Research on the Influence Mechanism of Work Time Pressure on Overwork: A Study Based on Resource Conservation and Stress-Emotion Theories

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Abstract: The work time pressure and overwork have become common issues among workers. Based on resource conservation theory and stress-emotion theory, we investigated 350 employed individuals by descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis, and found challenging work time pressure influence overwork, hindering work time pressure influence overwork and psychological capital influence overwork. We found challenging work time pressure affects overwork, hindering work time pressure positively affects overwork. Psychological capital influences the relationship between work time pressure and overwork: as psychological capital rises, the adverse effects of challenging work time pressure on overwork intensify, while the beneficial impact of hindering work time pressure on overwork diminishes.

Keywords: Work Time Pressure; Overwork; Psychological Capital; Influence Mechanism

1. Introduction

In the rapid economic development of many industries, a lot of companies and employees must exert the maximum effort to accomplish work tasks, keep competitive, and achieve personal development. When faced with heavy or time sensitive tasks, employees often experience different degrees of perceived time pressure. For the tasks they have to complete, workers most directly react to this stress with extended working hours and increased work effort. According to the report Global Working Time and Work-Life Balance of the International Labour Organization (ILO) released April 27, 2023, China is among the top countries globally in terms of annual working hours as of 2019 [1]. National Bureau of Statistics data show that the average weekly working hours of enterprise employees is 48.6 hours in 2025 [2]. This suggests that excessive labor is still a problem of urgent attention in China.

Overwork is typically defined as the work state in which workers work longer than normal work hours and reasonable labor intensity over time [3], putting them under stress, reducing their performance, causing frequent occupational safety incidents, and crowding out jobs [4-7]. The causes of overwork may be important theoretically and practically for protecting workers' rights, organization human resource management efficiency and sustainable development.

Overwork causes are currently studied in terms of institutional settings, labor market supply-demand dynamics, technological advancements, organizational management, etc. The understanding of overwork formation through the lens of perceived time pressure at work remains somewhat restricted. Time pressure, a subjective feeling of insufficient time resources, is a crucial mechanism contributing to overwork, warranting further investigation into its underlying processes. Time pressure does not always lead to negative consequences. Chong et al. differentiated time pressure into two distinct types: challenge-based time pressure and hindrance-based time pressure. The former is conceptualized as a stressor that facilitates personal growth and goal achievement, while the latter is considered detrimental to individual development and likely to trigger negative emotional responses [8]. This typology provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the "double-edged sword" effect of time pressure in workplace environments.

Individual psychological resources play a critical role in stress coping. The concept of psychological capital proposed by Luthans et al. includes four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience [9]. Research indicates that individuals possessing greater psychological

capital are more likely to employ proactive strategies in response to stressors, thereby mitigating workplace stress [10,11]. Additionally, psychological capital may serve as a crucial moderator in the relationship between work time pressure and overwork.

Based on this analysis we construct a model of work time pressure (differentiating between challenging and hindering aspects) on overwork from stressor heterogeneity perspective, which is based on Conservation of Resources Theory and Stress-Emotion Model. We study the role of psychological capital in the moderating effect of overwork behaviour. Questionnaire survey of 350 employed participants and empirical results have been used to determine how work time pressure affects overwork behavior. The results will provide theoretical foundations and practical guidance for organizations to develop targeted interventions to prevent overwork.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Work Time Pressure and Overwork

Work time pressure can be viewed from several perspectives. Zhou et al. characterized work time pressure from a resource-based viewpoint, suggesting that employees feel they lack sufficient time to fulfill work responsibilities due to a perception of being overwhelmed by their personal resource limitations [12]. Overwork consists of workers behaviors and states, prolonged long hours work with high intensity and excessive fatigue, while “death from overwork” is its most severe consequence [13]. Takami identified three major causes of employee overwork empirically: excessive workload, sudden emergency tasks, and staff shortage [14]. From labor economic point of view, Meng and Yang argue that when labor supply exceeds demand, employers gain dominance while workers weaken bargaining power. This imbalance combined with competition pressures in employment forces some workers to work longer until burnout [15]. Chen argued that technology has eliminated the time and space limitations on work and prevented psychological and physical detachment from work. She also noted that workers with unemployment pressures and promotion incentives sacrifice health through prolonged high-intensity work, resulting in overwork [16].

