



Journal Website

Article history:
Received 07 June 2024
Accepted 20 Sept. 2024
Published online 08 Dec. 2024

International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences

Volume 5, Issue 5, pp 59-67



E-ISSN: 3041-8828

Modeling Psychological Well-being Based on Attachment Styles, Personality Traits, and Defense Mechanisms with the Mediation of Job Burnout in Emergency Medical Staff

Mahboube Keshtkar¹ , Alireza Aghayousfi^{2*} , Abdolvahid Davoodi³

1. PhD Student, Department of Psychology, Qom Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qom, Iran.
2. Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding author).
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Qom Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qom, Iran.

* Corresponding author email address: arayeh1100@gmail.com

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Keshtkar M, Aghayousfi A, Davoodi A. (2024). Modeling Psychological Well-being Based on Attachment Styles, Personality Traits, and Defense Mechanisms with the Mediation of Job Burnout in Emergency Medical Staff. *International Journal of Education and Cognitive Sciences*, 5(5), 59-67.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijecs.5.5.7>



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of the present study was to model psychological well-being based on attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms with the mediation of job burnout in emergency medical staff.

Methods and Materials: The research design was correlational using path analysis. The statistical population of this study included emergency medical staff in the southwest of Tehran Province (Islamshahr, Shahriar, Malard, Parand, Robat Karim) in 2023, with an approximate number of 450 individuals. For the selection of the research sample, 210 participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on Krejcie and Morgan's table and the size of the statistical population. The participants completed the Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff et al., 1989), the Revised Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), the Big Five Personality Traits Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1991), the Defense Style Questionnaire (Andrews et al., 1993), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, 1981). Data were analyzed using covariance analysis and path analysis with AMOS and SPSS 26.

Findings: The results indicated that the path coefficient of the direct effect of attachment styles on predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies in emergency medical staff was significant. It was also found that the path coefficient of defense mechanisms in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies in emergency medical staff was significant.

Conclusion: Overall, it was determined that attachment styles and personality traits play a role in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout in emergency medical staff.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, attachment styles, defense mechanisms, job burnout.

1. Introduction

In the positive psychology movement, psychologists describe psychological well-being under the term "psychological health" (Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Ryff (1989) further defined psychological well-being as comprising six components: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, and environmental mastery (Abedi et al., 2024; Ofem, 2023). Given that psychological well-being plays a significant role in individuals' mental health, it is essential to investigate the factors that explain this important construct (Luo & Hancock, 2020). In this regard, several studies have shown that individuals with higher psychological well-being exhibit greater resilience in the face of challenges and stress and are less likely to experience psychological harm (Sagone et al., 2023; Sepahvand et al., 2020). Since psychological well-being is a crucial variable in relation to psychological and individual characteristics, attachment styles, as an influential variable, are considered effective in this context and are examined in this study as a variable related to psychological well-being.

The concept of attachment is introduced as a strong emotional bond that individuals form with their primary caregiver. Early attachment experiences with the primary caregiver or mother guide individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in adulthood (Haji Adineh et al., 2024). Ainsworth (1978) described three attachment styles: secure attachment, anxious/ambivalent attachment, and anxious/avoidant attachment. In relation to the role of these attachment styles in adult relationships, Hazan and Shaver (1987) noted that the secure style is associated with close relationships with others. Individuals with this style feel more comfortable in close relationships. On the other hand, individuals with an avoidant style struggle to form secure connections with others and experience tension in their relationships. Those with an anxious-ambivalent style believe others are incapable of establishing appropriate relationships with them and are worried about not being liked (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021; Myrick et al., 2014). Furthermore, attachment plays a crucial role in how individuals cope with challenges and stress, and those with unhealthy attachment patterns report more psychological issues (Annalakshmi, 2019). Hence, insecure attachment styles are linked with maladaptive behavior patterns (Hazan

& Shaver, 1987). Personality traits are another variable examined in this study.

