Job Demands, Emotional Exhaustion, and Religious Coping Across the Lifespan

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A Thesis

In the Department

of

Management

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science (Management) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

December 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: **Job Demands, Emotional Exhaustion, and Religious Coping Across the Lifespan**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science (Management)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

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This study examined how religious coping influences the relationship between job demands and emotional exhaustion, integrating the job demands and resources (JDR) model, conservation of resources (COR) theory, and lifespan developmental perspectives. Using a cross-sectional design, 210 full-time employees from diverse occupational sectors completed measures of job demands, burnout, and religiosity. Regression analyses indicate that job demands were a strong predictor of emotional exhaustion, explaining variance beyond demographic controls. Contrary to expectations, neither positive nor negative religious coping significantly moderated the demands–exhaustion relationship. However, zero-order correlations revealed that negative religious coping was positively associated with exhaustion, suggesting a potential relationship between maladaptive theological appraisals and strain. No significant age-related moderation emerged across private, public, or commitment-based religiosity. Theoretically, these findings reinforce JDR and COR frameworks by demonstrating burnout arises from excessive demands and may also arise from insufficient recovery and blocked resource replenishment. Building on my findings, I propose the spiritual recovery dynamics model for future research, which reframes spirituality as an active recovery rhythm that complements the JDR model's motivational pathway and COR theory's gain-spiral mechanism, highlighting recovery as the critical missing link in understanding burnout.

Keywords: emotional exhaustion, job demands, lifespan development, recovery, religious coping, occupational stress, spiritual recovery dynamics

Acknowledgments

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, whose Mercy, Guidance, and Decree carried me through every stage of this journey. Nothing in these pages would exist without the strength, patience, and clarity He granted me in moments of exhaustion, uncertainty, and difficulty. Alhamdulillah for every door He opened, every challenge He transformed into growth, and every measure of resilience He placed in my heart.

I am profoundly grateful to my parents, whose prayers, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in me from the very beginning laid the foundation for everything I have accomplished. Your encouragement and trust sustained me throughout this journey.

My deepest gratitude goes to Steve Granger for his mentorship and guidance, which shaped both this thesis and my development as a researcher. Thank you for believing in me and in this work from the beginning, and for consistently encouraging me to sharpen my thinking. I also extend my sincere thanks to my lifelong mentor and friend, Dr. Timothy Farmer, for his continued support, insight, and thoughtful guidance.

To my husband, thank you for standing beside me through every challenge with patience and understanding. To my children, Ayoob, Sara, Aasiyah, Rumaisa, and Ibraheem, your presence gave purpose to every late night and early morning. This work is for you. To my siblings, thank you for your encouragement and reminders that I am never alone. To my in laws, thank you for your prayers and support.

Finally, I offer my sincere thanks to my committee members, Linda Dyer and Yu-Shan Hsu, for their time and thoughtful feedback.

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Job Demands, Emotional Exhaustion, and Religious Coping Across the Lifespan

Stress is an integral part of human life and the modern workplace. It arises from job demands, organizational pressures, and environmental factors and manifests through psychological, physiological, and social reactions (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define psychological stress as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources" (p. 19). Although stress can sometimes be adaptive, prolonged exposure to stressors without sufficient coping mechanisms leads to psychosocial, emotional, and physical strain (Crawford et al., 2010). A common and particularly consequential form of strain within the workplace is burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2005).

Burnout is characterized by feelings of depleted emotional and physical energy (Yao et al., 2015), interpersonal detachment and cynicism (Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001), and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Yao et al., 2015). It has been linked to numerous negative outcomes that affect individuals, organizations, and society at large (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Burnout increases the risk of depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular illness, producing long-term health consequences (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It also reduces productivity, increases absenteeism, and accelerates turnover, generating significant economic costs for organizations. At a societal level, burnout contributes to higher healthcare expenditures and widespread workforce shortages (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The purpose of this thesis is to advance understanding of coping strategies that can reduce the impact of sustained job-related stress and prevent burnout.

The conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Holmgreen et al., 2017) provides a unifying psychological foundation for understanding how individuals

experience stress, proposing that people strive to acquire, maintain, and protect resources, whether material, social, or psychological. Stress occurs when these valued resources are threatened or lost and when individuals lack the means to replenish them. In this context, burnout reflects a state of cumulative resource depletion that results from continuous exposure to high demands and insufficient resource gain. Later extensions to COR introduced the concept of resource gain and loss spirals, recognizing that small losses can compound into depletion and that accumulated resources can create resilience (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Building on this framework, the job demands-resources (JDR) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a structural explanation for how job demands lead to exhaustion while job and personal resources buffer strain. These resources may be organizational, social, or personal, such as self-efficacy, optimism, or religious coping. By integrating COR and JDR theories, this thesis conceptualizes job stress as a dual process: an impairment process driven by demand-induced resource loss and a motivational process sustained through the preservation or replenishment of personal resources.

Religious coping, as theorized by Pargament (Pargament, 1997), represents one such personal resource that individuals employ to manage stress. It refers to the use of religious beliefs and practices as cognitive and behavioral strategies to buffer against strain (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). Within the JDR model, two perspectives describe how demands and resources interact: the additive and the multiplicative models. The additive model proposes that job demands and resources have independent effects on strain, with resources reducing burnout regardless of demand level. The multiplicative model proposes that job demands and resources interact, such that personal resources like religious coping are most effective when demands are high (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

From a lifespan developmental perspective, the capacity to mobilize, conserve, and replenish resources evolves across adulthood (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). Younger adults often face instability and limited control; middle-aged adults juggle competing professional and caregiving roles; and older adults contend with existential concerns of purpose and continuity. Studies on work-family dynamics confirm that resource availability and recovery processes vary by age, with younger workers encountering higher conflict and older adults drawing more effectively on internal and spiritual resources (Demerouti et al., 2012; Idler et al., 2009). Integrating this lens allows examination of how the efficacy of religious coping fluctuates across early, middle, and late adulthood, as individuals recalibrate their motivational goals and redefine the meaning of work and faith in response to developmental transitions.

In this thesis, JDR and COR theory function as the primary theoretical lenses for explaining how job demands and resources impact emotional exhaustion. Lifespan development theory contextualizes these processes by considering how age shapes individuals' resources evaluations and coping capacity. Religious coping is a form of personal resource embedded within the JDR and COR framework. Together, they provide a comprehensive view of both the external pressures and internal resource dynamics that determine resilience at work.

This thesis makes three primary contributions to the literature. First, it tests both the additive and multiplicative effects models within the JDR model to clarify how and under what conditions personal resources such as religious coping influence burnout. This analysis contributes to the design of personalized interventions that support employees in managing stress. Second, it broadens the generalizability of the JDR model by examining the moderating role of religious coping across culturally and occupationally diverse contexts. Prior research indicates that in high-strain professions where formal workplace resources are limited, religious

coping often serves as a compensatory mechanism that fosters resilience and well-being (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). By integrating religious coping into the JDR and COR frameworks, this study provides a deeper understanding of how individuals offset resource deficits through faith-based strategies, particularly in environments with limited structural job support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Koenig, 2009). Finally, it examines how religious coping moderates the relationship between job demands and emotional exhaustion across early, middle, and late adulthood, reinforcing the lifespan perspective's applicability to coping research.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Job Demands-Resources Model

The job demands-resources (JDR) theory provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how work environments influence employee well-being, motivation, and performance. According to Granger et al. (2025), the model organizes all occupational characteristics into two broad categories: job demands, which require sustained physical or psychological effort and are associated with strain, and job resources, which help achieve goals, buffer demands, and stimulate personal development. Demerouti and colleagues (2001) originally developed the model to describe how these two elements predict both burnout and engagement, respectively.

The dual-process structure of the JDR model, comprising the health impairment pathway (excessive demands leading to exhaustion) and the motivational pathway (abundant resources promoting engagement), was empirically validated by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). These pathways reflect the logic of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), in which individuals invest existing resources to offset demands and generate new resources. Building on this, Halbesleben et al. (2014) described "resource caravans," clusters of interlinked resources and "resource

passageways," environmental channels that facilitate or hinder recovery. Furthermore, Nielsen et al., (2017) provide empirical evidence to support the idea that resource clusters across individual, group, leader, and organizational levels interact to produce synergistic effects on well-being and performance. These constructs explain why job and personal resources can buffer strain and initiate gain spirals; a process further elaborated in Hobfoll et al. (2018). In Hakanen's, et al., (2006) large-scale study of Finnish teachers, they found that job demands predicted burnout while job resources predicted engagement, confirming that the JDR model reliably explains both negative and positive aspects of occupational well-being.

Empirical research also shows that job resources have their strongest effects under high-demand conditions. Bakker et al., (2007) demonstrated that autonomy, feedback, and social support most powerfully boost work engagement when job demands are elevated, suggesting that resources operate as adaptive buffers rather than static protections. This finding highlights the importance of resource availability for sustaining motivation in demanding environments.

Building on these insights, Bakker and colleagues (2023) emphasized that the future of JDR research lies in understanding short-cycle recovery processes and affective regulation, focusing on how individuals sustain vitality through micro episodes of detachment, meaning-making, and restoration. Their review positions JDR as a dynamic framework that captures the ongoing interplay between depletion and replenishment processes at work.

