

Job Strain and Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Psychological Detachment

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of psychological detachment in the relationship between job strain and turnover intention among full-time employees in Pakistan. The research adopted a descriptive correlational design involving 400 full-time employees across various sectors in Pakistan. Participants were selected based on Morgan and Krejcie's sampling table using stratified random sampling. Standardized tools were used to measure job strain (Job Content Questionnaire), psychological detachment (Recovery Experience Questionnaire), and turnover intention (Turnover Intention Scale). Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation in SPSS-27 and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS-21 to test the mediation model and assess the strength and direction of direct and indirect relationships between variables. Pearson's correlation results showed that job strain was positively associated with turnover intention ($r = .58, p < .001$) and negatively with psychological detachment ($r = -.41, p < .001$). Psychological detachment was also negatively associated with turnover intention ($r = -.46, p < .001$). SEM analysis confirmed good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.39$, RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.95). The direct effect of job strain on turnover intention was significant ($\beta = 0.42, p < .001$), as were the effects of job strain on psychological detachment ($\beta = -0.39, p < .001$) and psychological detachment on turnover intention ($\beta = -0.31, p < .001$). Psychological detachment partially mediated the relationship between job strain and turnover intention (indirect $\beta = -0.12$). The findings underscore the importance of psychological detachment as a key personal resource that mitigates the impact of job strain on turnover intention. Organizations should develop interventions that both reduce job stressors and enhance employees' ability to mentally disengage from work to improve retention outcomes.

Keywords: Job Strain, Turnover Intention, Psychological Detachment.

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Introduction

In today's volatile labor market, employee retention has become a growing concern for organizations seeking stability, efficiency, and sustainability. One of the central challenges in human resource management is the rising incidence of turnover intention, defined as the conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave one's current organization in the near future. While turnover intention does not always result in actual

turnover, it is widely accepted as a reliable predictor of employee exit behavior and reflects underlying organizational dysfunctions such as dissatisfaction, stress, and disengagement (1, 2). Understanding the antecedents and mechanisms influencing turnover intention is crucial for organizations to proactively address workforce instability and safeguard institutional knowledge and performance.

A substantial body of research has emphasized the significance of job strain as a key predictor of turnover intention. Job strain encompasses a combination of high psychological demands and low decision latitude that creates a stressful occupational environment (3). Several studies have demonstrated a consistent positive correlation between high job stress and increased intention to leave, especially when job demands surpass the coping capacity of employees or when support systems are inadequate (4-6). For instance, in sectors such as healthcare and construction—where stress is endemic—turnover intentions have been strongly linked to stressors such as workload, lack of autonomy, and workplace bullying (4, 7).

The mediating role of job satisfaction in the stress-turnover relationship has also been well-documented. Employees experiencing high levels of stress are less likely to report satisfaction in their roles, which in turn amplifies their intention to leave (8-10). While job satisfaction acts as a psychological buffer, it does not fully explain the mechanisms through which job strain culminates in turnover intention. Therefore, scholars have begun to explore psychological detachment—the ability to mentally disengage from work during off-hours—as a critical personal resource that may mitigate the harmful consequences of job stress (11). This construct, grounded in recovery theory, implies that employees who effectively detach from work during non-working hours are better able to replenish their cognitive and emotional resources, thereby reducing strain and subsequent turnover intention.

The importance of psychological detachment has gained empirical traction in recent years. Studies have shown that employees who struggle to disengage from work-related thoughts during their free time experience prolonged stress, emotional exhaustion, and higher intentions to leave (12, 13). In contrast, detachment acts as a form of self-regulation that promotes well-being, resilience, and commitment to the organization (14). Despite this emerging consensus, relatively few studies have investigated psychological detachment as a mediating variable in the job strain–turnover pathway, particularly in non-Western, developing economies such as Pakistan, where occupational stressors and organizational dynamics may differ significantly from Western contexts.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the need to examine turnover intention through a psychological lens. High-pressure environments, job insecurity, and mental strain during the pandemic have been found to exacerbate turnover intention across various professional groups, including healthcare workers, educators, and service employees (15-17). Psychological burnout, emotional labor, and the lack of adequate support structures have significantly contributed to employee withdrawal and detachment from their organizational roles (17, 18). Furthermore, researchers argue that even in the post-pandemic era, the psychological aftermath of workplace disruptions continues to manifest in elevated turnover intentions (13).

