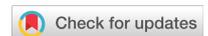


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Workplace Stressors, Burnout, and Quiet Quitting: Organizational Social Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Purpose—The paper's aim is to make a contribution to research in management and accounting by examining "quiet quitting" as a behavioral response to long-term stressors in the workplace. It also considers the implications of this for performance management, human capital accountability, and organizational value creation. This study draws on resource conservation theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and the social-contextual approach to discuss how unfavorable management and job design conditions can lead to "quiet quitting" through psychological and social processes.

Design/methodology/approach—We conducted a quantitative study and analysed survey research data using a partial least squares structural equation model to evaluate an integrative framework linking workplace stressors, burnout, quiet quitting, and social interaction intensity. The model shows how managerial control practices, job design realities, and accountability-related stressors can lead to behavioral disengagement.

Findings—The results show that long-term work stressors are linked to quiet quitting via burnout. This highlights burnout as a key psychological process through which managerial pressure and job demands lead to a decrease in discretionary effort. Furthermore, stressors' explanatory power is not limited to fatigue; quiet quitting also reflects workers' assessments of managerial practices and perceived effort-reward imbalances. The level of social interaction intensity does not significantly influence this relationship. Furthermore, high interaction frequency does not appear to compensate for structural (managerial) inadequacies.

Originality/value—This paper provides insights into the management and accounting literature by reconceptualizing quiet quitting as a result of ill-aligned control, workload distribution, and relational job design, rather than an individual attitudinal shortcoming. It's a fresh behavioral-accountability lens that connects HR management, job design, and performance governance to today's trends in disengagement.

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1. Introduction

Silent withdrawal has recently become a significant yet under-theorized form of employee disengagement in modern workplaces. Quiet quitting is a new form of withdrawal behaviour in which employees consciously make an effort to do only enough at work (Karrani et al., 2024) and deviate from typical forms of withdrawal, such as turnover or absenteeism. This phenomenon has been more prevalent after job intensification, organizational change, and prolonged uncertainty in the global labor market (Schenkenhofer and Kitsing, 2026; Wibowo et al., 2026; M. Liu et al., 2026). Nonetheless, as it has become more common practice, there is no widely accepted understanding of quiet quitting.

In the majority of research, quiet quitting has been approached by understanding it as a consequence of low levels of work engagement or organizational commitment (Afrahi et al., 2022), focusing on an attitudinal explanation individually level. Although these models provide valuable understanding, they often do not take into account the accumulated effect of chronic work stressors and psychological processes through which such

stressors can be transformed into visible withdrawal behavior (Doğan, 2026; Gong and Y.-S. Huang, 2026; Jia and Hu, 2026; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026). Furthermore, existing studies have overwhelmingly treated disengagement as an independent process established at a single point in time, versus recognizing the fact that employees are part of a social milieu where they constantly observe and interpret others' actions and adjust their own behaviors accordingly.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is used to conceptualize quiet quitting as a rational response to continuing resource drain. COR theory argues that people are motivated to protect valuable resources and expend effort in the act of doing so, such that continued exposure to stressors catalyzes individuals' adoption of defensive strategies aimed at avoiding further loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Within the organizational context, work-related stressors, such as abusive supervision and role overload, gradually deplete employees' emotional and cognitive energies (Tepper et al., 2017; Tepper, 2000). Once resource loss becomes a chronic condition, employees may be inclined to withhold effort and use quiet quitting as an approach to conserve resources.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model can help to clarify this process: it posits burnout as a central psychological mechanism that mediates the effects of adverse job conditions on withdrawal. The JD–R model suggests that burnout develops through a process whereby, over time, job demands deplete available resources, which in turn leads to emotional exhaustion and a distancing from work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026; Srivastava et al., 2026; Özen and Yücel, 2026). There is ample evidence to demonstrate that burnout predicts multiple types of withdrawal from work, although the extent to which this is true for quiet quitting specifically has not been widely investigated. Filling this void, the current investigation situates burnout as the central explanatory mechanism between a host of work stressors and QQ behavior.

Importantly, this study extends prior research by embedding quiet quitting within a social interaction context. Social interactions in organizations refer to the extent to which employees mutually engage in communication, coordination, and trust-based exchanges, enabling the development of emotional connections as critical psychological resources (C. J. Chen and J. W. Huang, 2007a). Drawing on crossover theory, psychological states and behavioral responses such as disengagement may spread across individuals through daily interactions (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009). Social learning theory further suggests that employees may model their behavior after peers when such behavior appears adaptive or socially acceptable (Bandura, 1986). In work environments characterized by high interaction intensity, quiet quitting may therefore become normalized and amplified rather than contained.

Accordingly, this study develops an integrative model that examines how multiple workplace stressors influence quiet quitting, how burnout explains this relationship, and how workplace social interaction intensity strengthens these effects. By integrating COR theory, the JD–R model, and crossover mechanisms, this research offers a socially grounded and psychologically rigorous explanation of quiet quitting. The findings contribute to the emerging literature by shifting the focus from purely individual attitudes to behavioral, psychological, and contextual drivers of quiet quitting, while providing practical insights for organizations seeking to mitigate disengagement through leadership practices, job design, and social context management.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical background

The present study is designed to be informed mainly by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which suggests that individuals are motivated to gain, preserve, and salvage resources that they value, and long-lasting resource consumption results in defensive coping strategies (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In work-related settings, persistent stressors within the workplace may deplete both emotional and psychological resources of employees, which can lead them to be more prone to withdrawal responses. Future endeavors of COR theory, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model describes how high demands and low resources lead to burnout and maladaptive behavior (Demerouti et al., 2001; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026; Srivastava et al., 2026; Özen and Yücel, 2026). Crossover theory builds on this schema by assuming that stress and coping reactions can spill over from persons to other persons through social interactions (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009). Lastly, social learning theory posits

that employees emulate the behaviors of others if they consider them adaptive in their social environment (Bandura, 1986). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, quiet quitting can be appreciated as a resource-dependent (Hobfoll, 1989), psychologically mediated (Blau, 1964), and socially reinforced phenomenon.