The model has also been refined to include personal resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, and goal orientation, which moderate or mediate the relationship between demands and outcomes. Petrou and Demerouti (2010) highlighted that individuals differ in their regulatory focus, that is, whether they view work experiences through a lens of gains or losses, which shapes how they respond to demands and resources. In this sense, personal orientations toward

growth, meaning, or prevention influence whether job conditions lead to exhaustion or engagement.

The inclusion of spiritual and existential resources has also gained empirical attention in occupational contexts. Perera et al., (2018) found that nurses who relied on religious and spiritual coping strategies experienced lower perceived stress and higher well-being, suggesting that faith-based practices can complement organizational resources. Similarly, Wachholtz and Pargament (2005) showed that spiritual meditation, compared with secular or relaxation-based meditation, produced greater improvements in mood, physiological calm, and pain tolerance, indicating that embodied spiritual practices may promote psychological recovery in ways consistent with resource-gain mechanisms.

Collectively, these studies show that the JDR model has evolved from a structural model of job design into a broader theory of human functioning that accounts for environmental, psychological, and personal factors. The model's enduring appeal lies in its flexibility and inclusivity; it accommodates a wide variety of workplace conditions and personal differences while maintaining a simple explanatory structure (Granger et al., 2025). This adaptability has made JDR one of the most widely applied models in occupational health psychology and organizational behavior. Granger et al. (2025) emphasize that its continued relevance depends on integrating affective and physiological mechanisms of recovery within its motivational pathway. Such developments reflect an expanding recognition that well-being at work arises not only from managing demands but also from cultivating diverse forms of personal and contextual resources.

Hypothesis 1: Higher job demands will be directly associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

Religious Coping, JDR model and Emotional Exhaustion

Individual characteristics, including personality, age, and value orientation, may influence employees' perception and response to job stress (Cooper et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006; Rodell & Judge, 2009). However, little is known about the moderating effects of religion and spirituality on the relationship between job stressors and burnout. Religious meaning systems shape cognitive appraisals and emotional regulation in ways that influence how demands are interpreted and managed (Cohen & Koenig, 2002; Graca & Brandao, 2024; Perera et al., 2018). Religion may therefore play an important role in how individuals interpret and cope with stressors, given its influence on values, beliefs, and motivational orientation, and consistent with lifespan and COR perspectives, which emphasize how resource meaning and utilization evolve with age and context (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Effective coping strategies can help individuals manage stress more efficiently, thereby reducing the adverse effects of high job demands. Within the job demands-resources (JDR) framework, religious coping can be conceptualized as a personal resource that promotes emotional recovery, engagement, and resilience under strain (Bakker et al., 2007; Granger et al., 2025). Religious coping operates across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, enhancing self-regulation, fostering meaning-making, and stimulating gain spirals consistent with COR theory (Wachholtz and Pargament, 2005).

A large portion of Canadians identify as religious. According to recent statistics, 68% of Canadians over the age of 15 report a religious affiliation, and 54% state that their beliefs are somewhat or very important to how they live their lives (Statistics Canada, 2021). These data suggest that religious beliefs are not peripheral but deeply embedded in daily life. Such embeddedness implies that religiously guided routines may shape work-life boundaries and stress-recovery cycles, influencing how individuals detach from or re-engage with occupational

demands (Doufesh et al., 2014; Pirutinsky et al., 2020; Sianoja et al., 2018). Religious affiliation and the importance of beliefs can therefore affect moral decisions, health practices, and social behaviors that demarcate work and personal life.

From a recovery-informed perspective, such boundaries are vital because they facilitate psychological detachment from occupational stressors (Sianoja et al., 2018; Sonnentag, 2003). Employees who integrate faith-based boundaries such as daily salat, Sabbath observance, or structured prayer breaks create predictable intervals for cognitive and emotional disengagement from work. Empirical evidence shows that rhythmic, embodied spiritual practices enhance parasympathetic activation, reduce physiological arousal, and promote calm focus, functioning as brief recovery episodes (Doufesh et al., 2014; Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005). These practices align with COR's micro-gain mechanisms, providing recurring opportunities for restoration and protection against cumulative resource loss.

Religious involvement further provides community, meaning, and emotional reinforcement, all of which are critical for managing stress and emotional exhaustion. Through prayer, communal worship, and fellowship, individuals may find both emotional and practical support that aids coping while generating psychological recovery from work-related rumination. Such activities serve as structured micro-recovery opportunities that replenish psychological resources and align with the JDR model's emphasis on personal and contextual resources that buffer strain (Bakker et al., 2007; Granger et al., 2025; Hakanen et al., 2006).

This high level of religious engagement suggests that many individuals naturally turn to faith for support during times of stress. This form of coping can be positive, seeking divine support and meaning, or negative, characterized by spiritual discontent and struggle. Individuals under stress may engage in religious coping to seek emotional comfort, positively reinterpret

stressors, and foster personal growth (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Boss et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2012; Graca & Brandao, 2024), thereby strengthening both personal and social resources.

However, consistent with Sonnentag's (2018) concept of the recovery paradox, individuals experiencing high exhaustion may find it difficult to engage in restorative practices or to achieve genuine detachment during them. When resources are severely depleted, even adaptive religious coping may lose its restorative potential, leading to ritual disengagement or emotional fatigue (Scheibe et al., 2015; Tatala & Walesa, 2016). Consequently, even adaptive coping may be less effective when recovery capacity is already compromised. Recognizing this interplay between coping quality, resource availability, and emotional exhaustion underscores a theoretical bridge between JDR, COR, and recovery theory: burnout emerges not only from excessive demands but also from insufficient recovery and resource renewal.

Religious Coping as a Resource

Religious coping, as a personal resource, is grounded in both psychological and spiritual research. Pargament (1997) conceptualized religious coping as a process through which individuals draw upon faith to navigate stressful experiences, deriving meaning, control, and comfort in the face of adversity. Key antecedents include religious commitment, intrinsic religiosity, and community participation, which collectively enable individuals to interpret, appraise, and manage stress (Pargament et al., 1998). Within the JDR model, these characteristics function as personal resources psychological assets that promote resilience, foster recovery, and buffer the effects of job strain.

From a COR perspective (Hobfoll, 2001), religious coping functions as both a protective and replenishing mechanism. Halbesleben et al. (2014) expanded this view by showing that recovery depends on access to resource passageways supportive environments that allow individuals to reinvest energy and gain resources. Faith-based rituals and communal worship

operate as such passageways, channeling both social and emotional support. Hobfoll et al. (2018) further emphasized that individuals facing chronic demands must actively invest resources to sustain gain spirals, aligning with the role of routine religious coping as an intentional recovery practice. Recent evidence further supports this dynamic: Haider et al. (2022) demonstrated that religious coping was the strongest positive predictor of life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing well-being by more than 50% for each unit increase in faith-based coping. These findings underscore that religious coping not only protects against depletion but actively builds new emotional and cognitive resources, initiating what COR theory describes as gain spirals.

Religious coping is typically categorized as positive (e.g., seeking spiritual support, collaborative problem-solving with the divine) or negative (e.g., feeling punished or abandoned by a higher power; Pargament et al., 1998). Positive religious coping is consistently associated with adaptive outcomes such as higher life satisfaction and reduced emotional exhaustion, whereas negative coping intensifies distress and undermines well-being (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). This distinction parallels COR theory's principle that the appraisal of stress determines whether energy is replenished or depleted: positive coping restores vitality and meaning, while negative coping accelerates exhaustion and loss (Büssing et al., 2018).

For instance, Pirutinsky et al. (2020) found that healthcare workers engaging in positive religious coping reported significantly lower emotional exhaustion under high-demand conditions. Similarly, Cavusoglu et al. (2025) demonstrated that religious coping moderated the link between occupational stress and emotional exhaustion, particularly in demanding care professions by nurturing hope, fostering acceptance, and promoting a sense of transcendence, religious coping can mitigate key components of burnout, emotional exhaustion and

depersonalization. These findings are consistent with Perera et al. (2018), who observed that nurses who engaged in spiritual and religious coping experienced lower perceived stress and higher well-being. Their results underscore how structured faith routines can act as psychological recovery mechanisms within high-pressure occupational contexts.

Moreover, empirical evidence across diverse contexts underscores its protective potential. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found that religious coping strategies enhanced psychological adjustment to stress, thereby reducing the risk of burnout. Harris and Tao (2022) reported that nurses who engaged in religious coping experienced lower emotional exhaustion and higher well-being than those who did not. Furthermore, they observed that healthcare workers who used faith as a coping resource reported greater comfort and strength in managing elevated job demands and constrained resources. These findings reinforce the role of religious coping as both a preventive and restorative process, consistent with recovery theory's assertion that structured detachment and meaning-making are essential for daily vitality restoration (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Sonnentag, 2018).