Adding complexity to this issue is the role of organizational and individual-level factors that can either buffer or exacerbate the impact of job strain. Organizational justice, leadership style, and workplace spirituality have all been shown to influence employee turnover intention, often mediated through job satisfaction and psychological resilience (9, 14). Similarly, personal attributes such as self-efficacy, morale, and perceived organizational support can determine how employees internalize workplace stress and how

likely they are to consider leaving (2, 19). However, despite the growing recognition of these variables, few studies have simultaneously considered psychological detachment alongside job strain and turnover intention using structural equation modeling, which is necessary for understanding complex mediational relationships.

Emerging data from Southeast Asia and South Asia, including Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, suggest that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping stress perception and turnover behavior (1, 20). Collectivist cultures may discourage the expression of dissatisfaction or emotional burnout, leading to the internalization of stress and a quiet buildup of turnover intentions (19, 21). Moreover, the availability of economic opportunities, job market conditions, and organizational culture norms significantly affect whether an employee acts upon their turnover intentions. Therefore, investigating these relationships in the Pakistani context is particularly relevant, where economic uncertainties and organizational challenges often elevate both job strain and employee attrition.

Scholars such as Setyowati and Setyawati (2021) emphasize that job insecurity, when combined with excessive workloads, creates a toxic workplace climate that fuels psychological withdrawal and turnover intention (22). Meanwhile, evidence from recent Indonesian and Malaysian organizational studies suggests that failure to provide recovery opportunities—such as rest periods or work-life balance policies—intensifies job stress and hastens workforce disengagement (3, 10). These findings highlight the need for a multidimensional approach to employee retention, incorporating both organizational-level interventions (e.g., reducing job demands) and individual-level strategies (e.g., promoting psychological detachment).

Despite substantial progress in this field, gaps remain. Many existing studies focus on job satisfaction or burnout as the primary mediators between job strain and turnover intention, with limited attention paid to how recovery-related constructs like psychological detachment function within this framework. Moreover, much of the empirical evidence comes from Western or East Asian contexts, leaving South Asian organizational environments under-represented in the literature (5, 11). There is a need for research that addresses this imbalance and explores how culturally embedded work stressors and coping behaviors influence turnover intention in Pakistan's socio-economic setting.

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to examine the mediating role of psychological detachment in the relationship between job strain and turnover intention among full-time employees in Pakistan.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationship between job strain, psychological detachment, and turnover intention among full-time employees. The participants were recruited from various organizations across Pakistan using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse occupational representation. The sample size of 400 participants was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, ensuring statistical adequacy for structural equation modeling and correlational analysis. Eligible participants were adults aged 20 and above, employed full-time in either the public or private sector for at least one year. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection.

Data Collection

Turnover intention was measured using the Turnover Intention Scale developed by Camman, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1979). This standard tool consists of three items designed to assess an employee's likelihood of voluntarily leaving their current organization. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect stronger intentions to leave the organization. The scale does not contain subscales, ensuring a focused assessment of overall turnover intent. Numerous studies have confirmed the scale's construct validity and internal consistency, with reported Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.80, supporting its reliability across various occupational contexts.

Job strain was assessed using the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) developed by Karasek (1985), a widely used instrument in occupational health psychology. For this study, the focus was on two key subscales: psychological job demands (9 items) and decision latitude (9 items), which together define job strain according to the demand-control model. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Job strain is operationalized by combining high demands and low decision latitude scores. The JCQ has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with both subscales showing good internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$) and validated construct structures across multiple occupational and cultural populations.