2.2 Workplace stressors and quiet quitting behavior

Job-related sources of stress are significant precursors of silent attrition. Abusive supervision damages subordinates' dignity and psychological safety, leading them to withdrawal behavior by way of self-protection (Tepper, 2000). Work role overload amplifies demand-related job pressure beyond what employees can handle and signals effort reduction in line with the JD–R health-impairment process (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2020). Job insecurity produces constant uncertainty and stress, causing employees to withdraw behaviorally, while they husband available resources (De Witte, 1999; Jia and Hu, 2026). In addition, under the condition of low relational job design, employees will suffer from a lack of meaningful social interaction and perceived task significance and feel alienation and withdrawal (Grant, 2007; Grant and Parker, 2009; Karrani et al., 2024). Carrying out such an approach, from the point of view of COR, we believe that quiet quitting is a reasonable strategy to minimize additional resource loss in situations where employees are exposed to chronic work stressors.

2.3 Workplace stressors and burnout

The concept of burnout is considered universal psychological reaction to sustained adverse working conditions. Abusive supervision drains emotional resources through persistent maltreatment, fostering the experience of emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Tepper et al., 2017; Tepper, 2000; Karrani et al., 2024). Work role overload quickens burnout by demanding beyond the point of their recovery capacity both cognitively and emotionally (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009). Job insecurity results in burnout through continued stress and a sense of lack of control over one's work future (De Witte, 1999). Together, low relational job design diminishes access to social and meaningful resources at work, leaving individuals more susceptible to burnout (Grant, 2007; Sivanesan et al., 2026; Bouwhuis et al., 2026). In line with COL and JD–R theories, then, work stressors should directly lead to burnout (B.-J. Kim and M.-J. Kim, 2026; S. Chen et al., 2026).

2.4 Burnout and quiet quitting

Work disengagement is preceded by a number of key precursors, one of which is work fatigue. Employees who are not engaged in their work also conserve energy because they have invested less in discretionary effort and psychological resources (C. Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2020). Research into nurses' burnout has found a link with disengagement, decreased citizenship behavior, and passive coping (Afrahi et al., 2022). These findings are also relevant to the concept of silent exiting because these are tacit acts that are performed rather than remaining silent. According to (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 1989), burnout is when people have used up all their reserves to the maximum, with nothing left to give. In order to recover, workers need to stop using the few resources they have left.

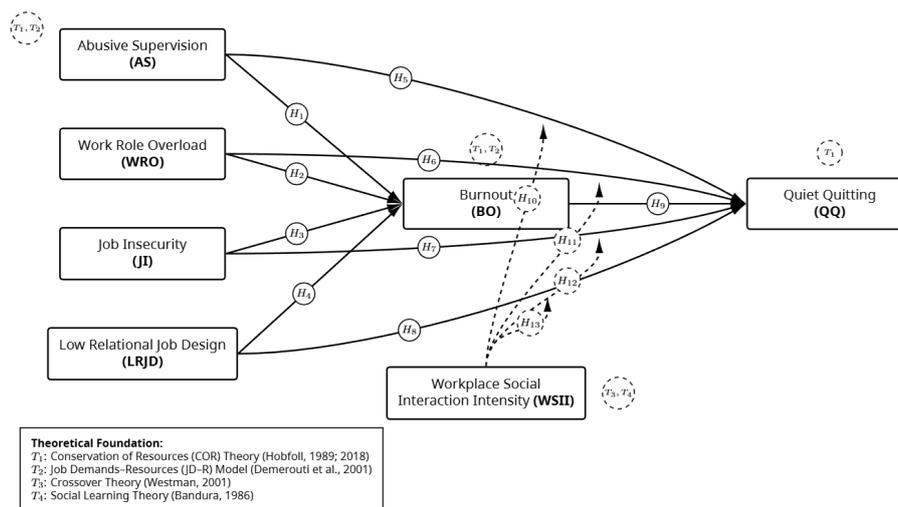


Fig. 1. Conceptual research framework of workplace stressors, burnout, quiet quitting, and social interaction intensity.

2.5 Burnout as an explanatory mechanism

Burnout is an important mechanism that explains the relationship between workplace stressors and quiet quitting. In the same line, abusive supervision, excessive workload, job insecurity, and low relational job design lead to a depletion of emotional and cognitive resources, which in turn increase burnout levels (Demerouti et al., 2001; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026). Employees are also more inclined to disengage behaviourally as burnout emerges and seek to avoid further resource consumption (Blau, 1964). Evidence of the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between negative work conditions and withdrawal behaviors such as low effort or psychological detachment is compelling (Schaufeli et al., 2020; Afrahi et al., 2022). Following this logic, burnout should serve to account for why various workplace stressors lead to quiet quitting behavior by providing a psychologically based process that is consonant with COR theory.

2.6 Social interaction as a contextual amplifier

Workplace Social Interaction Intensity and Perceived Adversity: Employees' interpretations of and responses to adverse circumstances are affected by the intensity of their social contact at work. Social situations mean there is transmission of attitudes and behaviour, which lets stress and coping transcend individual boundaries (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009). Following social learning theory, the more employees notice certain behaviors in their peers, the more they will be led to mimic these behaviors if they seem adaptive (Bandura, 1986). In high interactivity settings, silent quitting may be institutionalized when employees jointly decrease effort as they react to shared stress-inducing contexts (S. Chen et al., 2026). Crossover research also shows that negative work-related experiences have stronger impacts with high levels of interpersonal contact (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009; Jose et al., 2026; M. Liu et al., 2026). As such, social intensity in workplace interactions is predicted to moderate the relationship between workplace stressors and quiet quitting.

