worrying about something?" . Each question has four options, each reflecting the respondents' mental health level in different degrees. In this study, the GHQ-12 standardized scoring method was used, i.e., options (1) and (2) were scored as 0, (3) and (4) were scored as 1. 0 was the lowest score, 12 was the highest score, and 3 was the dividing point; $0 \leq$ GHQ score of ≤ 3 was "low symptoms of mental illness", $4 \leq$ GHQ score of ≤ 12 was "high symptoms of mental illness"(Wang et al., 2012). The Cronbachs' α coefficient of this questionnaire in this study was 0.818.

2.2.5. LMX Scale

The LMX-7 scale developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) was used. The scale consists of 7 items including "I know how satisfied my leaders are with my work". A 5-point Likert scale was used, with 1-5 points indicating "very inconsistent", "mostly inconsistent", "generally consistent", "mostly

consistent", and "very consistent", with higher scores indicating a closer relationship between employees and their leaders. The Cronbachs' alpha coefficient for this questionnaire in this study was 0.738.

2.3. Procedures

The random sampling was adopted to collect data by distributing questionnaires on the Questionnaire Star platform. In the process of questionnaire distribution, in order to ensure the authenticity of the data, the questionnaire guide explains the purpose of the questionnaire, and the process of anonymity is adopted in the way of answering the questions, the questions do not involve the right and wrong points, the respondents to fill in the process of enjoying the right to know, and can be withdrawn at any time to answer.

2.4. Statistical Methods

SPSS 26.0 was used for data analysis. Firstly, Harman's one-factor method was used to test the existence of common method bias, and all the items of the four scales of WCBA, job burnout, mental health and LMX were subjected to exploratory factor analysis, and the explanation rate of the first factor was 30.93%, which was smaller than the critical standard of 40%, indicating that the common method bias was not obvious (Zhou & Long, 2004). Next, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted for each variable, and Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the correlation between off-hours work connectivity behavior, burnout, and mental health. The mediating and moderating effects were analyzed using multiple linear regression, and the hypothesized model was further tested using the PROCESS plug-in.

3. Results

3.1. Basic Information on Survey Respondents

In the data collected in this study, there are more females than males, and there are far more unmarried people than married people. The sample data of the study is mainly post-90s, and the number of people aged between 20-30 years old is 190, accounting for 81.9%. The number of people with bachelor's degree or above is 187, accounting for 80.6%, which means that most people in the sample have higher education. The number of people with 0-5 years of working experience is the largest, with 201 people, accounting for 86.7%. In the distribution of position level, most of the sample are ordinary employees, totaling 194 people, accounting for 83.6%. In the distribution of unit nature, private and private enterprises account for 55.6%, accounting for the highest proportion.

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

The results of descriptive statistics showed that the frequency of WCBA was at a moderate to high level, corporate employees' job burnout was at a moderate level in general, 42.2% of the corporate employees in the sample had some degree of mental health problems based on the definition of symptoms of psychological disorders in the General Mental Health Questionnaire, and the LMX was at a moderate level.

In order to explore the correlation between the variables, Pearson correlation analysis was used to conclude that WCBA, job burnout and its sub-dimensions emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and mental health were significantly positively correlated. The results presented in Table 1.

Table1. *Relevant Analysis Results*

	1	**2**	**2-1**	**2-2**	**2-3**	**3**	**4**	**M±SD**
1 WCBA	1							3.13±0.76
2 Job Burnout	0.136*	1						2.52±0.74
2-1 Emotional Exhaustion	0.190**	0.922**	1					2.76±1.03
2-2 Depersonalization	0.171*	0.917**	0.878**	1				2.50±0.96
2-3 Reduced Personal Accomplishment	-0.026	0.731**	0.452**	0.478**	1			2.34±0.67
3 Mental Health	0.164*	0.682**	0.640**	0.567**	0.538**	1		3.39±2.89
4 LMX	0.217**	-0.350**	-0.229**	-0.169**	-0.521**	-0.295**	1	2.93±0.53

**** p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05 (the same as below)*

3.3. Hypotheses Testing

The results of correlation analysis of the samples showed that the correlation between the variables was significant and regression analysis was used to verify the research hypotheses. Demographic variables such as gender, marital status, age, and education level were selected as control variables to analyze and validate the relationship between the variables.