Religious beliefs can also reduce existential anxiety and emotional exhaustion by providing a framework of meaning, purpose, and optimism (Pargament, 2002). Empirical studies support that individuals who engage in positive religious coping report higher psychological well-being and lower distress (Graca & Brandao, 2024). Physiological evidence further indicates that embodied spiritual practices, such as the structured cycles of prayer are linked to increased parasympathetic activity and relaxation responses, consistent with micro-recovery mechanisms (Doufesh et al., 2014), and positive emotions that build vagal tone via perceived social connection (Kok et al., 2013). Religious participation is also associated with stronger perceived social connections pathway that, in turn, supports autonomic health (Kok et al., 2013). During

high-stress periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, religious coping buffered the association between stressors and psychological distress (Pirutinsky et al., 2020), offering immediate solace and cognitive detachment through prayer-like practices. This aligns with Sonnentag's (2003, 2018) recovery literature, which identifies rhythmic detachment and structured routines as critical mechanisms for restoring psychological energy mechanisms inherently embedded within daily faith practices and echoed in workday break research showing that brief, structured recovery episodes restore vitality and focus (Sianoja et al., 2018).

Religious communities also provide substantial social resources that are crucial in high-stress contexts. Social support from religious groups offer comfort, belonging, and practical assistance, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion (Ellison & George, 1994). Empirical research confirms that active engagement in religious communities enhances perceived social connectedness and physiological regulation, which jointly predict better mental health (Kok et al., 2013). This sense of belonging and shared meaning serves as a powerful buffer against isolation and stress, echoing findings that religious coping during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic reduced psychological distress through enhanced communal support and routine (Pirutinsky et al., 2020). Similarly, Haider et al. (2022) observed that communal religious participation was strongly associated with life satisfaction and emotional well-being, suggesting that collective worship reinforces optimism and resource sharing. Büssing et al. (2018) further note that shared spiritual practices foster emotional balance and parasympathetic activation, highlighting a physiological dimension to the social support effect. Within the JDR model, such communal ties function as contextual resources that buffer the impact of job demands on strain (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Koeske & Koeske, 1989).

Collectively, these insights highlight that religious coping provides both psychological and social resources that enable individuals to reinterpret and manage job demands. Through prayer, reflection, and community involvement, individuals foster meaning, resilience, and personal growth. These are critical elements for mitigating stress and emotional exhaustion. Viewed through the COR lens, these faith-based practices represent structured micro-cycles of social and psychological resource replenishment. Because JDR model specifies that personal resources can influence strain through two distinct pathways, (1) direct contributors to well-being (additive effects) or (2) as demand-contingent buffers (multiplicative effects) the present study evaluates both roles:

H2: Religious coping (H2a: positive religious coping; H2b: negative religious coping) will be associated with burnout reflecting an additive effect within the JDR model in which coping operates as an independent personal resource that directly influences exhaustion regardless of demand level. Specifically, higher positive religious coping will be associated with lower burnout, whereas higher negative religious coping will be associated with higher burnout.

H3: Religious coping (H3a: positive religious coping; H3b: negative religious coping) will moderate the relationship between job demands and emotional exhaustion representing a multiplicative effect within the JDR model in which coping interacts with job demands to alter the strength of their relationship with exhaustion. Thus, the positive relationship between job demands and emotional exhaustion will be weaker among individuals with higher levels of positive religious coping and stronger among those with higher levels of negative religious coping.

Life Stages and Coping Strategies

While I hypothesize that religious coping is a significant factor in directly and conditionally mitigating emotional exhaustion, its effectiveness is likely contingent upon developmental stage and context (Bickerton et al., 2021; De Clercq et al., 2024). As job expectations evolve across the lifespan, individuals possess differing levels of control, autonomy, and social support, which in turn shape how they manage stress and prevent emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2012). This developmental approach is grounded in lifespan development theory (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996), which emphasizes adaptive resource allocation across stages of life. Integrating JDR with this framework suggests that age-related changes in demands and resources also influence opportunities for recovery and detachment, not merely coping capacity. Thus, the interaction of age and religious coping can reveal how individuals sustain resilience through changing life roles, priorities, and resource reservoirs. To understand how religion supports the coping process and the specific functions it serves, it is therefore essential to examine how individuals adapt religious coping strategies to meet job demands at different stages of life.

Early Adulthood (18-35 years). Early adulthood is a period of career establishment, identity formation, and resource scarcity, often accompanied by high work demands and low job control (Demerouti et al., 2012). Young adults frequently face uncertain career trajectories, unstable employment, and high-performance expectations, while possessing limited experience, authority, or professional networks to navigate these challenges (Arnett, 2000). These structural deficits intensify strain within the JDR model by increasing demands while constraining available resources and recovery opportunities. The stressors of early adulthood are further compounded by role conflict as individuals balance professional development with financial independence and emerging family responsibilities (Demerouti et al., 2012).

Religious coping provides a stability-enhancing and identity-anchoring function during this stage, acting as an external regulatory system when workplace resources (e.g., job security, mentorship, career progression) are insufficient (Pargament et al., 1998). Faith-based practices such as prayer, meditation, or gratitude rituals help young adults cognitively reframe stressors and regain a sense of agency, while religious communities provide emotional and social support that buffer workplace-induced strain (Folkman., 2011). However, declining institutional religiosity and individualized spirituality among younger generations suggest that the form, rather than the presence, of religious coping may differ across cohorts (Statistics Canada, 2021). For younger workers, spirituality may function more as a personal mindfulness resource than a communal recovery ritual, reflecting broader cultural shifts in how religion is integrated into daily life and stress regulation.

Middle Adulthood (36-55 years). Middle adulthood is characterized by intensifying job demands and role accumulation, including career advancement pressures, leadership responsibilities, and caregiving duties (Koenig, 2009). Unlike younger adults, who face resource scarcity, middle-aged employees often experience resource overload, managing competing professional and personal demands that lead to chronic stress accumulation (Crosswell et al., 2024). Within the JDR model, this stage is marked by a widening gap between escalating demands and shrinking recovery time, heightening the risk of exhaustion and work-home interference. Long working hours, managerial accountability, and limited personal time contribute to sustained activation of stress systems and impaired psychological detachment (Sonnentag, 2018).

Religious coping serves as a structured recovery and meaning-making mechanism, helping adults restore equilibrium between demands and available resources. This aligns with

Pargament's view of religion as an organized coping system and with recovery theory's emphasis on structured detachment and resource replenishment (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Empirical evidence shows that daily, rhythmic religious behaviors such as prayer, communal worship, and Sabbath observance promote both physiological and emotional recovery by embedding predictable routines within the week (Pirutinsky et al., 2020; Krauseet al., 2018). Such temporal and social regularity provides opportunities for detachment from work demands while reinforcing meaning and coherence, counteracting the unpredictability of modern professional and family life (Sianoja et al., 2018). Religious commitment also facilitates cognitive reappraisal, enabling individuals to reinterpret work stressors as purposeful challenges rather than depleting burdens (Koenig, 2009). In terms of COR theory, religious routines can be understood as scheduled gain spirals, suggesting that each act of spiritual engagement contributes small resource gains that make future gains more likely. Over time, these repeated practices build resource caravans, clusters of psychological, emotional, and social resources that reinforce one another and strengthen resilience (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Within recovery theory, these embodied practices serve as rhythmic pauses for reflection and renewal, supporting vitality restoration amid chronic exposure to daily demands (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; Sianoja et al., 2018).

Late Adulthood (56+ years). Late adulthood involves transitions in job roles, retirement planning, and reflections on legacy, each introducing uncertainty and emotional strain (Beier et al., 2023; Phillips & Stein, 2007). Older adults often face a loss of professional identity and changing work relevance, making existential meaning and continuity key psychological concerns (Krause, 2009). From a JDR perspective, formal work demands may decline, but existential demands maintaining purpose, self-worth, and social connectedness become more salient. Age-

related changes in cognitive and physical functioning may also create a perceived loss of professional efficacy, while the contemplation of mortality can heighten emotional vulnerability (Crosswell et al., 2024).

As individuals confront these shifts, they develop greater emotional wisdom, drawing upon accumulated experience and spiritual beliefs to navigate the challenges of aging and life finitude (Krause et al., 2018). Empirical evidence underscores that religious coping serves as a structured recovery and meaning-making mechanism, helping individuals restore equilibrium between demands and available resources (Haider et al., 2022). Furthermore, in their study, Haider et al., (2022) illustrate that religious coping emerged as the strongest positive predictor of life satisfaction, increasing well-being by 59% for every unit increase in faith-based coping, whereas avoidant coping showed a negative association.