2.7 Research framework

The proposed research framework integrates workplace stressors, burnout, quiet quitting, and workplace social interaction intensity into a unified explanatory model grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. From a resource-based perspective, abusive supervision, work role overload, job insecurity, and low relational job design are conceptualized as primary stressors that threaten employees' psychological resources and increase the likelihood of withdrawal-oriented behaviors (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001). Prolonged exposure to these stressors accelerates resource depletion, thereby undermining employees' capacity to sustain effort and engagement.

Burnout is positioned as the central psychological mechanism through which sustained resource loss is translated into quiet quitting behavior. Consistent with the JD-R health impairment process, emotional exhaustion and cognitive fatigue represent critical conditions that precede behavioral withdrawal (Christina Maslach et al., 2001; Halbesleben et al., 2014). In addition, workplace social interaction intensity is incorporated as a contextual amplifier that conditions the strength of stressor—quiet quitting relationships. Drawing on crossover theory and social learning theory, frequent social interactions may facilitate behavioral transmission, collective sense-making, and the normalization of withdrawal practices within work groups (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009; Bandura, 1986). Control variables are included to account for individual heterogeneity that may influence withdrawal behavior. This integrated framework advances a multilevel explanation of quiet quitting by linking individual stress exposure, psychological depletion, and social-contextual reinforcement mechanisms within a single theoretical model (see Figure 1).

3. Methods Innovation

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design based on primary survey data to empirically test a

Table 1. Sample population characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	144	55.0
	Female	118	45.0
Age	22–30 years	158	60.3
	31–45 years	86	32.8
	>45 years	18	6.9
Position	Staff	105	40.1
	Senior Staff	78	29.8
	Supervisor	39	14.9
	Manager	26	9.9
	Senior Manager	14	5.3
Contract Type	Permanent	157	59.9
	Contract	78	29.8
	Outsourcing	27	10.3
Department	Operations	65	24.8
	Sales/Marketing	53	20.2
	Finance/Accounting	39	14.9
	HR/Admin	39	14.9
	IT/Technical	40	15.3
	Customer Service	26	9.9

theoretically grounded structural model. The research design is rooted in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which jointly posit that workplace stressors influence employee outcomes through psychological resource depletion processes (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001). These theoretical foundations provide a robust basis for examining the relationships between stress-inducing work conditions, burnout, and quiet quitting behavior.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the primary analytical technique due to its suitability for complex models incorporating multiple constructs, mediation mechanisms, and moderation relationships. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for predictive-oriented research and does not impose strict assumptions regarding data normality (Hair, Hult, et al., 2022). In addition, this approach enables the simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural models while maintaining statistical robustness with moderate sample sizes. The selection of PLS-SEM aligns with established methodological standards in leading journals within the fields of management and organizational behavior.

3.2 Research data population

The target population of this study consisted of full-time employees working in team-based service organizations characterized by continuous interpersonal interaction. Data were collected using an online self-administered questionnaire, resulting in an initial pool of 300 responses. Following data screening procedures to assess completeness and response quality, 262 valid responses were retained for analysis. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in terms of statistical power and model complexity (Hair, Hult, et al., 2022; Bowling and Kirkendall, 2012).

The sample demonstrates substantial heterogeneity across key demographic and organizational characteristics, including age, tenure, job position, contract type, department, and company size. Such variability enhances the external validity of the findings and reflects the diversity of contemporary organizational contexts in which quiet quitting behavior may emerge. A

detailed overview of the sample characteristics is presented in Table 1.

3.3 Variable data measurement tools

All constructs were measured using multi-item reflective scales adapted from well-established instruments in the organizational behavior literature. Five indicators were used for each construct and measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Abusive supervision was assessed using the scale developed (Tepper, 2000). Work role overload and burnout were operationalized based on the Job Demands–Resources framework (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job insecurity followed the conceptualization of (De Witte, 1999). Low relational job design was adapted from (Grant, 2007; Grant and Parker, 2009). Quiet quitting items were adapted from (Karrani et al., 2024), while workplace social interaction intensity was measured following crossover research by (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009). To mitigate common method bias, all items were paraphrased to fit the research context and ensure conceptual clarity. Detailed measurement items are provided in Appendix B.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 following a two-stage Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) procedure. In the first stage, the measurement model was evaluated to assess indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity in accordance with established guidelines (Hair, Hult, et al., 2022; Henseler et al., 2015). The assessment confirmed that the reflective measurement model met the recommended threshold values, indicating satisfactory reliability and construct validity.

In the second stage, the structural model was examined to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among constructs. This evaluation focused on the significance and direction of path coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The explanatory power of the model and the relative contribution of each predictor were assessed based on these criteria. The significance of

indirect relationships was examined using bootstrapped specific indirect effects, allowing for the assessment of the underlying psychological transmission mechanism. Moderation was tested by estimating interaction terms using a two-stage approach, which is recommended for handling interaction effects in PLS-SEM (Nitzl et al., 2020; Sarstedt et al., 2021). To ensure robust statistical inference, bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was employed. The results of the measurement and structural model assessments are reported in the following section.

4. Results of Innovation and Discussion

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2 reports the results of the measurement model evaluation. The findings demonstrate strong indicator reliability and convergent validity for abusive supervision (AS), burnout (BO), job insecurity (JI), low relational job design (LRJD), quiet quitting (QQ), and work role overload (WRO). All indicator loadings for these constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from approximately 0.78 to 0.89, indicating that the indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs. Internal consistency reliability is also well established, as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (ρ_C) values consistently exceed the recommended minimum of 0.70. In addition, average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 0.50 for all six constructs, confirming that a substantial proportion of variance in the indicators is captured by the underlying latent variables.