3.3.1. Mediating Effect

Referring to Baron and Kenny's (1986) test of mediating effects. First, the predictive effect of the independent variable WCBA on the dependent variable employee mental health and the mediator variable job burnout was tested. In equation 1, WCBA has a significant positive effect on employees' mental health problem (β=0.144, $p<0.05$). In equation 2, WCBA has a significant positive effect on job burnout (β=0.103 , $p<0.05$). Then, testing the predictive effect of the mediating variable job burnout on the dependent variable mental health, in equation 3, job burnout had a significant positive effect on employees' mental health problem (β=0.679, $p<0.001$). Finally, WCBA and job burnout were added to the regression equation at the same time to construct regression equation 4, the regression equation was significant (R^2=0.476, F=22.447, $p<0.001$), and the positive effect of job burnout on employees' mental health problem was still significant (β=0.668, $p<0.01$), However, the effect of WCBA on employees' mental health was no longer significant, indicating that job burnout completely mediated the relationship between WCBA and employees' mental health, the results presented in Table 2.

Table2. *Results of Job Burnout Mediation Effect Test Analysis*

Dependent Variable	**Eq.1**	**Eq.2**	**Eq.3**	**Eq.4**
Control Variables				
Gender	0.132*	0.250***	-0.041	-0.035
Marital Status	0.014	-0.111	0.109	0.088
Age	-0.129	-0.062	-0.102	-0.087
Level of Education	0.162*	0.249***	0.007	-0.004
Length of Service	-0.047	-0.088	0.012	0.012
Position	-0.216**	-0.220**	-0.070	-0.069
Nature of Unit	0.049	0.009	0.035	0.043
Independent Variable				
WCBA	0.144*	0.103*		0.072
Intermediary Variable				
Job Burnout			0.679***	0.668**
R^2	0.187	0.350	0.472	0.476
Adjusted R^2	0.158	0.327	0.453	0.455
F	6.400***	15.010***	24.883***	22.447***

Based on the results of the mediation effect test, the path of mediation is plotted, as shown in Figure 1:

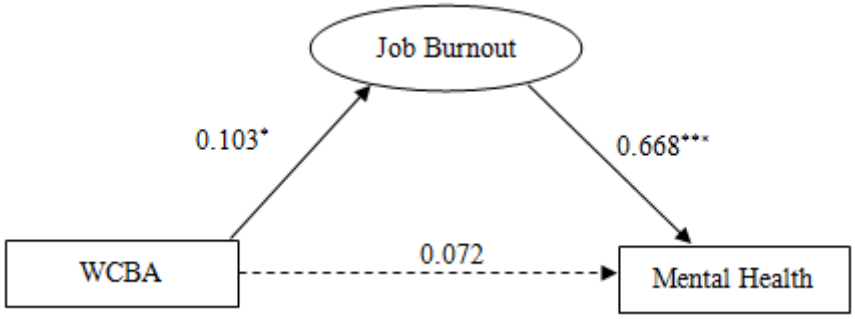

Fig1. *Mediation Effect*

3.3.2. Moderating Effect

Referring to Baron and Kenny's (1986) test of moderating effect, multiple linear regression was used to analyze the moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between WCBA and job burnout, and control variables, dependent variables, independent variables, moderating variables, and interaction

terms were introduced into the regression equations, and the results of the statistical analyses are shown in Table 3. In Equation 3, the interaction term between WCBA and LMX interaction terms positively affect job burnout (β=0.305, p<0.01), indicating that there is a significant moderating effect of LMX between WCBA and job burnout.

Table3. *Results of LMX Moderating Effect Test Analysis*

	Eq.1	**Eq.2**	**Eq.3**
Control Variables			
Gender	0.446**	0.420**	0.421**
Age	-0.039	-0.091	-0.045
Marital Status	-0.278	-0.175	-0.268
Level of Education	0.361**	0.352**	0.358**
Length of Service	-0.096	-0.071	-0.049
Position	-0.279**	-0.237**	-0.242**
Nature of Unit	0.028	0.007	-0.030
Independent Variable			
WCBA	0.110*	0.169**	0.153**
Moderator Variable			
LMX		-0.410**	-0.500**
Interaction Term			
WCBA*LMX			0.305**
R^2	0.367	0.442	0.488
Adjusted R^2	0.338	0.414	0.46
F	12.801***	15.865***	17.379***
$\triangle R^2$	0.367	0.076	0.045
$\triangle F$	12.801***	29.820***	19.417***

The results of the simple slope analysis are shown in Figure 2, with the horizontal coordinate representing the frequency of WCBA and the vertical coordinate representing job burnout. The solid line represents a low-quality LMX, and the dashed line represents a high-quality LMX. When the quality of the LMX is high, the relationship between WCBA and job burnout is stronger, and vice versa.