Psychological detachment was measured using the Recovery Experience Questionnaire developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007), specifically the psychological detachment subscale. This subscale comprises four items that assess the extent to which individuals can mentally disconnect from work during non-working hours. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater detachment. The psychological detachment subscale has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.80) and has been validated across different languages and occupational groups, confirming its reliability and relevance in studies examining work-related recovery processes.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize demographic information. The relationships between the dependent variable (turnover intention) and the independent variables (job strain and psychological detachment) were first examined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. To test the hypothesized mediation model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS. The model fit was evaluated using standard indices, including Chi-square (χ^2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). The significance level was set at $p < .05$ for all statistical tests.

Findings and Results

Out of the 400 participants, 226 (56.5%) were male and 174 (43.5%) were female. The age distribution showed that 112 participants (28.0%) were between 20–29 years, 147 (36.8%) were between 30–39 years, 91 (22.8%) were between 40–49 years, and 50 (12.5%) were 50 years or older. Regarding educational attainment, 102 participants (25.5%) held a bachelor's degree, 198 (49.5%) held a master's degree, and 100

(25.0%) had postgraduate or professional qualifications. In terms of organizational sector, 246 participants (61.5%) were employed in the private sector and 154 (38.5%) in the public sector.

Prior to conducting correlation and SEM analyses, assumptions for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed. Skewness and kurtosis values for all main variables ranged between -0.79 and $+0.88$, indicating acceptable normal distribution. The Pearson correlation matrix showed no excessively high correlations (all r -values $< .75$), ruling out multicollinearity. Tolerance values ranged from $.62$ to $.87$ and VIF values ranged from 1.14 to 1.61 , confirming no multicollinearity issues. A visual inspection of scatterplots indicated linear relationships and homoscedasticity between the variables. These results confirmed that all statistical assumptions were sufficiently met.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 400)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Job Strain	32.74	6.21
Psychological Detachment	13.46	3.82
Turnover Intention	11.59	2.67

The results in Table 1 show the central tendencies and dispersions for the main study variables. Participants reported a moderate level of job strain ($M = 32.74$, $SD = 6.21$) based on the composite score of psychological demands and decision latitude. The mean score for psychological detachment was 13.46 ($SD = 3.82$), indicating moderate-to-low detachment from work during non-working hours. Turnover intention also showed a moderate mean value of 11.59 ($SD = 2.67$), suggesting a relatively high perceived intention to leave the organization.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients and Significance Levels Between Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Job Strain	–		
2. Psychological Detachment	$-.41^{**}$ ($p < .001$)	–	
3. Turnover Intention	$.58^{**}$ ($p < .001$)	$-.46^{**}$ ($p < .001$)	–

As shown in Table 2, job strain was significantly and positively correlated with turnover intention ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher job strain is associated with greater intention to leave. Conversely, psychological detachment was negatively correlated with both job strain ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$) and turnover intention ($r = -.46$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who are better able to detach from work report lower levels of strain and less intent to quit.

Table 3. Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
Chi-Square (χ^2)	114.87	–
Degrees of Freedom (df)	48	–
χ^2/df	2.39	< 3.00
GFI	0.95	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.91	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.97	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.96	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.059	≤ 0.06

Table 3 presents the model fit indices for the proposed structural equation model. The Chi-square value of 114.87 with 48 degrees of freedom yielded a χ^2/df ratio of 2.39 , which is within the acceptable threshold. Other fit indices indicated an excellent model fit: $GFI = 0.95$, $AGFI = 0.91$, $CFI = 0.97$, $TLI = 0.96$, and

RMSEA = 0.059. These results support the adequacy of the hypothesized mediation model in explaining the data.