Another variable under examination in this study is personality traits. Given the significant role of personality and personality traits in psychological factors, it is expected that personality traits may also play an important role in individuals' job-related responses, with different personalities showing varied psychological reactions in the workplace (Randall et al., 2017). More specifically, personality includes traits or tendencies that lead to individual differences in behavior, consistency in behavior over time, and continuity of behavior across different situations (Sadat Mousavi & Ebrahimi, 2024). Costa and McCrae (2003) defined personality as comprising five main factors: openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Personality is a psychological construct with various definitions across different theoretical approaches. It refers to traits or tendencies that lead to individual differences and demonstrate stability and continuity across different situations. Furthermore, personality determines various behavioral and psychological characteristics (Abagheri Meyari et al., 2024; Soltani et al., 2024; Yazdani et al., 2023).

Another variable in this study is defense mechanisms. In Freud's theory (1936), defense mechanisms are mental operations that keep painful thoughts and feelings out of individuals' conscious awareness (Shahla et al., 2022). Defense mechanisms are considered psychological strategies, often operating unconsciously, that individuals use to protect themselves from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings. These mechanisms can function adaptively or maladaptively, depending on how they protect the ego. Defense mechanisms are significant in predicting and treating psychological disorders from a psychoanalytic perspective (Parchment, 2023; Porcerelli et al., 2016). They serve as processes that regulate psychological issues in the domain of awareness. Individuals employ them to reduce dissonance and sudden changes in internal and external realities by influencing the perceiver's perception. In other words, defense mechanisms are psychological techniques individuals use to protect themselves from anxiety, unfavorable situations, and emotional-psychological pressures. They enable adaptation to unpleasant events to prevent serious vulnerability resulting from failure. However, excessive reliance on defense mechanisms is linked to neurotic issues (Porcerelli

et al., 2016). Immature defense mechanisms are expected to be associated with psychological problems (Parchment, 2023). Therefore, it can be stated that defense mechanisms are related to individuals' psychological well-being. Furthermore, due to the nature of their work, emergency medical technicians are often exposed to psychological and emotional distress, which may be linked to their attachment styles and personality traits. As a result, job burnout is examined in this study as a mediating variable between these factors.

Job burnout, a key indicator of occupational stress, is considered a delayed reaction to chronic stressors in the workplace (Hu et al., 2015). Moreover, job burnout has detrimental effects, with individuals working in high-stress environments experiencing greater burnout (Ren et al., 2021). Given the increasing job burnout among healthcare workers, which may be attributed to factors such as heavy workloads, long working hours, insufficient staff, constant contact with sick individuals, exposure to death, rotating shifts, and interpersonal conflicts with colleagues, it is expected that job burnout is associated with psychological problems (Galletta et al., 2016).

Since healthcare workers and emergency medical technicians face job-related psychological problems, multiple factors are likely to influence the psychological well-being of these individuals. The most significant predictors include attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms, which are pivotal factors in relation to the psychological well-being of emergency personnel. While previous research has not examined the relationship between attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms with psychological well-being simultaneously, many theories and studies focus on risk factors associated with decreased psychological well-being. However, the impact of these risk factors, considering fundamental components, remains unclear. Previous studies have explored important variables like coping strategies and job burnout as significant factors affecting psychological well-being independently, but they have not considered these factors as mediators between attachment styles, personality traits, defense mechanisms, and psychological well-being. It is generally agreed in the literature that these variables are reported in individuals with psychological characteristics. Therefore, considering the occupational challenges and psychological problems faced by emergency medical technicians, this group represents an overlooked sample within the healthcare workforce, and this study focuses on them. Moreover, given that previous studies have not

investigated this specific population, there is a research gap in assessing these vulnerable individuals. Hence, considering the factors influencing psychological well-being and reviewing the existing literature, this study seeks to answer whether job burnout can serve as a mediating factor in the relationship between psychological well-being and attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The design of this study was correlational, employing path analysis. The statistical population of the present research included emergency medical technicians (paramedics) from the southwest of Tehran Province (Islamshahr, Shahriar, Malard, Parand, Robat Karim) in 2023, with an approximate total of 450 individuals. For the selection of the research sample, purposive sampling was used among emergency technicians from southwest Tehran Province in 2023. A total of 210 participants were selected as the research sample based on the Krejcie and Morgan table and the size of the statistical population.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Psychological Well-being

