



# From job demands and resources to work engagement, burnout, life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and occupational health<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the cross-lagged associations between work engagement and burnout, and life satisfaction and depressive symptoms, their demands (i.e., workload) and resources (i.e., servant leadership, self-efficacy, resilience) and relationships with occupational health outcomes (i.e., recovery, number of mental health diagnoses, workaholism). This study is a part of an ongoing Occupational Health Study in which 1 415 employees (586 men, 829 women) were followed twice during two years 2011–12 through their occupational health services. The participants filled in a questionnaire on their work engagement, burnout symptoms, well-being, personal and work environmental resources and demands, and occupational health. The results showed that spillover existed, in particular, from work engagement to depressive symptoms (negatively), and to life satisfaction (positively) and from depressive symptoms to work engagement (negatively), and to burnout (positively). Work engagement was also negatively associated with work burnout, and depressive symptoms were negatively associated with life satisfaction. Moreover, servant leadership was positively associated with work engagement, which, in turn, was positively associated with high life satisfaction and recovery, and negatively associated with work burnout and depressive symptoms. High workload, in turn, was positively associated with burnout and depressive symptoms, which, in turn, were further positively associated with increased mental health diagnoses, and negatively associated with recovery.

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## 1. Introduction

Recent research has shown that work engagement and burnout symptoms are negatively associated and may either promote or hinder one's job performance (Taris, 2006), organizational commitment and well-being (Hakanen et al., 2006). According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), different energy-driven and motivational processes are in play between work engagement and burnout

symptoms and related to job demands and resources. For example, increased workload manifests as wearing out and other symptoms of burnout, leading to absenteeism, whereas high resources at work manifest as increased motivation, involvement and low turnover (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). Work-related engagement and burnout may also spillover to general life satisfaction and depressive symptoms (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012) and vice versa (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, in press). Different job resources may also predict employees' well-being, which, in turn, may further influence occupational health. For example, servant leadership (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) as a social resource has been demonstrated to manifest as an increase employees' job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009) and as a decrease in burnout symptoms (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2010), and may spill over to life satisfaction and depressive symptoms. However, less is known about the extent to which servant leadership functions as a resource for employees' work engagement and life satisfaction, simultaneously reducing one's burnout and depressive symptoms, and further affecting

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employees' occupational health. Consequently, the present study investigates (a) the cross-lagged associations between employees' work engagement and burnout, and depressive symptoms and life satisfaction, (b) the role of workload as job demand and servant leadership, self-efficacy, and resilience as job resources in predicting the above mentioned variables, and (c) occupational health outcomes (e.g., recovery, number of mental health diagnoses from the participants' occupational health services registers, and workaholism) of employees' work engagement, burnout, depressive symptoms and life satisfaction.

### 1.1. Job demands and resources, and occupational health outcomes

According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker et al., 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2006; Demerouti et al., 2001) work engagement and burnout are closely related and reflect one another. For example, increased burnout symptoms negatively affect work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2006). *Work burnout* is typically described as a reaction to chronic occupational stress characterized by exhaustion (i.e., strain and overtaxing from work), cynicism (i.e., loss of interest and distal attitude toward work, not seeing work as meaningful), and feelings of inadequacy as an employee (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, & Nurmi, 2009; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). *Work engagement*, in turn, is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind which is described by experiences of energy, dedication, and absorption at work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Energy refers to high vigor and mental resilience while working, and to willingness to invest effort and persistence when facing difficulties (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Absorption, in turn, is described as being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, so that time passes quickly and it may be difficult to detach oneself from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work burnout and engagement are distinctive albeit negatively associated constructs which both reflect employees' work-related well-being (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012).

In studies focusing on occupational health, it is equally important to take into the consideration employees' general well-being in addition to their work-related well-being (see also Ahola et al., 2005). Several studies have shown that spillover exists between work engagement and burnout, and life satisfaction and depressive symptoms (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2016, in press). According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), different gain and loss spirals may exist between work engagement, burnout and related variables (see also Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). In addition, those who lack resources are not only more vulnerable to resource loss but initial lack of resources also fosters increased future loss (Hobfoll, 2001). Similarly, those who have high initial resources will have more resources available to them later on (Hobfoll, 2001). Thus, work burnout and engagement may spillover to life satisfaction and depressive symptoms. Life satisfaction and depressive symptoms, in turn, may show as increases or decreases in work burnout and engagement.

Supporting the COR theory, previous studies have shown that the development of work engagement is closely associated with life satisfaction among young adults, and that life satisfaction, in particular, positively predicts one's career engagement rather than vice versa (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, in press). Study-related burnout, in turn, increases depressive symptoms among students (Salmela-Aro, Savolainen, & Holopainen, 2009). Thus, among students and young adults ontext-free life satisfaction often spills over to study-related engagement, whereas study-related burnout

rather spills over to depressive symptoms. Among employees, both work engagement and burnout typically predict general life satisfaction and depressive symptoms rather than vice versa (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Hakanen et al., 2008; Innstrand, Langballe, & Falkum, 2012). In addition, some studies have suggested that stability in work engagement is more comparable with the stability in general psychological distress than the stability in work-related burnout symptoms (Seppälä et al., 2012). The conflicting results of the previous research indicate the need for further study.

The JD-R Model (Bakker et al., 2003; Demerouti et al., 2001) further postulates that engagement at work is influenced by multiple job demands and resources. Job demands and resources can be further divided into physical, psychological, social or organizational resources and demands (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009).

*Job demands* refer to those aspects of work that require sustained physical and psychological effort and are thus associated with certain physical and psychological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001). Although job demands are not necessarily negative, they may turn into stressors when the effort required to meet them is high and when the number of demands simultaneously present is also high (Bakker et al., 2003). Job demands include, for example, workload, problems with equipment (i.e. computer problems), long working hours and time pressure, and emotional strain (Bakker et al., 2003). Quantitative or qualitative workload is a job environmental demand which manifests as increased burnout symptoms and disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). In this study, we investigate the relationship of workload to work engagement and burnout, and life satisfaction and depressive symptoms.

*Job resources* refer to those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of job that either/or: (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in receiving work-related goals; (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Demerouti et al., 2001; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). In addition, recent research has shown that job resources may buffer the negative influence of job demands on work engagement (Bakker et al., 2007). However, job resources are not only crucial for dealing with job demands but they are also important in their own right. For example, lack of resources may lead to poor work engagement and increased levels of burnout symptoms (Hakanen et al., 2006). Job resources can be identified, for example, in such areas as the employee's personal efficacy, resilience, and quality of supervisory coaching (Bakker et al., 2003). Personal resources include characteristics such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, and optimism, all of which predict high subsequent work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). One important social resource in the workplace are leaders and the type of leadership. For example, a recent study (Demerouti, Bakker, & Fried, 2012) showed that feedback from the supervisor was significantly and positively related to enjoyment (flow) in work. It has also been found that authentic leadership, which strengthens followers' identification with both leader and organization, promotes work engagement and subsequent job satisfaction (Giallonardo, Wong, & Iwasiw, 2010). Similarly, servant leadership characterized by stewardship, empowerment, and accountability (Russell & Gregory Stone, 2002) positively predicts job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009) and organizational trust (Joseph & Winston, 2005), and decreases employees' burnout symptoms (Babakus et al., 2010). However, less is known about the extent to which servant leadership serves as a resource for work engagement, how servant leadership may buffer against the negative impact of workload, and how various work resources and demands spill over to ontext-free life satisfaction and depressive symptoms. Thus, the present study examined the role of servant leadership, efficacy beliefs,

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