Table 4. Standardized and Unstandardized Path Coefficients in the Mediation Model

Path	B	S.E.	Beta	p
Job Strain → Turnover Intention	0.38	0.06	0.42	< .001
Job Strain → Psychological Detachment	-0.27	0.05	-0.39	< .001
Psychological Detachment → Turnover Intention	-0.29	0.07	-0.31	< .001
Job Strain → Turnover Intention (Indirect)	-0.08	—	-0.12	—
Job Strain → Turnover Intention (Total)	0.30	—	0.54	—

As shown in Table 4, job strain had a significant direct effect on turnover intention ($B = 0.38$, $\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$). It also had a significant negative effect on psychological detachment ($B = -0.27$, $\beta = -0.39$, $p < .001$), which in turn had a significant negative effect on turnover intention ($B = -0.29$, $\beta = -0.31$, $p < .001$). The indirect path from job strain to turnover intention through psychological detachment was statistically meaningful ($\beta = -0.12$), suggesting partial mediation. The total effect ($\beta = 0.54$) indicates a strong overall relationship between job strain and turnover intention, both directly and indirectly.

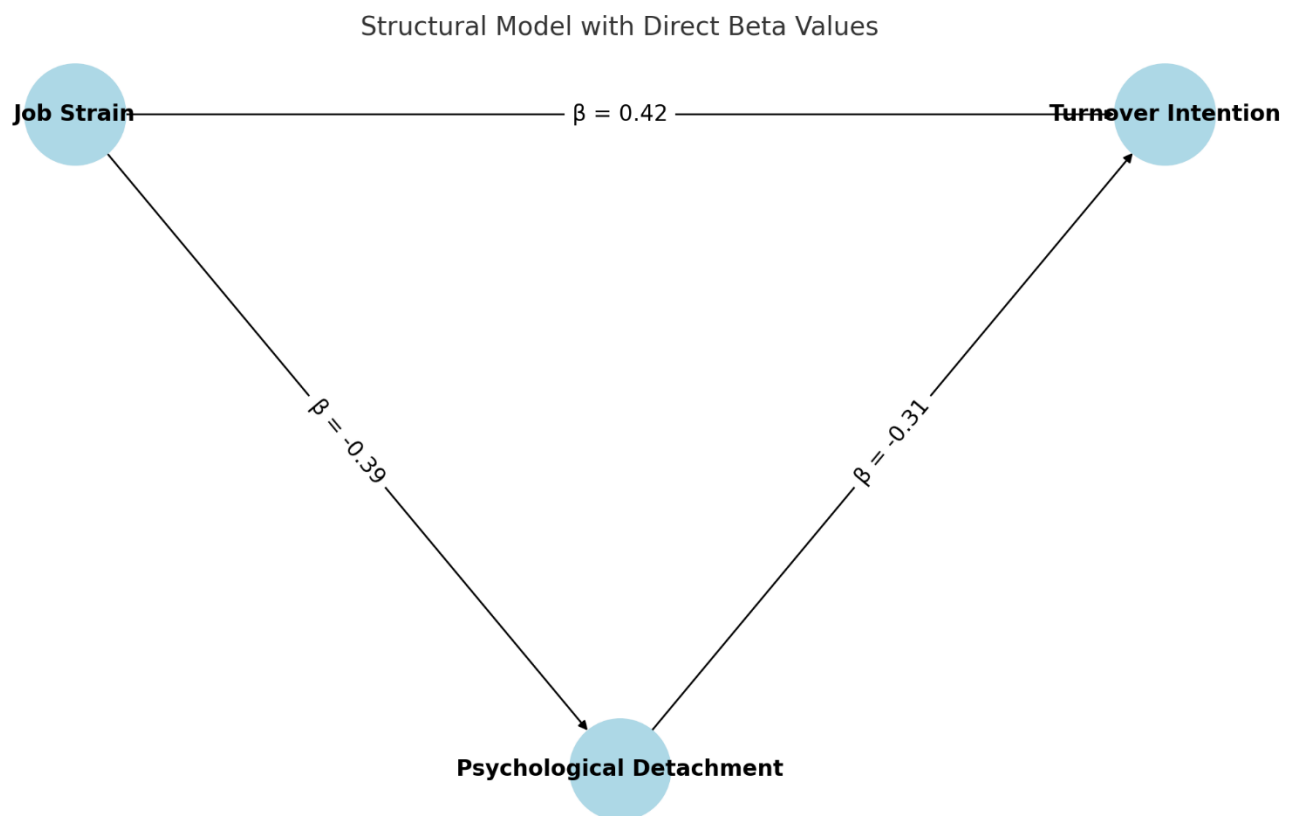


Figure 1. Model with Beta Values

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the mediating role of psychological detachment in the relationship between job strain and turnover intention among full-time employees in Pakistan. Based on structural equation modeling (SEM), the findings confirmed that job strain had a significant positive effect on turnover intention. Moreover, psychological detachment was found to partially mediate this relationship, indicating