These findings confirm that regular engagement in religious behaviors such as prayer, reflection, and communal worship offers predictable temporal structures and emotional reinforcement that buffer against uncertainty and strain (Pargament, 2002; Pargament et al., 2001). Long-term participation in faith-based communities reinforces belonging and purpose, mitigating emotional burdens of aging and role loss (Koenig, 2009; Phillips & Stein, 2007). At this life stage, religious coping functions as an existential recovery process that conserves psychological resources while fostering transcendence and peace (Sianoja et al., 2018). By integrating religiosity with reflections on mortality, older adults sustain psychological equilibrium and cultivate peace, illustrating how religious coping functions as a lifelong recovery resource that evolves to meet shifting developmental and occupational demands.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between private religiosity, measured by the frequency of private prayer, scripture reading and religious of spiritual meditation, and emotional

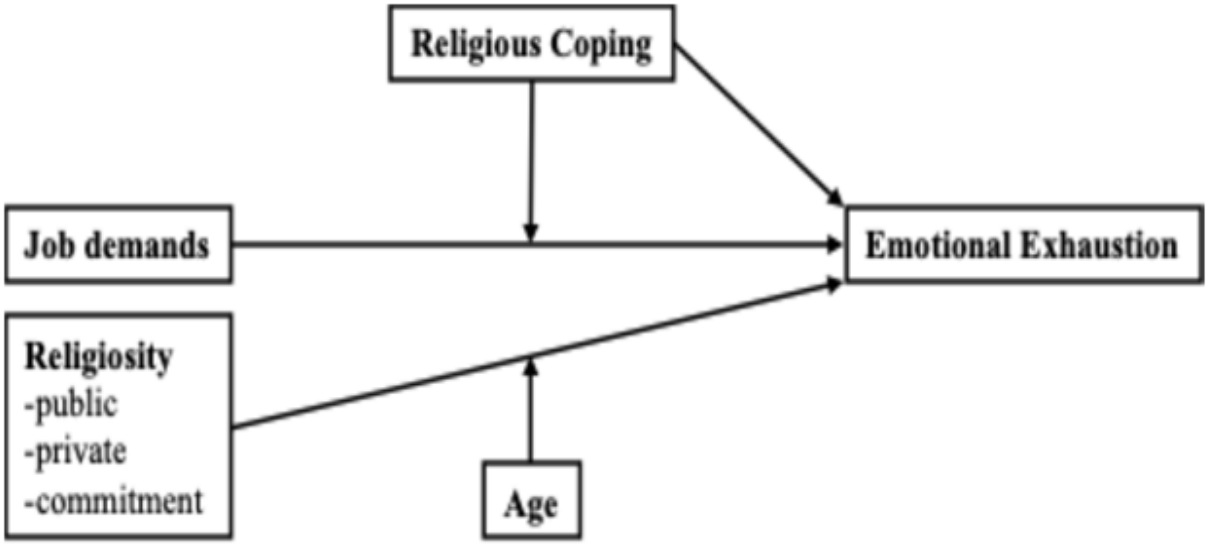
exhaustion will be moderated by age, such that the negative association will be stronger for younger participants (18-35) compared to middle-aged and older participants.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between public religiosity, measured by attendance at religious services, participation in religious group activities, and engagement in communal religious study, and emotional exhaustion will be moderated by age, such that the negative association will be stronger for middle-aged participants (36-55) compared to younger and older participants.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between spiritual commitment, measured by the frequency of seeking spiritual growth, using spirituality to guide life decisions, and engaging in deep reflection on the meaning of life from a religious perspective, and emotional exhaustion will be moderated by age, such that the negative association will be stronger for older participants (56+) compared to younger and middle-aged participants.

See Figure 1 for full model illustrating the relationships among job demands, emotional exhaustion, religious coping, and their moderating effects across different life stages.

Figure 1. *Hypothesized conceptual model.*



Method

Procedure

I conducted a cross-sectional online survey of 207 full-time workers. Participants were recruited through the online platform Prolific, which provides access to a diverse pool of working adults. Prior to beginning the survey, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the voluntary nature of participation. The survey included several components. First, participants completed measures of work demands, religiosity, and religious coping. Second, they responded to items assessing well-being, specifically emotional exhaustion. Finally, participants provided sociodemographic information, including age, gender, education, marital status, tenure, and household income. The survey required an average of 10 minutes to complete. All participants received fair monetary compensation consistent with Prolific's ethical guidelines for participant remuneration. This study received approval from the Research Ethics Board *(REB # 30021808).*

Participants

The study drew on a diverse sample of 210 full-time employees spanning multiple organizations and industries. In terms of religious affiliation, the sample was predominantly Christian (86.7%), encompassing a range of denominations (e.g., Baptist, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Jehovah's Witness). Smaller proportions of participants identified as Muslim (5.7%), Spiritualist (3.3%), Buddhist (1.9%), Hindu (1.0%), Jewish (1.0%), or Sikh (0.5%).

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 years (M = 45.46, SD = 13.47). To test moderation by life stage, participants were grouped into three categories: (1) younger employees (18-35 years; 32%), (2) middle-aged employees (36-55 years; 36%), (3) older employees (56+ years; 32%). This near-equal distribution across age groups ensured robust statistical power for

testing age as a moderating factor in the relationship between religiosity and exhaustion, consistent with prior life-course approaches to stress and coping (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). The gender distribution was balanced, with 46.4% female (n = 96) and 53.6% male (*N* = 111). Gender was included as covariate given evidence that women often report higher emotional exhaustion due to cumulative role strain (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Educational attainment varied across the sample (M = 2.70, SD = 0.99, range = 1-4). Specifically: 20% attained high school or less, 28% some college/technical training, 34% a bachelor's degree, and 18% a graduate/professional degree. The majority of participants (63.6%, *N* = 133) were married, while 36.4% (*N* = 76) were single, divorced, or widowed. Marital status was treated as a control variable, as family structures are known to shape exposure to non-work demands and recovery opportunities (Gautun & Hagen, 2010). Household income was measured on an eight-point scale, with an average of M = 4.67 (SD = 1.63), corresponding to middle-income brackets.

Measures

***Job Demands*.** Job demands were measured using 10 items from the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) Questionnaire (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Sample items include, "Do you have to work at speed?" and "Does your work require a lot of concentration?" This scale has been validated across occupational settings and consistently demonstrates strong psychometric properties (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In this study, responses to the job demands items showed strong internal consistency (α = .88).

***Emotional Exhaustion*.** Emotional exhaustion was assessed using the 7-item Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 2001). Items include, "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel used up at the end of the workday." The MBI is considered the gold standard in burnout measurement and has

demonstrated validity and reliability across cultures and professions (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998). In this sample, the scale demonstrated excellent reliability (α = .91).

Religious Coping. The Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2011) was used to assess both positive and negative religious coping strategies. Positive coping was measured with items such as "I looked for a stronger connection with God" and "I sought support from members of my religious community." Negative coping included items like "I questioned the power of God in my work struggles" and "I felt spiritually discontent when facing workplace stress." The RCOPE is widely validated in coping research (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). In the current study, internal consistency was strong for both positive coping (α = .87) and negative coping (α = .83).

Private and Public Religiosity. Private religiosity was measured using the non-organizational (private) subscale of the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL; Koenig and Büssing, 2010). Items assess frequency of prayer, scripture reading, and spiritual meditation outside of formal religious services. Internal consistency in this sample was excellent (α = .92). Public religiosity was assessed through the organizational (public) subscale of the DUREL (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). Items include, "How often do you attend religious services (e.g. mosque, synagogue, church, temple)?" and "How often do you participate in religious group activities?" This subscale showed good internal consistency (α = .89).

Spiritual Commitment. Spiritual commitment was measured using the 9-item Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES; Underwood and Teresi, 2002), which captures the integration of spirituality into daily life. Sample items include, "I feel God's presence" and "I use my faith to guide decisions in my daily life." The DSES is widely used in health and psychology research and demonstrates excellent reliability (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). In the present study, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = .90).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations, were first computed to summarize the key study variables. Assumption testing confirmed no major violations of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, or multicollinearity. Hypotheses were tested using regression-based analyses, with Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) employed to examine conditional (moderation) effects using 5,000 bootstrap samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals (Hayes, 2017). In all models, I controlled for gender, education, marital status, household income, and job tenure to account for their potential influence on emotional exhaustion and coping processes.

Results

Please see Table 1 in Appendix A for the descriptives and intercorrelations between study variables.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that job demands would be positively associated with emotional exhaustion. Regression results supported this hypothesis: job demands significantly predicted emotional exhaustion ($b = 1.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI: 0.89, 1.15), explaining 6% of the variance in emotional exhaustion beyond demographic controls. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that religious coping would be associated with emotional exhaustion, such that higher positive religious coping would be associated with lower emotional exhaustion (H2a), and higher negative religious coping would be associated with higher emotional exhaustion (H2b). Contrary to expectations, regression results indicated no significant associations between either positive religious coping ($b = -.06$, $p = .662$, 95% CI: -.33, .21) or negative religious coping ($b = -.13$, $p = .607$, 95% CI: -.65, .38) and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that religious coping would moderate the relationship between job demands and emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship would be weaker among individuals with higher levels of positive religious coping (H3a), and stronger among individuals with higher levels of negative religious coping (H3b). Results from PROCESS Model 1 revealed no significant interaction effects between job demands and either positive religious coping (b = .01, p = .874, 95% CI: -.12, .14) or negative religious coping (b = .12, p = .133, 95% CI: -.04, .28). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that age would moderate the relationship between private religiosity (prayer, scripture reading, meditation) and emotional exhaustion, such that younger adults would have the strongest negative association between private religiosity and emotional exhaustion compared to middle and older adults. PROCESS model 1 (categorical) results indicated no significant interactions (young adults as referent, interaction 1 [middle adults]: b = .02, p = .86, 95% CI: -.20, .24; interaction 2 [older adults]: b = -.14, p = .25, 95% CI: -.36, .09). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that age would moderate the relationship between public religiosity (e.g., service attendance, group religious activity, communal study) and emotional exhaustion, such that the negative association would be stronger for middle-aged participants (36-55) compared to younger and older adults. PROCESS model 1 results indicated no significant interaction effects (young adults as referent, interaction 1 [middle adults]: b = -.07, p = .436, 95% CI: -.25, 0.11; interaction 2 [older adults]: b = -.02, p = .884, 95% CI: -.23, 0.20). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that age would moderate the relationship between spiritual commitment (e.g., seeking spiritual growth, using spirituality in decisions, religious reflection)

and emotional exhaustion, such that the negative association would be strongest among older participants (56+) compared to younger and middle-aged adults. PROCESS model 1 results showed no significant interaction effects (young adults as referent, interaction 1 [middle adults]: $b = .04$, $p = .810$, 95% CI: -.27, .34; interaction 2 [older adults]: $b = .01$, $p = .939$, 95% CI: -.28, .30). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Discussion

The present study advances the burnout literature by reaffirming the centrality of job demands in predicting emotional exhaustion, while simultaneously questioning prevailing assumptions about the protective role of religiosity, at least among those who already identify as religious. By testing multiple forms of religious coping and commitment within the job demands-resources (JDR) framework, this research provides both confirmatory evidence for core JDR propositions and novel boundary conditions that refine our theoretical understanding.