In contrast, workplace social interaction intensity (WSII) exhibits clear measurement deficiencies. Several WSII indicators show low, near-zero, or negative loadings, and the construct demonstrates extremely weak convergent validity (AVE = 0.080). Reliability estimates for WSII are also problematic, with a very low composite reliability ($\rho_C = 0.034$) and an inadmissible ρ_A value (-3.163). These results indicate that the WSII measurement specification does not function as intended and may be affected by issues such as improper reverse coding, inconsistent item wording, or an unsuitable reflective measurement specification. Consequently, WSII should be re-examined and respecified before drawing substantive conclusions regarding its role in the structural model.

Table 3 indicates satisfactory discriminant validity across the main constructs, as HTMT values are well below conservative cutoffs (typically 0.85) for all construct pairs. The highest association appears between BO and QQ (HTMT = 0.616), which remains comfortably below threshold, suggesting that burnout and quiet quitting are related yet empirically distinct. Other relationships are comparatively low (e.g., AS-QQ = 0.399; BO-WRO = 0.402), supporting adequate construct separation. WSII shows very small HTMT values with all constructs (≤ 0.081), implying low overlap; however, this should be interpreted cautiously because the WSII measurement quality in Table 2 is weak. Accordingly, discriminant validity conclusions for WSII remain provisional until its measurement specification is corrected and reassessed.

4.2 Structural Model Evaluation

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model assessment. The associations between workplace stressors and burnout are positive and statistically meaningful, with standardized coefficients ranging from 0.139 to 0.363. Work role overload shows the strongest association with burnout ($\beta = 0.363$; $t =$

6.993), followed by abusive supervision ($\beta = 0.323$; $t = 6.317$). Job insecurity ($\beta = 0.139$; $t = 2.512$) and low relational job design ($\beta = 0.177$; $t = 3.396$) exhibit smaller but still significant effects. Burnout is strongly associated with quiet quitting ($\beta = 0.360$; $t = 6.282$). The model explains 31.7% of the variance in burnout and 45.2% of the variance in quiet quitting, with Q^2 values of 0.220 and 0.309, respectively, indicating adequate predictive relevance.

Direct paths from abusive supervision ($\beta = 0.199$), job insecurity ($\beta = 0.225$), work role overload ($\beta = 0.133$), and low relational job design ($\beta = 0.094$) to quiet quitting are all positive and statistically significant. In contrast, workplace social interaction intensity shows a small and non-significant association with quiet quitting ($\beta = 0.058$; $t = 0.769$). All interaction terms yield very small coefficients ($|\beta| \leq 0.121$) with t -values below 1.65, suggesting negligible incremental explanatory contribution.

4.3 Mediation Analysis Results

Table 5 reports the results of the mediation analysis based on bootstrapped specific indirect effects. The results indicate that burnout serves as a significant explanatory mechanism linking all examined workplace stressors to quiet quitting. All indirect relationships are positive and statistically significant, with confidence intervals that do not include zero, providing robust support for the proposed mediation paths.

Specifically, the indirect effect of abusive supervision on quiet quitting through burnout is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.116$; $t = 4.334$), as is the indirect effect of work role overload ($\beta = 0.131$; $t = 4.316$). Job insecurity and low relational job design also exhibit significant indirect effects via burnout, although with comparatively smaller magnitudes. These findings indicate that sustained exposure to adverse work conditions contributes to quiet quitting primarily through heightened burnout, underscoring the central role of burnout as a psychological transmission mechanism.

4.4 Moderation Analysis Results

Table 6 presents the results of the moderation analysis. None of the interaction terms reach statistical significance, with t -values ranging from 0.293 to 1.502 and all p -values exceeding 0.10. The standardized coefficients are small in magnitude, ranging from -0.033 to 0.121, and all confidence intervals include zero. The largest interaction effect is observed for WSII \times JI ($\beta = 0.121$); however, its effect size remains small ($f^2 = 0.027$) and statistically unsupported. Other interaction terms exhibit negligible explanatory contribution, with f^2 values close to zero. Overall, these results indicate that workplace social interaction intensity does not materially alter the strength of the associations between abusive supervision, work role overload, job insecurity, low relational job design, and quiet quitting within the estimated model.

4.5 Predictive Power and Model Fit

Table 7 summarizes the predictive power and model fit assessment. The results indicate that the model explains a meaningful proportion of variance in both endogenous constructs. Specifically, the model accounts for 31.7% of the variance in burnout and 45.2% of the variance in quiet quitting. The adjusted R^2 values of 0.306 for burnout and 0.430 for quiet quitting suggest stable explanatory performance. Predictive relevance is further supported by positive Q^2 values for burnout (0.220) and quiet quitting (0.309), indicating that the model exhibits adequate

Table 2. Indicator loadings, composite reliability, and convergent validity

Construct	Indicator loadings	Cronbach's α	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
AS	AS1 0.857; AS2 0.823; AS3 0.864; AS4 0.835; AS5 0.864	0.903	0.908	0.928	0.720
BO	BO1 0.860; BO2 0.850; BO3 0.838; BO4 0.850; BO5 0.828	0.900	0.901	0.926	0.714
JI	JI1 0.861; JI2 0.880; JI3 0.855; JI4 0.875; JI5 0.837	0.914	0.921	0.935	0.743
LRJD	LRJD1 0.856; LRJD2 0.780; LRJD3 0.889; LRJD4 0.783; LRJD5 0.880	0.896	0.928	0.922	0.704
QQ	QQ1 0.849; QQ2 0.833; QQ3 0.872; QQ4 0.884; QQ5 0.877	0.915	0.919	0.936	0.746
WRO	WRO1 0.834; WRO2 0.861; WRO3 0.856; WRO4 0.866; WRO5 0.869	0.910	0.918	0.933	0.735
WSII	WSII1 -0.140; WSII2 0.163; WSII3 -0.183; WSII4 0.567; WSII5 -0.002	0.906	-3.163	0.034	0.080