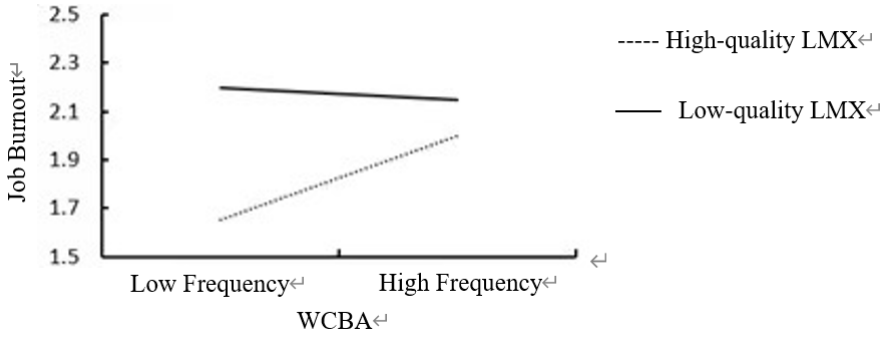

Fig2. *The Moderating Role of LMX*

3.3.3. Moderated Mediating Effect

The mediating effect of having moderation was further tested using the PROCESS plug-in based on the test proposed by Edwards and Lambert (2007). LMX was categorized into three levels based on the mean of the LMX and plus or minus one standard deviation each. For employees with a low level of LMX (M-1SD), that is, "outsiders" as leaders, the confidence interval of indirect effect included 0, indicating that the indirect effect of WCBA on job burnout and mental health was not significant. For employees with a high level of LMX (M+1SD), that is, "insiders" as leaders, the confidence interval of the indirect effect does not include 0, indicating that WCBA has a significant indirect effect on job burnout and then on employees' mental health, as shown in Table 4.

Table4. *The Mediating Role of Job Burnout at Different Levels of LMX*

LMX	**Effect**	**Boot SE**	**Boot LLCI**	**Boot ULCI**
M-1SD	-0.056	0.192	-0.455	0.299
M	0.382	0.158	0.098	0.709
M+1SD	0.821	0.217	0.414	1.271

The results of the above regression analysis are synthesized to draw the research path of this paper, as shown in Figure 3:

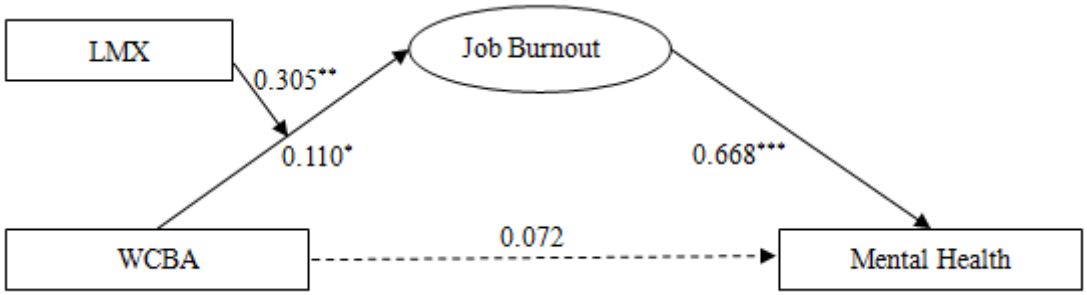

Fig3. *Moderated Mediating Effect*

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Outstanding Mental Health Problems of Employees

The research found that 42.2% of the corporate employees in the sample had some degree of mental health problems. In the context of fierce social competition, enterprise employees generally face great work pressure and are prone to mental health problems. In order to address this problem, enterprises can establish employee mental health files, regularly test and record the level of mental health of employees, and take effective measures to intervene in time for employees with mental health problems.