This questionnaire was designed by Ryff et al. (1989) and contains 18 items. The scoring of the Ryff Psychological Well-being Questionnaire is based on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The questionnaire includes six components (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth), with three questions for each component and one total score. Ryff (1989) reported the reliability of the test using Cronbach's alpha, with a range of coefficients from 0.72 to 0.89 (Dehghani et al., 2017; Khelatbari et al., 2019; Shahla et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Attachment Scale

Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), designed by Collins and Read (1990), consists of 21 items, with 18 currently used. The scale includes three subscales: questions 1, 6, 8, 12, 13, and 17 assess secure attachment; questions 2, 5, 14, 16, 7, and 18 assess avoidant attachment; and questions 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 15 assess anxious/ambivalent

attachment. Items 6, 8, 17, 5, 16, and 18 are reverse scored. Based on the questionnaire guidelines, six items pertain to each subscale. The scoring of this questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all characteristic of me to 5 = very characteristic of me). Collins and Read (1990) estimated the reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha at 0.80. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha for the secure subscale was calculated between 0.80 and 0.82, for the avoidant subscale between 0.78 and 0.80, and for the anxious subscale between 0.83 and 0.85. Pakdaman (2001) also examined the validity of the test using a test-retest method, with the results showing that the questionnaire has 95% reliability when administered twice, one month apart (Akbari et al., 2018).

2.2.3. *Personality Traits*

This tool, developed by Goldberg (1999), consists of 50 items. For each of the five major personality traits, 10 items are used. These five traits are typically labeled neuroticism (items 24, 4, 44, 49, 29, 19, 14, 9, 34, and 39), extraversion (items 31, 21, 46, 11, 1, 26, and 16), openness to experience (items 25, 15, 50, 20, 10, 30, 35, 5, 40, and 45), agreeableness (items 32, 7, 2, 22, 17, 12, 37, 27, and 42), and conscientiousness (items 38, 28, 43, 18, 8, 48, 33, 13, and 3). The scoring is based on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Items 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 18, 19, 22, 26, 28, 32, 38, 41, and 46 are reverse scored. Khormaei (2006) reported the reliability and validity of this scale using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.75. For neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion, the coefficients were 0.88, 0.78, 0.80, 0.80, and 0.78, respectively, indicating the tool's adequate reliability (Sepahvand et al., 2020; Zargar Kharazi Esfahani et al., 2023).

2.2.4. *Defense Styles (Mechanisms)*

This questionnaire, designed by Andrews et al. (1993), contains 40 items. It evolved from an initial questionnaire by Bond et al. (1983). The questionnaire identifies 20 defense mechanisms and categorizes them into three factors: mature, immature, and neurotic. Immature defense styles include rationalization (items 4-16), projection (items 6-29), denial (items 8-18), omnipotence (items 9-15), devaluation (items 10-13), acting out (items 11-20), somatization (items 12-27), autistic fantasy (items 14-17), splitting (items 19-22), passive aggression (items 23-36), displacement (items 31-

33), and isolation (items 34-37). Mature defense styles include sublimation (items 3-38), suppression (items 2-25), humor (items 5-26), and anticipation (items 3-35). Neurotic defense styles include pseudo-altruism (items 1-39), reaction formation (items 7-28), intellectualization (items 21-24), and undoing (items 32-40). The scoring is based on a nine-point Likert scale. Each defense mechanism yields a score between 2 and 18, and individuals scoring above 10 are considered to use that mechanism. Overall, the individual's average score in each style is compared to others. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported by Andrews et al. (1993) with a Cronbach's alpha of over 0.70 for the entire questionnaire and its dimensions (Shahla et al., 2022).