Job Demands as the Engine of Exhaustion

The most robust finding of this study was the large magnitude of the demand-exhaustion association. Job demands explained a substantial portion of the variance in emotional exhaustion, consistent with effect sizes commonly observed in JDR research (Cohen, 1992). These findings strongly reaffirm JDR theory's central proposition that job demands are the primary antecedent of emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This relationship is further illuminated through conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which defines stress as a response to threatened or depleted resources and frames burnout as a cumulative process of loss spirals. Within this dual framework, job demands serve as chronic resource drains that deplete time, energy, and psychological capacity, while limited recovery opportunities restrict the replenishment of those resources. When both frameworks are

viewed together, burnout emerges as a process of resource loss and insufficient replenishment, a cycle that begins with excessive job demands and culminates in emotional depletion.

Lesener et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analytic review of longitudinal JDR studies and concluded that "demands exert the most consistent and substantial effects on exhaustion, whereas sociodemographic factors such as gender or tenure typically explain negligible variance once demands and resources are included" (p. 87). This finding provides strong empirical validation for the present study's results, confirming that the primary antecedent to emotional exhaustion are not demographic differences but exposure to persistent demands. When job demands were entered into the regression model, the predictive effects of demographic variables including gender, education, marital status, tenure, and income were rendered nonsignificant. For example, women initially reported higher exhaustion, consistent with meta-analytic evidence that women are more likely to report emotional exhaustion, often attributed to greater role conflict and caregiving responsibilities (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Yet, these differences disappeared once demands were considered, suggesting that observed demographic disparities in emotional exhaustion are demand-driven rather than identity-based. There was, however, no evidence of an additive nor multiplicative buffering process from religious coping on emotional exhaustion or the strength of demand-exhaustion slope, respectively.

From a theoretical standpoint, this reinforces the resource erosion sequence within COR theory and the impairment pathway within JDR. Exposure to chronic demands initiates a downward spiral of resource depletion, which constrains the individual's ability to recover and leads to further exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Holmgreen et al., 2017). When such demands restrict opportunities for psychological detachment, employees remain physiologically and cognitively activated, impeding recovery and accelerating exhaustion (Sonnentag & Fritz,

2007; Sonnentag, 2018). As Halbesleben et al. (2014) describe, this ongoing depletion forms "resource caravans" of loss interconnected deficits that accumulate and propagate over time, particularly in environments lacking "resource passageways," or supportive systems that enable replenishment. The absence of such passageways explains why even motivated employees cannot fully recover without environmental or structural support.

This intersection provides the conceptual bridge to Spiritual Recovery Dynamics (SRD), a framework I later propose that may explain why exhaustion persists not only because resources are depleted, but because the channels through which recovery should occur are structurally constrained. In this view, the risk of emotional exhaustion is not inherent to being female, married, or less experienced; rather, these identities signal one's position within social and occupational structures that shape exposure to job demands and access to recovery opportunities, consistent with intersectionality theory (Atewologun, 2018).

For instance, women are disproportionately employed in emotionally demanding roles, such as education, healthcare, and service sectors where emotional labor amplifies stress and depletes energy reserves (Beehr et al., 1976; Bakker et al., 2004). Once demand levels are statistically controlled, these apparent "gender effects" are absorbed by the broader structural variable of workload intensity, reinforcing Hobfoll et al.'s (2018) expanded notion of resource passageways environmental conditions that either foster or constrain recovery. It also aligns with Holmgreen et al.'s (2017) notion of resource caravans, wherein individuals in less supportive contexts suffer compounding losses that erode resilience.

Integrating recovery theory adds a further layer: job demands act not only as primary stressors but also as inhibitors of recovery. Heavy workloads prevent mental disengagement, blocking emotional restoration. In COR terms, this reflects a failed recovery spiral where

continuous demands deplete energy reserves faster than they can be replenished. Halbesleben et al. (2014) argue that sustainable well-being depends on the presence of gain spirals repeated cycles of resource restoration supported by conducive environments. The absence of such gain spirals contributes to chronic exhaustion and explains why burnout becomes self-perpetuating in high-demand contexts. Thus, exhaustion is perpetuated both by excessive demands and by insufficient recovery opportunities.

Given this strong evidence that job demands drive exhaustion, the following section explores whether spiritual coping, particularly through religious interpretation and embodied practice can serve as a counteractive recovery pathway that reactivates these blocked replenishment processes.

Religious Coping: Additive Versus Multiplicative Pathways

A central aim of this study was to examine whether religious coping functions additively by exerting direct effects on emotional exhaustion or multiplicatively by moderating the core job demand-exhaustion relationship. This distinction clarifies whether faith-based coping may independently alleviate strain or condition how demands translate into exhaustion within the JDR model or neither.

From an additive standpoint, the results are clear: positive religious coping showed no significant direct association with lower exhaustion. This suggests that while positive religious coping may promote meaning making and resilience in broader life domains (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Pargament et al., 2011), it may not provide the specific recovery experiences necessary to counter daily depletion from job demands. Within JDR logic, positive coping may enhance existential or interpretive resources without directly replenishing the self-regulatory, attentional, or physiological resources eroded by workload pressures. This

interpretation aligns with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which holds that resource gains must match the domain of loss to restore equilibrium. Consistent with this view, evidence indicates that religiosity is more reliably associated with subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction than with depletion-based outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, suggesting that religious meaning may stabilize significance without necessarily altering energetic fatigue (Abu-Raiya et al., 2021).

In contrast, while negative religious coping did not significantly predict emotional exhaustion in the regression model, a positive bivariate association did emerge. This pattern aligns with research showing that negative or struggle based religious coping is associated with greater psychological distress and impaired emotional regulation (Abu-Raiya et al., 2015; Pargament, 2013). Employees who interpret occupational challenges as divine punishment, abandonment, or spiritual failure may experience an additional emotional burden beyond objective job demands. This mirrors COR's principle of secondary loss spirals, whereby maladaptive meaning-making consumes emotional and attentional resources, accelerating depletion (Hobfoll et al., 2014). Cross cultural research further demonstrates that the impact of religious struggles varies by national and situational context, indicating that such processes are not uniformly pathogenic but embedded within specific cultural frameworks (Abu-Raiya et al., 2018). Since the present study did not support a significant regression effect, these interpretations should be understood as unconfirmed theoretical possibilities.

From a multiplicative perspective, moderation analyses revealed no significant interaction effects between job demands and either positive or negative religious coping. In other words, the strong association between job demands and emotional exhaustion was not altered by individuals' religious coping styles. Religious coping therefore did not function as a buffer or amplifier within the job demands-exhaustion relationship. This pattern is consistent with

qualitative evidence indicating that religious coping often emphasizes meaning-making, certainty, and perseverance rather than rest or emotional restoration, potentially supporting endurance under strain without facilitating recovery from depletion (Kroesbergen-Kamps, 2024).

Taken together, these findings indicate that religious coping did not exert either additive or multiplicative effects on emotional exhaustion. Religious coping did not influence overall exhaustion levels nor alter how job demands translated into depletion. While faith-based interpretations may shape emotional tone or perceived significance, these influences did not manifest as measurable differences in emotional exhaustion. This pattern suggests that religious coping may not operate as a resource or may operate in a different way, such as at the level of meaning and interpretation rather than through mechanisms directly responsible for replenishing depleted energy resources (Abu-Raiya et al., 2021; Pargament, 2013). Consequently, religious coping did not function as a secondary resource reservoir within the JDR health impairment pathway in this sample.

Null Moderation of Religiosity by Age

Hypotheses 4 through 6 proposed that age would moderate the protective effects of private religiosity, public religiosity, and spiritual commitment on emotional exhaustion. However, none of these religiosity variables significantly predicted exhaustion, nor did they interact with age group. This pattern suggests that age itself may have little influence on how religiosity or religious coping relates to emotional exhaustion. Younger, middle-aged, and older adults did not differ in the extent to which religiosity was associated with emotional exhaustion, indicating that age alone did not alter how religious engagement related to depletion. This null finding suggests that the beneficial role of religious engagement in coping with job-related stress

may depend less on age and more on other unmeasured factors, such as the depth and enactment of practice.