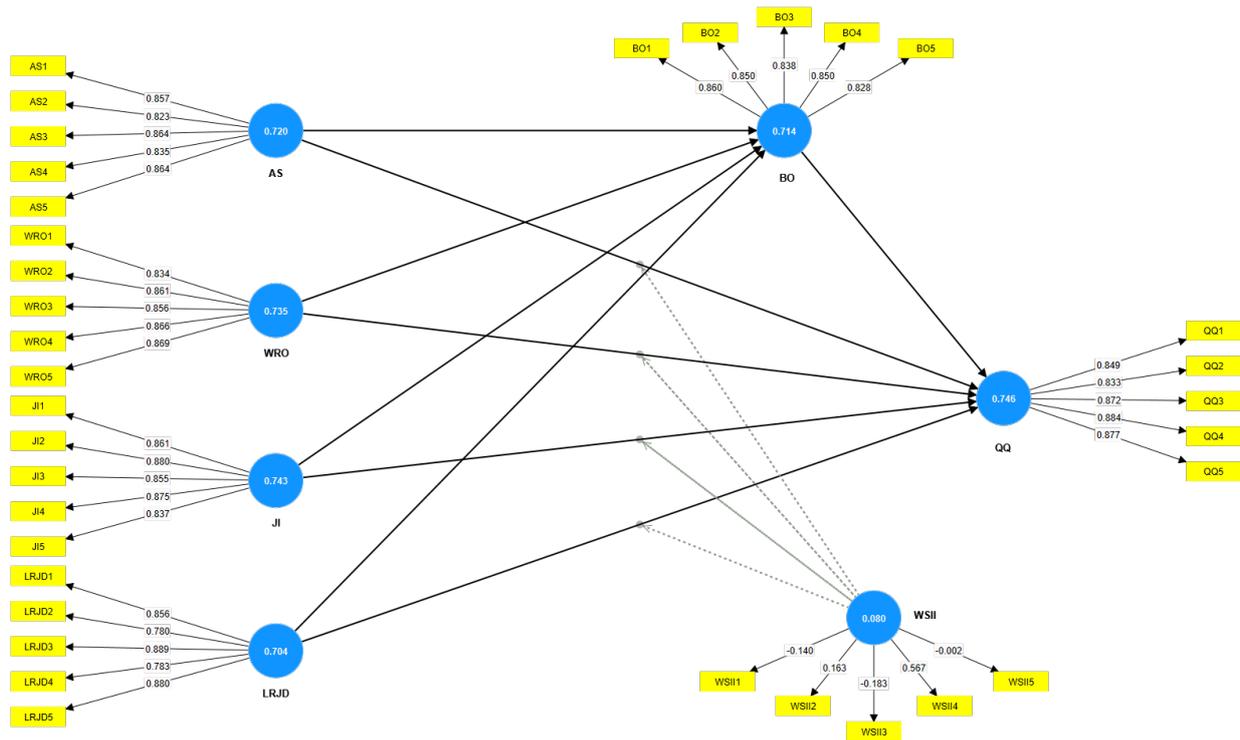


Fig. 2. Structural model results highlighting burnout as the primary mechanism linking workplace stressors to quiet quitting, with additional direct effects from stressors to quiet quitting.

Table 3. Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	AS	BO	JI	LRJD	QQ	WRO	WSII
AS	—						
BO	0.359	—					
JI	0.335	0.264	—				
LRJD	0.042	0.266	0.066	—			
QQ	0.399	0.616	0.423	0.226	—		
WRO	0.131	0.402	0.060	0.221	0.273	—	
WSII	0.058	0.041	0.071	0.081	0.059	0.050	—

out-of-sample predictive capability.

Effect size estimates provide additional insight into the relative importance of individual predictors. Work role overload ($f^2 = 0.181$) and abusive supervision ($f^2 = 0.136$) show the strongest contributions to burnout, whereas burnout itself demonstrates a medium effect on quiet quitting ($f^2 = 0.157$). All remaining paths exhibit small effect sizes, suggesting incremental yet meaningful contributions to the overall predictive framework without dominating the model.

As depicted in Figure 3, the interaction plots display largely parallel slopes across low and high levels of workplace social interaction intensity, consistent with the small and non-significant interaction effects reported in Table 6.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

This study advances the understanding of quiet quitting by positioning it as a behavioral manifestation shaped by multiple workplace stressors operating through burnout. Consistent with the Conservation of Resources theory and the Job De-



Table 4. Structural path coefficients and hypothesis testing results

Hyp.	Structural relationship	β	t	p	95% CI	f^2	Decision
H1	AS \rightarrow BO	0.323	6.317	0.000	[0.223, 0.422]	0.136	Supported
H2	WRO \rightarrow BO	0.363	6.993	0.000	[0.260, 0.464]	0.181	Supported
H3	JI \rightarrow BO	0.139	2.512	0.012	[0.031, 0.249]	0.025	Supported
H4	LRJD \rightarrow BO	0.177	3.396	0.001	[0.077, 0.282]	0.044	Supported
H5	BO \rightarrow QQ	0.360	6.282	0.000	[0.266, 0.492]	0.157	Supported
H6	AS \rightarrow QQ	0.199	3.612	0.000	[0.067, 0.284]	0.055	Supported
H7	WRO \rightarrow QQ	0.133	2.412	0.016	[0.003, 0.215]	0.025	Supported
H8	JI \rightarrow QQ	0.225	4.519	0.000	[0.133, 0.329]	0.079	Supported
H9	LRJD \rightarrow QQ	0.094	2.063	0.039	[0.012, 0.193]	0.015	Supported
H10	WSII \rightarrow QQ	0.058	0.769	0.442	[-0.133, 0.132]	0.006	Not supported
H11	WSII \times AS \rightarrow QQ	0.050	0.918	0.359	[-0.144, 0.075]	0.003	Not supported
H12	WSII \times WRO \rightarrow QQ	0.014	0.293	0.769	[-0.060, 0.127]	0.000	Not supported
H13	WSII \times JI \rightarrow QQ	0.121	1.502	0.133	[-0.136, 0.170]	0.027	Not supported
H14	WSII \times LRJD \rightarrow QQ	-0.033	0.615	0.539	[-0.055, 0.157]	0.002	Not supported