2.2.5. *Job Burnout*

Burnout Inventory (MBI), designed by Maslach (1981), consists of 22 items. The scoring of the items is based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, and 22 are reverse scored. The questionnaire includes components of emotional exhaustion (items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, and 20), depersonalization (items 5, 10, 11, 15, and 22), and lack of personal accomplishment (items 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 21). The minimum score for this test is 22, and the maximum score is 110. Item 23 assesses overall burnout. The reliability of this questionnaire was first confirmed in Iran by Filian (1992), who reported a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Ehyaii and colleagues (2009) also reported a reliability coefficient of 0.53 using Cronbach's alpha (Dehghani et al., 2017).

2.3. *Data Analysis*

To analyze the data and interpret the results of this research, descriptive statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation were used. For comparing pre-test and post-test scores and testing research hypotheses, inferential statistical indicators, including MANCOVA (multivariate and univariate covariance analysis) and Bonferroni post hoc tests, were employed. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.

3. *Findings and Results*

Table 1 shows the descriptive findings, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores related to the variables of the present research for the student sample.

Table 1

Mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores related to the research variables

Research Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Psychological Well-being	102.32	3.45	41	171
Attachment Styles	37.19	0.712	11	48
Personality Traits	135.62	5.901	34	182
Defense Mechanisms	87.91	6.129	38	103
Job Burnout	49.18	0.329	16	57

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix between the research variables in the study sample.

Table 2

Correlation matrix between the research variables in the study sample

Row	Research Variables	Psychological Well-being	Attachment Styles	Personality Traits	Defense Mechanisms	Job Burnout
1	Psychological Well-being	1				
2	Attachment Styles	0.665*	1			
3	Personality Traits	0.552*	0.737*	1		
4	Defense Mechanisms	0.758*	0.744*	0.299*	1	
5	Job Burnout	0.713*	0.447*	0.598*	0.295*	1

*p<0.05

As shown in Table 2, all the correlation coefficients obtained between the research variables are significant at the 0.05 level ($P < 0.05$).

The significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all six research variables was greater than 0.05.

Therefore, the assumption of normal distribution for all research variables is confirmed. Table 3 shows the paths and standardized coefficients related to the direct effects in the proposed model.

Table 3

Paths and standardized coefficients related to the direct effects in the proposed model

Path	Standardized Estimate β	Standardized Estimate B	Significance Level P
Avoidant Attachment \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	-0.566	-1.23	0.000
Anxious Attachment \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	-0.083	-0.059	0.002
Secure Attachment \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	0.144	0.059	0.000
Personality Traits \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	0.89	0.45	0.000
Defense Mechanisms \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	-0.130	-0.018	0.001
Job Burnout \rightarrow Psychological Well-being	-0.145	-0.540	0.000

Based on the results shown in the table above, all the path coefficients related to the final model are significant. To examine the mediating relationships between the research variables, the bootstrap test was used. Based on the model

structure and the standardized coefficients mentioned in the tables above, the results for the first to third hypotheses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Bootstrap test results between independent, dependent, and mediating variables