4.2. Higher Frequency of WCBA among Employees

The WCBA of enterprise employees is at a moderate to high level and occurs with high frequency. Relevant researches have shown that WCBA not only affects employees' mental health, but also affects employees' evaluation of leadership effectiveness and employees' work attitude (Zhang et al., 2020). In this regard, enterprise managers should pay attention to improve the enterprise management system, clarify the boundaries of working time and non-working time, improve the efficiency of employees in working time, and reduce the frequency of WCBA. In addition, when designing the workflow, enterprises should fully consider the actual ability of employees and assign work tasks within their ability to put forward work requirements. At the same time, managers should also set an example by reducing the number of work tasks to be assigned to employees during non-working hours in non-emergency situations.

4.3. Job Burnout of Employees is at a Medium Level

Corporate employee burnout is generally at a moderate level. Of the three dimensions, Emotional Depletion has the highest score, indicating that corporate employees are generally in a state of emotional malaise. Emotionally exhausted employees show a lack of energy and depleted emotional resources. In this regard, companies should strengthen the attention to the work status of employees, when employees encounter difficulties at work, managers should communicate with employees in a timely manner, give employees appropriate help and support, to avoid the accumulation of bad emotions of employees. Relevant studies have shown that the emotional tone of WCBA will make employees feel happy or angry, which in turn will have an impact on the employees' psychological conflict (Butts et al., 2015), therefore, when carrying out the necessary WCBA, positive emotions should be adopted to reduce the negative impact on the employees' mental health.

4.4. Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Job Burnout

Job burnout plays a fully mediating role between WCBA and mental health. This result is similar to the results of previous empirical research that job burnout its fully mediating role in the relationship between emotional labor and mental health (Hu & Sun, 2016). WCBA puts employees in a working condition for a long time, which interferes with their private life and makes it difficult for them to relieve stress and negative emotions at work, which leads to a higher degree of emotional exhaustion and fatigue, which in turn affects employees' mental health. Therefore, enterprises can reduce the WCBA of employees by formulating relevant measures to reduce the degree of job burnout and improve the level of psychological health. If WCBA can not be avoided, enterprises can also reduce

the impact of WCBA on employees' mental health by reducing employees' work burnout, which can increase the material and emotional support for employees to make up for the resources consumed by employees, such as giving employees welfare subsidies, face to face encouragement and praise employees, etc., so as to reduce their work burnout.

4.5. Analysis of the Moderating Effects of LMX

Based on the results of the analytical test of the moderating effect, it can be seen that LMX positively moderates the relationship between WCBA and job burnout. Specifically, the relationship between WCBA and job burnout was stronger in the situation of high LMX and weaker in the opposite situation.

In response to results that differ from the previous hypothesis, we explores the reasons for this:

First, the measurement of the LMX in this research adopts the method of employee evaluation, which only obtains the employee's one-sided data, and is not comprehensive enough and lacks a certain degree of objectivity in evaluating the quality of the LMX, which leads to a bias in the analytical results.

Second, according to the Conservation of Resources Theory, the impact of resource loss is far more than resource gain, and its impact is faster and lasts longer. Compared with the resources gained from high-quality LMX, the resource loss from non-working time may have a greater impact, in addition, employees may make more WCBA to maintain high-quality LMX, which also leads to higher job burnout.

Third, the economic man hypothesis suggests that all human behavior is designed to maximize the satisfaction of one's own interests. The act of working connectivity during non-working hours is not paid for labor, and working during non-working hours is a loss for employees. Employees who maintain a good relationship with their leaders want to gain more benefits and minimize unnecessary losses. Therefore, if they are assigned to complete their work during non-working hours, they will have a more unbalanced mindset, which will elevate the feeling of job burnout, on the contrary, employees who have a lower quality of relationship with their leadership members do not have the hope of reducing their losses, and are more likely to accept completing their work during non-working hours.

5. Conclusion

Our research used surveys and statistical analyses to elucidate the interrelationships among the four variables of WCBA, burnout, mental health, and LMX. At the theoretical level, this study enriches the research in the field of WCBA and electronic communication, and provides a new research perspective from the leadership-employee interrelationship, focusing on the impact on individual psychology. At the practical level, we provides references for the management of enterprises, helping them to improve their work management system and promote the formation of a good working atmosphere within the enterprise.

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