These results diverge from prior studies indicating that religious commitment tends to increase with age and often serves as a stronger buffer against stress among older adults (Idler et al., 2003; Krause, 2002). At the same time, accumulating evidence suggests that increases in religiosity across the lifespan do not necessarily translate into stronger protection against strain-based outcomes. From a COR perspective (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018), this means that the mere possession of faith-related beliefs without consistent, enacted engagement does not constitute an active resource. COR theory emphasizes that resources must be invested and renewed to produce gain spirals, whereas symbolic or identity-based religiosity may remain psychologically meaningful but functionally inert with respect to exhaustion. Accordingly, age alone does not guarantee resource restoration unless religious engagement is organized in ways that support renewal.

One plausible explanation for the nonsignificant moderation effects lies in the religious composition of the sample. The majority of participants identified as Christian, drawn from a North American context where religiosity may function more as a cultural or identity marker than as a daily embodied discipline (Ellison & George, 1994). In such settings, religious practices such as private prayer or weekly service attendance, while meaningful, may occur too infrequently to counteract the cumulative depletion caused by job demands. Research on spiritual and meditative practices indicates that psychological and physiological benefits emerge most reliably when practices are performed consistently, rhythmically, and with embodied engagement (Kok et al., 2013; Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005). Thus, intermittent or symbolic religiosity may lack the recovery benefits derived from sustained, embodied practice. This

interpretation aligns with Halbesleben et al.'s (2014) notion of resource passageways, which emphasizes the importance of consistent behavioral environments that enable repeated resource renewal.

In traditions such as Islamic salat or Buddhist zazen, the structured repetition of prayer serves as a physiological and cognitive reset, providing regular recovery intervals within the workday. Wachholtz and Pargament (2005) demonstrate that such embodied rituals enhance parasympathetic activity and replenish emotional energy, linking spiritual embodiment directly to resource recovery. In summary, these findings highlight a critical theoretical implication: the absence of moderation by age does not imply that religiosity is ineffective but that its recovery potency is contingent on embodiment, intentionality, and rhythmic integration into daily life. Religiosity practiced merely as belief or weekly attendance lacks the recovery frequency necessary to influence the ongoing depletion process described by the JDR and COR models These physiological findings underscore COR's claim that recovery is an active, energy-regaining process, not a static condition (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Without sustained investment in restorative activities, resources continue to erode even in the presence of stable belief systems.

This distinction is particularly relevant when interpreting the findings for private religiosity. Although private religious practices were reported at relatively high levels in the sample, private religiosity showed no association with emotional exhaustion. This pattern suggests that frequency of prayer or scripture engagement alone may not be sufficient to influence exhaustion if such practices are not enacted in ways that facilitate recovery. Prior research emphasizes that religious practices confer benefits most reliably when they are integrated into daily life in a manner that supports emotional regulation and restoration, rather than remaining episodic or symbolic (Pargament, 2007; Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005).

A similar interpretation applies to public religiosity. Attendance at religious services and participation in group religious activities did not predict emotional exhaustion, nor did these associations vary by age. Consistent with prior findings, public religiosity often exhibits weak or null relationships with strain-based outcomes once job demands and demographic factors are taken into account (Abu-Raiya et al., 2021; Cowden et al., 2022). In contexts where communal worship occurs weekly or less frequently, such practices may provide social or symbolic benefits without offering the repeated recovery opportunities necessary to offset ongoing work-related depletion.

Spiritual commitment likewise did not moderate emotional exhaustion across age groups. Although spiritual commitment reflects felt connection to the sacred, inner peace, and perceived guidance, research suggests that these experiences are more closely tied to life satisfaction than to reductions in distress or exhaustion, particularly under sustained demand (Abu-Raiya et al., 2021; Cowden et al., 2022). This pattern further supports the interpretation that religiosity may shape subjective meaning more than it alters energetic depletion, which helps explain why age did not emerge as a meaningful boundary condition.

In summary, the absence of age-based moderation suggests that religiosity, as operationalized in this study, did not function as a recovery-relevant resource at any life stage. This may reflect both a genuine lack of association between religiosity and emotional exhaustion in high-demand occupational contexts and a misalignment between belief-based measures and the behavioral investments required for recovery. These findings clarify the conditions under which religiosity is unlikely to influence exhaustion and provide an important foundation for subsequent theoretical integration. Building on this foundation, the present study advances the Spiritual Recovery Dynamics (SRD) framework as a theoretical contribution that

reconceptualizes spirituality not as a static personal resource, but as a potential recovery process whose effects depend on how spiritual meaning is enacted through rhythm, embodiment, and integration into daily life.

Theoretical Implications

The present findings offer meaningful extensions to the JDR and COR frameworks. They reaffirm that job demands remain the most powerful driver of emotional exhaustion, clarify that coping quality may outweigh coping frequency. By integrating insights from Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) and the COR model (Holmgreen et al., 2017), the study underscores that burnout arises not only from excessive demands but potentially from insufficient detachment and blocked recovery opportunities.

Demands Overshadow Identity Variables. The results show that job demands exert a dominant influence on exhaustion, surpassing demographic covariates such as gender or marital status. This supports the JDR principle that strain stems primarily from exposure to demands rather than intrinsic vulnerabilities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). When interpreted through COR theory, these findings indicate that continuous exposure to high demands may initiate a loss spiral that depletes energetic and emotional resources. From a recovery standpoint, persistent activation of job-related cognition may inhibit psychological detachment, preventing resource replenishment and producing chronic exhaustion (Sonnentag, 2018). Halbesleben et al. (2014) confirmed this mechanism meta-analytically, showing that repeated demand exposure erodes resource caravans across occupational settings.

Coping Quality Over Frequency of Religiosity. The study further suggests that how employees interpret stress spiritually may be more consequential than how often they engage in religious activity. Positive and negative religious coping offers limited protection. This may

because religious coping is a meaning-making system (Pargament et al., 1998) that can either conserve or drain resources depending on appraisal style. Recent longitudinal findings by Bakker and de Vries (2021) show that daily fluctuations in resource appraisals predict next-day vitality, underscoring that coping must be continuous and dynamic to maintain well-being. Within JDR and COR logic, coping quality determines whether personal resources contribute to a gain cycle or perpetuate loss.

Embodied Ritual as a Form of Micro-Recovery. A key theoretical contribution of this thesis is the identification of embodied rituals as culturally grounded micro-recovery mechanisms operating within both the JDR and recovery frameworks. Prior research supports this proposition across physiological, psychological, and organizational domains. For instance, Doufesh et al. (2014) demonstrated measurable parasympathetic activation and physiological relaxation during the performance of Muslim salat, indicating that structured prayer elicits a restorative autonomic response. Similarly, Pirutinsky et al. (2020) found that engaging in daily prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic buffered stress and fostered psychological resilience by providing predictable structure and existential meaning. Similarly, Wachholtz and Pargament (2005) found that spiritual meditation compared to secular or relaxation-based meditation produced greater improvements in mood, physiological relaxation, and pain tolerance. Complementing these findings, Sianoja et al. (2018) showed that even brief midday breaks and moments of psychological detachment can replenish vitality and support affective recovery during the workday.

These findings align closely with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which conceptualizes stress as a reaction to threatened or actual resource loss and recovery as an active process of resource replenishment. Embodied rituals such as prayer or meditation can thus

be interpreted as intentional “resource investments” that counteract depletion and initiate gain spirals of vitality. Extending this principle, Halbesleben et al. (2014) introduced the concepts of resource caravans and resource passageways, which describe how clusters of resources travel together and how certain environments enable or restrict recovery. Within this framework, religious rituals and faith-based communities function as resource passageways, social, emotional, and spiritual channels that facilitate the conversion of depleted energy into renewed strength and meaning.

Extending the JDR and COR Frameworks. The Spiritual Recovery Dynamics (SRD) model is a novel integrative framework developed from this thesis to explain how religious and spiritual practices function as structured micro-recovery mechanisms within occupational stress processes. Drawing upon the Job JDR model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001), COR theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989), recovery theory (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), and religious coping theory (Pargament, 1997). SRD proposes that embodied, rhythmic, and meaningful spiritual rituals restore depleted psychological and physiological resources by embedding recovery episodes into daily life.

The model emerged inductively during interpretation of this study’s findings, which showed that religious coping did not buffer or amplify the demand-exhaustion relationship unless translated into embodied and structured routines. SRD therefore reconceptualizes spirituality not as a static belief or trait consistent with the null moderation effects observed but as a dynamic self-regulatory system that sustains vitality through recurring cycles of depletion and replenishment. At its core is the SRD Triad of cognitive-meaning, affective-emotional, and embodied-physiological processes, which together produce spiritual recovery episodes that align

with micro-recovery, psychophysiological down-regulation, and meaning reconstruction found in recovery and COR literature.