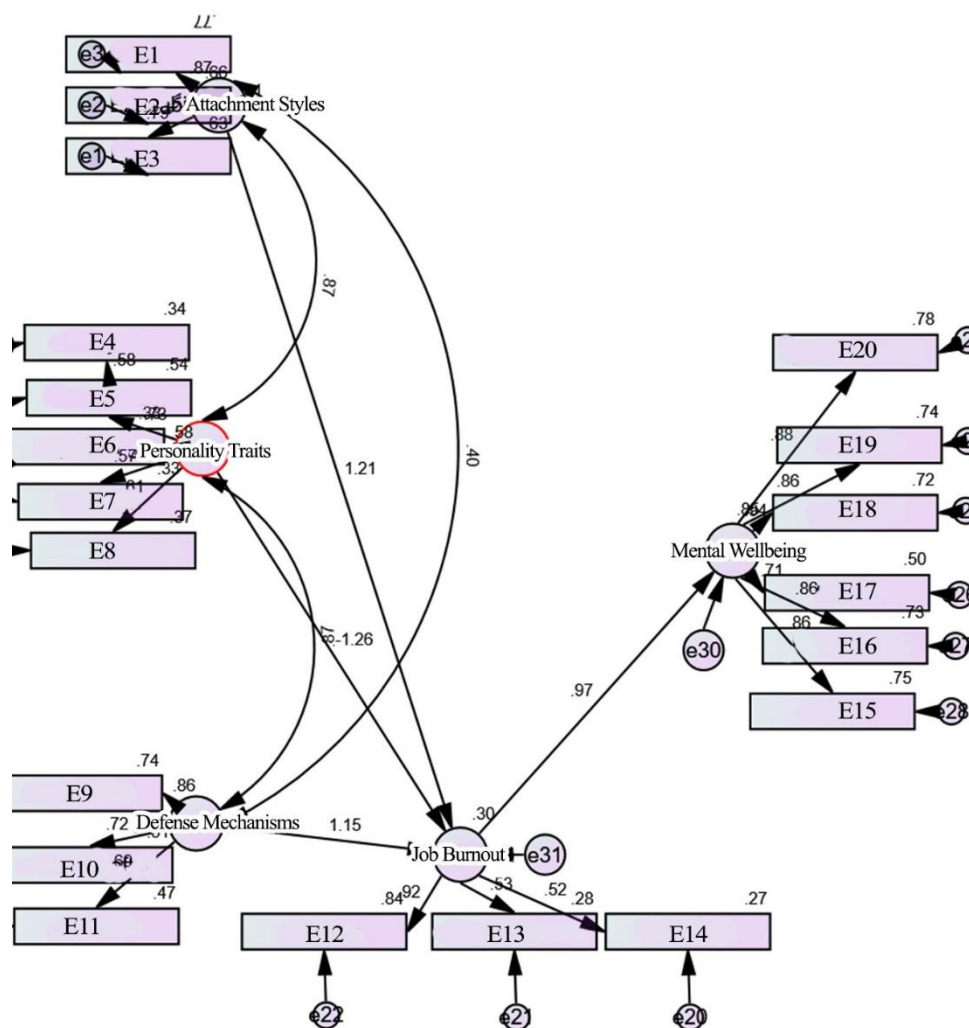
Path	Data	Bootstrap Value	Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Standard Error	Bias
Attachment Styles → Psychological Well-being with the mediation of Job Burnout	0.107	0.195	0.118	0.051	0.020	0.012
Personality Traits → Psychological Well-being with the mediation of Job Burnout	0.034	0.155	0.069	0.024	0.013	0.009
Defense Mechanisms → Psychological Well-being with the mediation of Job Burnout	-	-0.139	-0.115	-0.053	-0.012	0.011

The path coefficient between attachment styles and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout is $\beta = 0.195$, which is statistically significant at the level of $P < 0.05$ (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero). The path coefficient between personality traits and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout is $\beta = 0.155$, which is statistically significant at the level of

$P < 0.05$ (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero). Hence, the second hypothesis is confirmed. The path coefficient between defense mechanisms and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout is $\beta = -0.139$, which is statistically significant at the level of $P < 0.05$ (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero).

Figure 1

Output of the proposed model of the present study with standardized path coefficients



The fit indices for the proposed model include the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.540), the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.669), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.606), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.608), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.565), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.177), indicating a good model fit. [Figure 1](#) shows the proposed model of the present study along with the path coefficients.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that attachment styles play a role in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout in emergency medical staff. This study revealed a significant relationship between attachment styles and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout. These results are consistent with the previous findings ([Sagone et al., 2023](#)).

To explain these findings, it can be stated that job burnout is influenced by psychological and social factors, among which attachment styles are important due to their fundamental role in how individuals manage various intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges. Attachment influences the individual's perception of themselves and is crucial for a fulfilling life. Attachment, as the initial bond between the child and the mother, forms after six months of age, with its primary function being to protect the individual from destruction, which can play a critical role in job burnout.