Table 5. Specific indirect effects and mediation results

Indirect relationship	β	t	p	95% CI	Decision
AS \rightarrow BO \rightarrow QQ	0.116	4.334	0.000	[0.075, 0.179]	Supported
WRO \rightarrow BO \rightarrow QQ	0.131	4.316	0.000	[0.084, 0.202]	Supported
JI \rightarrow BO \rightarrow QQ	0.050	2.198	0.028	[0.011, 0.101]	Supported
LRJD \rightarrow BO \rightarrow QQ	0.064	2.827	0.005	[0.027, 0.116]	Supported

Table 6. Moderation effects of workplace social interaction intensity

Interaction relationship	β	t	p	95% CI	f^2	Decision
WSII \times AS \rightarrow QQ	0.050	0.918	0.359	[-0.144, 0.075]	0.003	Not supported
WSII \times WRO \rightarrow QQ	0.014	0.293	0.769	[-0.060, 0.127]	0.000	Not supported
WSII \times JI \rightarrow QQ	0.121	1.502	0.133	[-0.136, 0.170]	0.027	Not supported
WSII \times LRJD \rightarrow QQ	-0.033	0.615	0.539	[-0.055, 0.157]	0.002	Not supported

Table 7. Coefficient of determination, effect sizes, and predictive relevance

Endogenous construct / Path	R^2	$R^2_{adj.}$	Q^2	f^2	Effect size interpretation
Burnout (BO)	0.317	0.306	0.220	—	Moderate explanatory power
AS \rightarrow BO	—	—	—	0.136	Medium
WRO \rightarrow BO	—	—	—	0.181	Medium
JI \rightarrow BO	—	—	—	0.025	Small
LRJD \rightarrow BO	—	—	—	0.044	Small
Quiet quitting (QQ)	0.452	0.430	0.309	—	Substantial explanatory power
BO \rightarrow QQ	—	—	—	0.157	Medium
AS \rightarrow QQ	—	—	—	0.055	Small
WRO \rightarrow QQ	—	—	—	0.025	Small
JI \rightarrow QQ	—	—	—	0.079	Small
LRJD \rightarrow QQ	—	—	—	0.015	Small

mands–Resources framework, abusive supervision, work role overload, job insecurity, and low relational job design emerge as salient conditions that erode employees' psychological resources and foster disengagement-oriented responses. Prior research has shown that persistent job demands and adverse leadership behaviors drain energy and self-regulatory capacity, rendering withdrawal a rational coping response rather than a passive attitude (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001; Christina Maslach et al., 2001; Tepper, 2000). By integrating these stressors within a single explanatory model, this study extends earlier work that examined them in isolation and provides a more holistic account of how quiet quitting develops in contemporary organizations (Afrahi et al., 2022; B.-J. Kim and M.-J. Kim, 2026; Park and Min, 2026; H. Zhang and Li, 2025).

Burnout plays a central explanatory role in translating adverse

work conditions into quiet quitting. This finding aligns with extensive evidence indicating that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization act as proximal mechanisms linking chronic stress to withdrawal-oriented behaviors such as reduced effort, disengagement, and turnover intentions (C. Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Salvagioni et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). The results reinforce the view that quiet quitting should not be interpreted merely as attitudinal indifference, but as a resource-conservation strategy enacted when continued investment is perceived as psychologically unsustainable. This perspective complements emerging conceptualizations that frame quiet quitting as an adaptive, albeit costly, response to prolonged strain rather than a transient motivational fluctuation (Karrani et al., 2024; Park and Min, 2026; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026; H. Zhang and Li, 2025).