Within the JD–R model, SRD clarifies how and when spirituality becomes a personal resource. Rituals such as prayer, salat, meditative breathwork, and communal worship create discrete recovery episodes that enable psychological detachment, parasympathetic activation, and meaning-making. Empirical evidence demonstrates these mechanisms: Muslim salat elicits physiological relaxation and parasympathetic dominance through rhythmic posture and attentional focus (Doufesh et al., 2014); daily prayer buffered psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing temporal structure and emotional regulation (Pirutinsky et al., 2020); and spiritual meditation produced stronger emotional and cardiac recovery than secular meditation (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005). Positive emotion research further shows that embodied practices broaden attentional scope and build durable physiological resources (Kok et al., 2013). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that spirituality becomes a functional JDR resource only when enacted behaviorally and somatically, not when held solely as belief.

SRD also extends COR theory by specifying spiritual rituals as predictable gain-spiral generators. Rituals convert latent resources faith, meaning, belonging into functional gains through three mechanisms: (a) physiological down-regulation, (b) cognitive reappraisal, and (c) emotional broadening. These mechanisms operationalize COR principles of resource caravans and resource passageways (Halbesleben et al., 2014), especially when rituals occur in communal settings that offer emotional and social support (Ellison & George, 1994). Evidence from aging and spiritual wellbeing research (e.g., Krause et al., 2003; Graca & Brandao, 2024) shows that these resource gains extend across life stages and cultural contexts. SRD formalizes two COR-consistent pathways: the Spiritual Gain Spiral, where proactive ritual engagement amplifies

personal resources and vitality; and the Spiritual Loss Spiral, where exhaustion or maladaptive religious coping restricts detachment capacity and accelerates depletion.

Recovery theory emphasizes psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control as core restoration processes (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). SRD provides a religiously contextualized extension of this model: ritual pauses structure detachment, rhythmic movements induce autonomic calm, faith-based meaning-making supports cognitive reappraisal, and communal rituals reinforce belonging and emotional regulation. The model also emphasizes rhythmic recovery cadence, a dimension underdeveloped in secular recovery frameworks showing that repeated spiritual micro-episodes accumulate into measurable vitality rebound.

SRD therefore defines a researchable construct family comprising Embodied Practice, Rhythmic Cadence, Meaningful Absorption, Physiological Down-Regulation, and Vitality Rebound. These dimensions can be operationalized through multimethod approaches integrating self-report scales, behavioral observation, and physiological markers such as heart-rate variability, sleep efficiency, and diurnal cortisol. Longitudinal and daily-experience sampling designs are particularly well suited to capture the cyclical nature of spiritual recovery episodes.

In sum, SRD offers a unified theoretical model in which burnout arises when chronic demands exceed both material and spiritual recovery capacities, and restoration occurs when belief, intention, and embodied ritual converge into a rhythmic pattern of renewal. By linking JDR, COR, recovery science, and empirical literature on spirituality, SRD positions spiritual rituals as empirically testable micro-recovery mechanisms. This extension provides new conceptual and practical pathways for understanding how faith, physiology, and recovery intersect to sustain occupational well-being and informs intervention design that integrates spiritual micro-recovery routines into organizational health practices.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations constrain the generalizability and internal validity of the present findings and outline clear avenues for future research. First, the sample was relatively homogeneous and contextually bounded. Participants were recruited primarily from a Christian-majority, North American context in which religiosity is typically expressed as belief, identity, or general religious involvement rather than as a daily, embodied, ritualized practice. As a result, the operationalization of religiosity in this study relied on frequency-based indicators such as private prayer, attendance, and religious commitment, rather than measures capturing embodied, rhythmic practices or structured ritual cycles.

Although this measurement decision aligned with the intended scope of the study, it necessarily limited the ability to explore whether spiritually grounded behaviors function as recovery mechanisms. This boundary also helps contextualize the absence of significant moderating effects for private, public, and commitment-based religiosity on the job-demands exhaustion relationship. When religious engagement is primarily cognitive rather than embodied, it is less likely to generate the types of physiological or emotional restoration associated with recovery processes. Without structured, time-bound rituals such as daily prayer cycles, meditative pauses, or other embodied recovery moments religious coping may not provide the detachment or energetic renewal required to meaningfully influence strain.

Future research should therefore include participants from diverse faith traditions and secular backgrounds to examine whether embodied rituals such as Islamic salat, Jewish minyan, or Hindu puja function as proactive vitality-management strategies that punctuate the workday with micro-recovery opportunities. Cross-cultural and inter-religious designs will be essential for examining whether these practices produce measurable cycles of detachment and resource restoration in ways consistent with established recovery models.

Second, the cross-sectional design of the study limits causal inference. Although job demands were strongly associated with emotional exhaustion, the temporal ordering among demands, coping processes, and depletion cannot be established from a one-time assessment. It remains possible that maladaptive religious coping contributes to exhaustion; however, it is equally plausible that individuals already experiencing exhaustion have diminished capacity to engage in adaptive coping, resulting in a recursive feedback loop. This bidirectionality reflects broader theory suggesting that persistent strain can impair recovery potential, and impaired recovery can further intensify strain.

Future research should incorporate longitudinal, experience-sampling, or daily diary methods to capture within-person fluctuations in job demands, recovery quality, and spiritual engagement over time. Such methods would allow researchers to trace short-term and long-term feedback loops, examine dynamic cycles of resource loss or gain, and test whether structured spiritual behaviors generate micro-recovery episodes. Experimental or quasi-experimental interventions introducing structured boundary-setting rituals would further clarify whether enhancing rhythmic recovery behaviors buffers the impact of job demands on emotional exhaustion.

Third, the measurement of religiosity and coping was constrained by a focus on frequency rather than qualitative depth, meaning, emotional tone, or physiological impact. The instruments used captured behavioral frequency and broad affiliation, but not the dimensions most relevant to emerging models such as SRD, including embodiment, attentional focus, affective resonance, or ritual structure. Future research should therefore operationalize spirituality using multidimensional strategies that assess (1) depth of engagement, distinguishing between internalized versus externally motivated religious involvement; (2) embodiment,

through physiological and behavioral markers such as autonomic activation, heart-rate variability, or other indicators of relaxation during ritual performance; and (3) meaning-making, including constructs such as gratitude, forgiveness, transcendence, calling, and perceived purpose.

Incorporating ecological-momentary assessment tools, wearable biosensors, and mixed-methods approaches would enable real-time detection of spiritual recovery moments and their physiological correlates. Such methodological advancements would clarify whether spirituality primarily functions as a cognitive coping schema, a social resource, or a behavioral recovery mechanism that replenishes depleted emotional and energetic reserves.

Practical Implications

Job Demands as the Primary Target for Intervention. The results emphasize that effective burnout prevention must begin with addressing the structural sources of job demands. Organizations should prioritize strategies that reduce chronic workload pressure, clarify role expectations, and ensure sufficient recovery periods between high-intensity tasks. Sustainable performance and well-being depend on systemic adjustments rather than on individual resilience or coping alone (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). To promote recovery and long-term vitality, organizations can implement recovery-oriented policies such as flexible scheduling, workload rotation, and protected break periods. These practices allow employees to disengage from work temporarily, restore depleted energy, and return with renewed focus. In SRD terms, such interventions create organizational "recovery climates" that institutionalize rhythmic detachment opportunities for all employees.

Encouraging Adaptive and Restorative Coping. The findings also underscore the importance of supporting employees in developing adaptive and restorative interpretations of stress. Maladaptive coping responses, such as perceiving challenges as divine punishment or

personal failure, may yet intensify emotional exhaustion by reinforcing negative rumination. In contrast, meaning-focused and acceptance-based coping strategies can help employees reinterpret stressors constructively, supporting a sense of purpose and control. Organizations can integrate SRD-informed interventions such as brief guided reflection, gratitude rituals, or structured mindfulness breaks to cultivate cognitive reframing and active recovery. Collaborations among chaplaincy services, mental health professionals, and resilience trainers can yield programs that strengthen employees' ability to detach psychologically during non-work hours. Integrating these initiatives within a recovery framework highlights that true restoration requires both cognitive reframing and deliberate disengagement from work-related thoughts and demands.

Recognizing Embodied Rituals as Legitimate Recovery Opportunities. Although religiosity did not moderate the job demands-exhaustion relationship in this sample, traditions involving frequent embodied practices may provide natural, evidence-based opportunities for detachment, relaxation, and renewal. Short, structured rituals such as prayer, meditation, or reflection can serve as brief recovery episodes that interrupt continuous cognitive engagement and help emotional balance (Op den Kamp et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Employers who recognize and accommodate these micro-practices not only enhance recovery and well-being but also advance equity and inclusion by legitimizing diverse cultural approaches to vitality management. When framed inclusively, these pauses can be promoted as universal recovery opportunities accessible to all employees, linking spiritual traditions with evidence-based principles of psychological restoration, balance, and well-being. From an SRD perspective, this represents the practical realization of spiritual recovery dynamics at the

organizational level transforming faith-based rhythm into a structural component of sustainable performance.