The relationship characterized by attachment ultimately leads to the development of a secure base, resulting in feelings of safety and exploratory behavior. According to attachment theory, repeated interactions between the child and the caregiver lead to stable patterns of stress responses, receiving social support, vulnerability to illness, and adjustment to sickness. According to Bowlby's theory, individuals internalize their early experiences with caregivers and form stable cognitive schemas about relationships. These cognitive schemas influence an individual's self-image (as someone worthy of care—self-model) and their view of others (as deserving of support—other-model). These cognitive schemas or working models affect how individuals interact with others and interpret their experiences throughout life. Based on Bowlby's work, Hazan and Shaver (2010) identified three attachment styles in adult relationships: secure, ambivalent, and avoidant. Supporting this perspective, the findings demonstrated that insecure individuals, in contrast to secure individuals, feel

isolated in the chaos of life and work-related anxiety, becoming anxious, nervous, and depressed, leading to more physical disorders and ultimately reduced performance and increased susceptibility to job burnout ([Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021](#); [Sagone et al., 2023](#)).

The second hypothesis stated that personality traits play a role in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout in emergency medical staff. The results of this study indicated a significant relationship between personality traits and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout. These findings are consistent with prior studies ([Dehghani et al., 2017](#); [Khelatbari et al., 2019](#)).

Overall, the results of this study and other research on job burnout suggest that employees' personality traits, when positive—such as extraversion, flexibility, and agreeableness—allow individuals to adapt more to their job and environment, seek help from others, and assist others, making them more resilient to burnout. Conversely, negative traits like neuroticism accelerate the process of burnout.

The third hypothesis stated that defense mechanisms play a role in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout in emergency medical staff. The results of this study showed a significant relationship between defense mechanisms and psychological well-being with the mediation of job burnout. These findings are consistent with previous studies ([Luo & Hancock, 2020](#); [Parchment, 2023](#); [Porcerelli et al., 2016](#)).

The overall concept of these results aligns with previous research findings, showing that when individuals use adaptive coping mechanisms (mature defense mechanisms) to protect themselves from unpleasant emotions, they are more successful in dealing with stressful conditions.

It is suggested that the organization responsible for emergency medical staff designs educational programs to improve psychological well-being, particularly by teaching autonomy and fostering positive relationships with others, to mitigate job burnout. Additionally, counselors and psychologists should focus on enhancing employees' psychological well-being by increasing secure attachment styles and reducing insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent) through educational workshops. Considering the research findings on the impact of psychological well-being in predicting job burnout, implementing necessary mechanisms to increase job satisfaction and reduce burnout among emergency medical staff is essential. Another suggestion is for managers of emergency medical organizations to pay special attention to the role of these

variables in improving the psychological well-being of their employees and prioritize programs and training to address attachment styles and job burnout, ultimately enhancing employees' psychological well-being.

Given the results obtained, it is recommended to provide necessary skills training to combat job burnout and ensure psychological well-being among employees, considering their crucial role in labor markets and the improvement of workforce efficiency and effectiveness. Managers, companies, organizations, and decision-makers are also advised to consider psychological and defense mechanism components in employment tests and job interviews (tailored to the organization's needs and the job type) to create a psychological-work profile. The realization of a job's constructive effects depends first on the compatibility of the job with the individual's characteristics and second, on the individual's sense of worth, effectiveness, and capability in their work. This will only be achieved if both psychological and occupational factors are considered in selecting individuals for positions in organizations and industries, as under the same working conditions, individuals do not experience burnout to the same extent. Individual, interpersonal, occupational, and personality traits are of paramount importance. In this regard, providing employees with models, using organizational behavior brochures, and incorporating useful topics related to improving employees' defense mechanisms will be beneficial.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We hereby thank all individuals for participating and cooperating us in this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent.

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