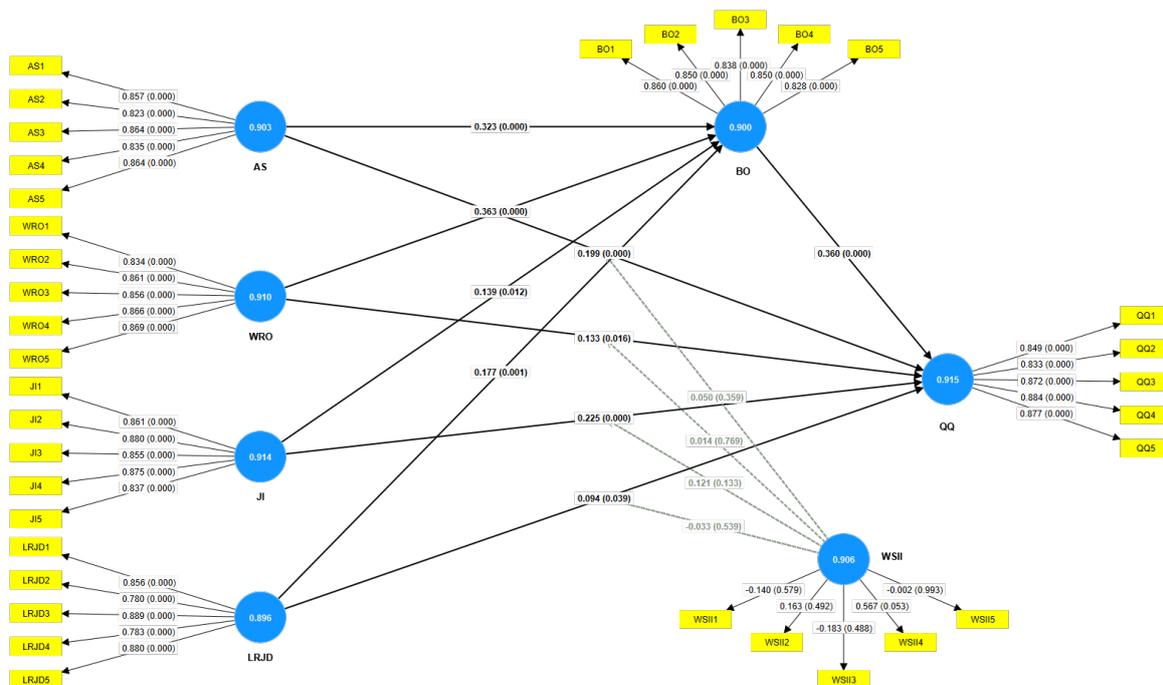


Fig. 3. Interaction plots illustrating the limited moderating role of workplace social interaction intensity on the relationships between workplace stressors and quiet quitting.

At the same time, the presence of associations between workplace stressors and quiet quitting beyond burnout suggests that disengagement is also shaped by cognitive and relational evaluations of the work environment. Abusive supervision and job insecurity may directly undermine trust, fairness perceptions, and future-oriented motivation, while low relational job design weakens the perceived social significance of work (Blau, 1964; Grant, 2007; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Tepper et al., 2017). These findings resonate with social exchange and social information processing perspectives, which posit that employees calibrate their effort levels based on cues regarding respect, reciprocity, and the long-term viability of the employment relationship (Borgatti and Cross, 2003; C. J. Chen and J. W. Huang, 2007a; Hom et al., 2017). The study therefore contributes by empirically demonstrating that quiet quitting reflects both affective depletion and rational recalibration of work investment.

Contrary to expectations, workplace social interaction intensity does not meaningfully alter the relationships between stressors and quiet quitting. This result challenges assumptions that higher interaction levels inherently buffer negative work experiences through social support or emotional contagion. Instead, it suggests that when core job demands and leadership stressors are salient, interaction intensity alone is insufficient to offset resource loss or alter withdrawal tendencies (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2009; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Y. Zhang and Parker, 2019; Loh et al., 2018; H. Zhang and Li, 2025). A novel implication is that social interaction may function as a neutral or ambiguous contextual feature unless accompanied by supportive norms, high-quality relationships, or resource-restorative practices. This insight refines current debates on social context and disengagement by emphasizing interaction quality and function over sheer frequency (Jia and Hu, 2026; M. Liu et al., 2026; Srivastava et al., 2026; Yang, H. Chen, et al., 2026).

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by integrating

COR theory, JD-R logic, and social-contextual perspectives into a unified framework explaining quiet quitting as a patterned response to sustained workplace strain. Practically, the findings underscore that reducing quiet quitting requires addressing structural stressors and leadership practices rather than relying on surface-level social interaction initiatives. The results also open avenues for future research to examine boundary conditions related to interaction quality, relational climate, and collective norms, thereby advancing a more nuanced understanding of disengagement in modern work settings.

5. Conclusion

This investigation recognizes "quiet quitting" as a calculated reaction to ongoing job strain, as opposed to merely a shortage of enthusiasm. The results show that stress factors deplete psychological resources. These stress factors include abusive supervision, excessive role demands, and job uncertainty. They also trigger burnout. Burnout serves as the main mechanism driving this withdrawal behavior. Intriguingly, the frequency of social interaction in the workplace does not appear to negate this effect, indicating that frequent interaction alone is insufficient to counteract inherent leadership deficiencies. Theoretically, this study conceptualizes 'quiet quitting' as a resource-conserving adaptive strategy rather than a generational phenomenon. In practice, organizations should make it their priority to reduce excessive demands and improve relationship-oriented job design, rather than relying on superficial engagement initiatives or increased social exposure to address disengagement.

Implications and Future Research

Research limitations

The results of our research can be interpreted in several different ways. The causal relationship between workplace stress, burnout, and quiet quitting cannot be determined in

this study because of the cross-sectional design. This means that the temporal relationship cannot be established empirically. However, this research design allows for better tracking of the dynamic process of resource loss and recovery as it occurs. Secondly, despite using valid measurement instruments and physician diagnoses, the exclusive use of self-reports may introduce common method bias and perception consistency effects. In future research, the validity of the results could be enhanced by the addition of multi-source measures, such as supervisor ratings and objective workload indicators. Thirdly, our measure of the intensity of social interactions at work performed poorly and is likely to be suboptimal for explaining health. In future studies, the quality of interactions or the extent to which they are supportive or positive should be focused on as predictors, rather than their frequency as an indicator. Fourthly, generalizations beyond the sample are limited by contextual constraints of industry, culture, and employment systems. For example, norms related to supervision, job security, or indifference can vary greatly. This model is based on several work stress factors. It does not consider individual differences or organizational factors that can mitigate these pressures. This points to opportunities for developing a framework with personal and contextual protective elements.