that employees who are unable to mentally disconnect from their work experience higher levels of turnover intention, especially under conditions of elevated job strain.

The direct effect of job strain on turnover intention observed in this study is in line with a substantial body of empirical evidence that links high psychological demands and lack of control at work to increased intentions to leave the organization. As confirmed by prior research, job stress undermines employee morale and fosters dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to turnover intentions (3, 7). In high-pressure environments such as corporate, health, and service sectors, the burden of excessive workload, organizational inefficiencies, and unrealistic expectations often leads to emotional exhaustion and detachment from organizational goals (4, 5). The current study's findings reinforce these conclusions, extending them to the context of Pakistani organizations, where economic instability and organizational rigidity often amplify the effects of job-related stress.

Furthermore, the results confirmed that psychological detachment plays a significant mediating role in the job strain–turnover link. Specifically, high job strain was associated with lower psychological detachment, which in turn was linked to higher turnover intention. This aligns with recovery theory, which posits that the inability to psychologically detach from work impairs recovery from job stress and contributes to sustained strain and negative outcomes. These findings are consistent with earlier research that identified detachment as a personal resource mitigating the effects of occupational demands. For example, Jung et al. (2024) found that psychological detachment was crucial for maintaining well-being among working women experiencing health-related job demands (12), while Sungbun et al. (2023) demonstrated that lack of detachment was a major predictor of turnover among emergency department nurses (13).

These findings offer compelling support for the idea that psychological detachment is not merely a passive absence of work-related thought, but rather an active coping strategy that enables emotional restoration and psychological resilience. Employees who can mentally disconnect from their job during non-working hours are better equipped to handle job stress and are less likely to develop withdrawal behaviors such as turnover intention (14). Moreover, the mediating role of detachment emphasizes that turnover intention is not solely driven by external organizational conditions, but also by internal psychological mechanisms that determine how stress is processed and managed.

The mediating effect of psychological detachment in this study also expands on earlier models that focused on job satisfaction or burnout as primary mediators. While previous research has shown that job satisfaction mediates the link between job strain and turnover intention (8-10), this study provides evidence that detachment serves a similar function, possibly complementing satisfaction-related mechanisms. Indeed, when employees are unable to disengage mentally, their cognitive load remains elevated, even during rest periods, which reduces recovery and makes them more susceptible to dissatisfaction and the desire to exit the organization (11).

Additionally, the positive association between job strain and turnover intention identified here corroborates findings from other high-stress occupational contexts. In healthcare, for instance, Ramdhan et al. (2024) demonstrated that job stress, when exacerbated by workplace bullying and poor organizational support, significantly increases turnover intention, mediated by burnout (4). Similar conclusions were drawn by Arman et al. (2024), who reported that early-career academics experiencing psychological strain exhibited elevated turnover intention, especially when lacking institutional resources and support (21).

These parallels across different contexts suggest that the mechanisms underlying stress-induced turnover are robust and widely generalizable, including to Pakistani work environments.

Another notable implication of this study is its relevance to post-pandemic occupational recovery. COVID-19 drastically changed the nature of work and intensified stress levels globally. Workers faced increased uncertainty, job insecurity, and blurred work-life boundaries, especially in sectors with limited remote work capacity. Studies by Mirzaei et al. (2021) and Tolksdorf et al. (2022) highlighted that pandemic-era stress contributed to higher turnover intentions among frontline healthcare workers (15, 16). The current findings, while not pandemic-specific, support the broader idea that chronic job strain and reduced psychological detachment continue to shape employees' attitudes and intentions in the post-pandemic workforce landscape.