Taken together, the findings reaffirm that job demands remain the central engine of emotional exhaustion, yet they also reveal that recovery rather than coping alone is the critical missing link in understanding burnout. By integrating the JDR model with the COR and Sonnentag's recovery framework, this study demonstrates that exhaustion emerges not only from excessive demands but also from insufficient psychological detachment and restoration. Within this integrative view, recovery is not a passive state but an active, rhythmic process of resource replenishment. When practiced adaptively and embodied within daily life, religious coping may serve as a potential recovery pathway, transforming faith-based practices into structured opportunities for reflection, meaning-making, and physiological calm. However, when organizational demands chronically exceed individual recovery capacity, even spiritual resources may lose their restorative power, perpetuating the exhaustion and detachment cycle described in recovery theory.

The proposed SRD model further extends this insight by conceptualizing spirituality as a cyclical recovery mechanism that interrupts demand-driven loss spirals through embodied reflection, rhythmic detachment, and renewal. In this framework, faith is reframed as an enacted recovery rhythm rather than a static belief system, providing a behavioral pathway that replenishes depleted resources and restores vitality.

Future research and organizational practice should therefore conceptualize recovery as both a structural and a spiritual imperative. Employees must be supported not only in managing workload intensity but also in reclaiming the mental and emotional space necessary for renewal, balance, and sustainable well-being. Embedding SRD-informed practices such as structured

reflection periods, mindful transitions, and culturally inclusive rituals can create recovery-rich work environments that sustain both productivity and human flourishing.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms that job demands are the dominant driver of emotional exhaustion, surpassing the influence of demographic and religious variables. When job demands are considered, differences related to gender, marital status, and income largely diminish, indicating that burnout stems primarily from sustained work intensity and chronic strain rather than inherent identity characteristics. The analysis of religious coping reveals that the quality of interpretation may be more consequential than the frequency of practice, yet both maladaptive theological appraisals and positive coping and general religiosity offer limited protection. While religiosity may provide existential meaning, it does not consistently afford daily psychological recovery. Together, these findings confirm that excessive demands drive exhaustion, while recovery mechanisms determine whether individuals spiral toward depletion or restoration.

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Table 1. *Study descriptives and correlational*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	45.46	13.47	-											
2. Gender	.46	.50	-.04	-										
3. Education	2.70	.99	-.18	.09	-									
4. Married	.64	.48	-.14	.02	.05	-								
5. Income	4.67	1.63	.04	-.05	.31	.25	-							
6. Job Demands	3.13	.77	-.15	.18	.08	-.05	-.09	(.88)						
7. Emotional Exhaustion	2.43	1.02	-.17	.18	-.02	-.13	-.14	.78	(.91)					
8. Positive Coping	3.07	1.24	-.12	.01	.10	.03	-.03	.10	.02	(.87)				
9. Negative Coping	1.63	.77	-.11	.05	.03	.01	-.05	.21	.34	.31	(.83)			
10. Private Religiosity	3.22	1.54	-.05	.05	.06	.07	-.01	.12	.01	.73	.19	(.92)		
11. Public Religiosity	2.36	1.21	-.10	-.03	.14	.01	.00	.14	-.02	.66	.15	.82	(.89)	
12. Spiritual Commitment	3.85	1.47	-.10	.02	.06	.05	-.06	.03	-.11	.87	.20	.80	.69	(.90)

Note. Correlations ≥ |.14| are significant at $p < .05$; ≥ |.20| at $p < .01$; and ≥ |.25| at $p < .001$. Values in parentheses along the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for multi-item scales.

Table 2. *Tests of Hypotheses 1 to 3 Predicting Emotional Exhaustion*

Table 2. Tests of Hypotheses 1 to 3 Predicting Emotional Exhaustion.	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Gender	.36*	.14	.10	.09	.10	.09	. 11	.09
Married	-.21	.15	-.17	.10	-.16	.10	-.18	.09
Education	.01	.07	-.07	.05	-.07	.05	-.07	.05
Tenure	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
Income	-.07	.05	-.02	.03	-.02	.03	-.01	.03
Work Demands	-	-	1.02***	.06	1.00***	.15	.78***	.14
Positive Religious coping	-	-	-	-	-.06	.15	-	-
Negative Religious Coping	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.13	.26
Work Demands*Positive Religious Coping					.01	.05	-	-
Work Demands*Negative Religious Coping	-	-	-	-	-	-	.12	.08

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3. *Tests of Hypotheses 4 to 6 Predicting Emotional Exhaustion by Age Group*

Table 3. Tests of Hypotheses 4 to 6 Predicting Emotional Exhaustion by Age Group.	Hypothesis 4		Hypothesis 5		Hypothesis 6	
Predictors	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Gender	.39**	.14	.38**	.14	.37*	.14
Married	-.20	.15	-.19	.15	-.17	.15
Education	-.02	.08	-.01	.08	-.01	.08
Tenure	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Income	-.07	.05	-.07	.05	-.08	.05
Young vs Middle Age Adults (W1)	-.19	.40	-.19	.38	-.21	.49
Young vs. Old Age Adults (W2)	.05	.43	-.13	.40	-.30	.53
Private Religiosity	.04	.08	-	-	-	-
Public Religiosity	-	-	-.00	.10	-	-
Religious Commitment	-	-	-	-	-.07	.09
Private Religiosity*W1	.02	.11	-	-	-	-
Private Religiosity*W2	-.14	.12	-	-	-	-
Public Religiosity*W1	-	-	.02	.14	-	-
Public Religiosity*W2	-	-	-.12	.15	-	-
Religious Commitment*W1	-	-	-	-	.01	.12
Religious Commitment*W2	-	-	-	-	-.03	.13

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. W1 and W2 are binary variables applying dumbing coding, k – 1.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographics (Control Variables)

1. What is your age? (Please type your exact age in years)

2. What is your gender?

o ☐ Male

o ☐ Female

o ☐ Non-binary/Other

o ☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your religious affiliation?

o ☐ Christianity

o ☐ Islam

o ☐ Judaism

o ☐ Hinduism

o ☐ Buddhism

o ☐ Other (please specify): _____

o ☐ No religious affiliation

4. How many years have you worked in your current field?

o ☐ Less than 1 year

o ☐ 1-5 years

o ☐ 6-10 years

o ☐ More than 10 years

5. How many hours per week do you work on average?

o ☐ Less than 20 hours

o ☐ 20-39 hours

o ☐ 40+ hours

6. Which industry do you currently work in?

o ☐ Healthcare

o ☐ Education

o ☐ Technology/IT

o ☐ Finance/Banking

o ☐ Retail/Hospitality

o ☐ Government/Public Sector

o ☐ Manufacturing/Trades

o ☐ Arts/Entertainment

o ☐ Nonprofit/Social Services

o ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section 2: Job Demands

Please rate the following statements about your job demands.

(1 = Never, 3 = Sometimes, 5 = Always)

1. Do you have to work at speed?

2. Do you work under time pressure?

3. Does your work require a lot of concentration?

4. Do you regard your work as mentally very straining?

5. Does your work require your constant attention?

6. Is your work emotionally demanding?

7. Do you face emotionally charged situations in your work?

8. During my work, I often feel emotionally drained.

9. After my work, I usually feel worn out and weary.

10. After work, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.

Section 3: Emotional Exhaustion

Please indicate how often you experience the following feelings in relation to your job.

(1 = Never, 5 = Very Often)

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.

2. I feel used up at the end of the workday.

3. I feel fatigued when I wake up and have to face another workday.

4. I feel burned out from my work.

5. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

6. I feel overwhelmed by my work responsibilities.

7. Working with people all day is really a strain for me.

Section 4: Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE)

Please indicate how you used religious or spiritual beliefs to cope with work-related stress.

(1 = Not at all, 5 = A great deal)

Positive Religious Coping

1. I looked for a stronger connection with God.

2. I sought God's love and care.

3. I trusted that God was in control of my work stress.

4. I tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.

5. I sought support from members of my religious community.

Negative Religious Coping

6. I felt that stressful situations were a punishment from God.

7. I questioned the power of God in my work struggles.

8. I wondered if God had abandoned me in difficult work situations.

9. I felt that the devil was responsible for my struggles at work.

10. I felt spiritually discontent when facing workplace stress.

Section 5: Private Religiosity (DUREL)

(1 - Rarely or never; 2 - A few times a month; 3 - Once a week; 4 - Two or more times/week; 5 - Daily; 6 - More than once a day)

1. How often do you pray privately, such as in your home or elsewhere, outside of formal religious services?

2. How often do you read religious scriptures or listen to religious programming (TV/radio/online)?

Section 6: Public Religiosity (DUREL)

(1 - Never; 2 - Once a year or less; 3 - A few times a year; 4 - A few times a month; 5 - Once a week; 6 - More than once/week)

1. How often do you attend religious services (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue, temple)?

2. How often do you participate in group religious activities outside of regular services (e.g., Bible, Quran, Torah etc. study, faith group meetings)?

Section 7: Spiritual Commitment (DSES)

Please indicate how often you experience each of the following in your daily life.

(1 = Never, 2 = Once in a while, 3 = Some days, 4 = Most days, 5 = Every day, 6 = Many times a day)

1. I feel God's presence.
2. I experience a connection to all of life.
3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy, which lifts me out of my daily concerns.
4. I find strength in my religion.
5. I find comfort in my religion.
6. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.
7. I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities.
8. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.
9. I desire to be closer to God or in union with Him.