Practical implications

This study's findings carry practical consequences for any organization looking to achieve sustainable quiet quitting. Organizations need to minimise abusive leadership by selecting leaders consciously, providing training, and holding leaders accountable, because employees are more likely to deplete their psychological resources and withdraw under the influence of destructive leaders. It is important to moderate the burden of job demands through realistic assignments, clear roles, and adequate staffing, as there is a relationship between exhaustion and extremes in demands. Job uncertainty can be reduced by encouraging open communication, fair employee practices, and clear career paths. This can also encourage investment throughout an employee's working life. Job design interventions that enhance relational aspects (e.g., the social impact of work and meaningful collaboration) can reinforce employers' goals in terms of employee retention. These findings highlight the importance of not placing too much reliance on higher interaction frequency, as socialization without adequate support does not offer protection against structural stressors.

Theoretical implications

This article develops an analysis of quiet quitting by referring to theories based on resources and social embedding. It adds to Resource Conservation Theory by showing how quiet quitting is an adaptive response for employees who want to protect themselves from depleted resources because of constant work demands and poor leadership. It looks at disengagement because of a lack of resources, not just because of an attitude. Furthermore, the paper extends JD-R theory by incorporating multiple stressors and exploring their combined effects on exhaustion and withdrawal behavior. The results of this study link JD-R logic with social exchange theory and social information processing by integrating relational job design and social context perspectives. In this way, effort regulation captures both emotional exhaustion and evaluative judgments of reciprocity and meaning in the workplace. Ultimately, the finding that the

intensity of social interaction does not moderate this relationship serves to further refine theoretical expectations regarding the role of social context as a resource.

Future research directions

There are several important directions in which the present findings can be taken by future research. Future studies must use longitudinal and experience-sampling methods to capture the dynamic process of burnout and quiet quitting, as well as resources lost and recovered over time. Future research should further improve the understanding of social context by measures that move beyond interaction intensity to interaction quality, such as perceived support, trust, and relational energy. Furthermore, if characteristic adaptive reaction patterns (i.e., resilience, proactive coping, and job crafting) were to be integrated in the model, they could potentially also explain why employees respond differently when confronted with similar strains. Cross-national and cross-cultural research might help to shed more light on the way in which institutional arrangements or cultural norms promote disengagement. Last, quasi-experimental studies examining leadership development and job redesign interventions would support stronger causal inference for burnout and quiet quitting mitigation strategies.

Declarations

CRedit authorship contribution statement

S. Mukarromah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to ethical considerations related to participant confidentiality.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the data were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

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Appendix B: Measurement Instruments

Table B1. Measurement items and sources

Construct	Code	Item description (paraphrased)	Scale	Source
Abusive Supervision (AS)	AS1	My supervisor speaks to me in a demeaning manner.	1–7	Tepper (2000)
	AS2	My supervisor humiliates me in front of others.	1–7	Tepper (2000)
	AS3	My supervisor blames me without clear justification.	1–7	Tepper (2000)
	AS4	My supervisor ignores my contributions despite my efforts.	1–7	Tepper (2000)
	AS5	My supervisor often displays hostile attitudes toward me.	1–7	Tepper (2000)
Work Role Overload (WRO)	WRO1	My workload exceeds the time available to complete it.	1–7	Demerouti et al. (2001)
	WRO2	I am required to handle multiple tasks simultaneously.	1–7	
	WRO3	Work targets are unreasonably high.	1–7	
	WRO4	My daily work intensity drains my energy.	1–7	
	WRO5	I often need to work overtime to complete basic tasks.	1–7	
Job Insecurity (JI)	JI1	I feel that I may lose my job.	1–7	De Witte (2000)
	JI2	The future of my job in this organization is uncertain.	1–7	
	JI3	I worry that my employment status may worsen.	1–7	
	JI4	I frequently think about the risk of dismissal or contract termination.	1–7	
	JI5	Job uncertainty makes it difficult to plan my career.	1–7	
Low Relational Job Design (LRJD)	LRJD1	My job rarely feels beneficial to other people.	1–7	Grant (2008)
	LRJD2	I rarely interact meaningfully with those who benefit from my work.	1–7	
	LRJD3	It is difficult to see the social impact of my work.	1–7	
	LRJD4	My job offers limited opportunities to build positive relationships.	1–7	
	LRJD5	My job feels routine with little relational connection.	1–7	
Burnout (BO)	BO1	I feel emotionally exhausted because of my work.	1–7	Maslach & Jackson (1981); Demerouti et al. (2001)
	BO2	My energy is quickly depleted at work.	1–7	
	BO3	I feel cynical or detached toward my job.	1–7	
	BO4	I tend to distance myself psychologically from my work.	1–7	
	BO5	I struggle to maintain enthusiasm for my work.	1–7	
Workplace Social Interaction Intensity (WSII)	WSII1	I communicate with coworkers frequently about work matters.	1–7	Bakker & Xanthopoulou (2009)
	WSII2	Work coordination with colleagues is intensive.	1–7	
	WSII3	I work in close proximity to colleagues during work processes.	1–7	
	WSII4	I frequently engage in informal work-related discussions with coworkers.	1–7	
	WSII5	I can easily observe coworkers' work attitudes and behaviors.	1–7	
Quiet Quitting (QQ)	QQ1	I limit my effort to tasks formally required in my job description.	1–7	Karrani et al. (2024)
	QQ2	I avoid taking on extra duties beyond my core responsibilities.	1–7	

Continued on next page...

Table B1 – continued from previous page

Construct	Code	Item description (paraphrased)	Scale	Source
	QQ3	I intentionally reduce initiative to maintain minimum performance.	1–7	
	QQ4	I no longer strive to exceed minimum organizational expectations.	1–7	
	QQ5	I limit voluntary involvement in organizational activities.	1–7	
Control Variables	AGE	Age (years).	Num.	Demographic
	GEN	Gender.	Cat.	Demographic
	TEN	Organizational tenure.	Num.	Demographic
	POS	Job position level.	Cat.	Demographic
	CON	Employment status.	Cat.	Demographic

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