Moreover, this study confirms that turnover intention is shaped by an interplay of organizational and individual-level variables. While structural features like workload and job demands represent the organizational context, personal resources such as psychological detachment influence how employees cope. This dual influence has also been observed in studies examining the role of job insecurity and emotional labor. For example, Yoon et al. (2022) found that job stress and emotional burnout significantly increased turnover intention among Korean language teachers, particularly when emotional labor was left unmanaged (17). Similarly, Rm and Yogatama (2021) demonstrated that psychological strain, combined with low employee morale, heightened turnover intentions among nurses in Jakarta (18).

In addition, cultural context remains a critical lens through which these dynamics must be interpreted. The study by Istiqomah et al. (2025) suggested that contract employees in Indonesia experienced high turnover intention due to the dual burden of job insecurity and low satisfaction (1). In collectivist cultures like Pakistan, where direct confrontation and formal grievances may be socially discouraged, turnover intention may serve as a silent expression of dissatisfaction and stress. Therefore, psychological detachment could function as a culturally acceptable and self-managed strategy to regulate internal emotional strain.

This study also builds upon and affirms earlier theoretical contributions suggesting that job strain is not an isolated stressor but part of a broader web of psychosocial influences. Researchers such as Kim (2024) and Kim et al. (2022) emphasized the role of self-efficacy, job involvement, and perceived social support in moderating the effects of stress on turnover behavior (2, 19). Bui et al. (2024) also highlighted that performance outcomes and turnover intentions are moderated by various individual and organizational variables, including autonomy and leadership style (20). The current study contributes to this discourse by establishing psychological detachment as a robust mediator that bridges the external work environment and internal cognitive-emotional responses.

Taken together, the findings underscore the importance of designing organizational strategies that both reduce job strain and promote psychological recovery. Interventions such as workload management, flexible work arrangements, and mandatory rest periods may help mitigate strain. However, these must be complemented by practices that encourage psychological detachment, such as digital disconnection policies after work hours, promoting work-life balance, and providing training in mindfulness or boundary-setting skills. These interventions are particularly crucial in the Pakistani context, where systemic organizational challenges and socio-cultural norms may otherwise inhibit open discussions about stress and dissatisfaction.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to infer causal relationships between job strain, psychological detachment, and turnover intention. Longitudinal studies would offer stronger evidence of temporal dynamics and causal pathways. Second, the data relied on self-report measures, which may introduce common method bias or social desirability effects. Although validated tools were used, the accuracy of responses may have been influenced by individual perceptions or cultural tendencies to underreport stress. Third, the study sample was limited to full-time employees in Pakistan, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other countries or to part-time, freelance, or remote workers who may experience different forms of job strain or detachment.

Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to establish the directionality and causal sequence between job strain, detachment, and turnover behavior. Including biopsychological markers of stress—such as cortisol levels or sleep patterns—could provide objective measures that complement self-reported stress and detachment. Additionally, future studies may explore moderating variables, such as job autonomy, emotional intelligence, and leadership style, which might strengthen or weaken the mediating role of psychological detachment. Cross-cultural comparisons could also illuminate how national or organizational cultures influence the experience and management of job strain and turnover intention. Finally, expanding this research to include remote workers and digital professionals could reveal how detachment operates in digitally connected, always-on work environments.

Organizations should implement structured interventions to reduce job strain, such as adjusting workloads, clarifying job roles, and enhancing decision-making autonomy. Employers should also actively promote psychological detachment by encouraging employees to disengage from work during non-working hours through policies like after-hours email bans and flexible scheduling. Training programs that enhance boundary-setting skills and mindfulness practices can further support recovery. Managers should model healthy detachment behaviors and respect employee off-time, while HR departments should monitor stress indicators and offer counseling or mental health support as needed. Such integrative efforts can not only reduce turnover intention but also cultivate a more resilient and committed workforce.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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