From resource allocation perspective, time urgency and resource constraints are the main focus. Work related time pressure creates a sense of imbalance between available resources and work demands. However, individuals respond differently to this imbalance: whether they act on this imbalance or not, depending on the stressors. According to the definition and classification of work-related time pressure by Chong et al. [8], we classify time pressure at work based on stressors. Work-related time pressure encompasses cognitive and emotional responses that emerge when insufficient time is available during work, often due to challenging or obstructive factors in the work environment. This definition comprises two distinct dimensions: challenge-based time pressure and hindrance-based time pressure.

Problem-based time pressure is perceived time pressure from work-related demands which may result in gains, motivating behaviors and growth orientated behaviors. Hindrance-based time pressure is perceived time pressure from work-related demands which hinder personal development or interfere with task completion, often provoking negative emotions and avoidance behaviors. The stressor type reflects individual differences in perception and reaction to time pressure at work. When faced with time constraints, employees react differently due to psychological and resource differences.

Current studies of the outcome variables of time pressure have found four effects: positive, negative, inverted U-shaped and “double-edged sword" effects. Song et al. demonstrated empirically that workplace time pressure hinders employee work well-being [17]. Feng et al. established an inverted U-shaped relationship between job time pressure and individual subjective well-being [18]. Schmitt et al. employed moderated hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate the curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) association between time pressure and work engagement [19]. Zhang et al. categorized time pressure into challenge-based and hindrance-based types, consistently finding that challenge-based time pressure enhances employee creativity, while hindrance-based time pressure markedly restricts it [20].

We examined time pressure in dialectical terms, distinguishing between challenging and hindering aspects, thus allowing us to study the “double-edged sword” effect of time pressure and refine the results related to work-related

time pressure.

According to Hobfoll Conservation of Resources Theory, individuals always aim at protecting resources, whether material, emotional or psychological [21].

When employees are under time pressure, they invest more time and resources to maintain their professional competitiveness and to achieve organizational goals while reducing stress, which is explained by this theory for overwork due to time pressure. Not all employees are proactive in stress response. Spector's stress-emotion model suggests that stress-emotional individuals may develop frustration that leads to negative emotions which affects work behavior and performance [22]. Employees who perceive obstructive time pressure evaluations may experience considerable psychological burdens that inhibit task completion. Heavy workloads require the employees to complete important tasks in limited timeframes, forcing them to extend work hours to fulfill obligations, thus causing time-related. Furthermore, handling unexpected urgent tasks takes more time and energy, disrupting existing work and increasing time pressure at work. In summary, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 1: Challenge-based time pressure is negatively associated with overwork;

Hypothesis 2: Hindrance-based time pressure is positively associated with overwork.

2.2 The Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital

Positive psychology emerged in the late 20th century, as identified by Luthans et al. They characterized psychological capital through the constructs of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, investigating the interrelations among self-efficacy, hope, and resilience. Additionally, they explored how these dimensions related to individual and organizational performance [9]. Self-efficacy is self-assurance, hope is persistence to achieve goals and a positive attitude towards future results and positive events, optimism is active positive orientation toward future outcomes and anticipation of positive events. Resilience is the ability to sustain strength and recover when stressed, adversity and setbacks. Fang showed that employees with higher levels of psychological capital tend to actively cope with stress, and thus reduce job burnout [23]. Excessive labor leads to cumulative fatigue, and it is posited that psychological capital may mitigate the impact of time pressure associated with excessive work. Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that overtime work depletes resources, including leisure time, thereby diminishing psychological resources and reducing resilience.

Long working hours decrease next-day job performance. Hobfoll found that individuals' resources (psychological capital) influence their cognitive appraisal of stressors and their coping performance, thus reducing the strength of the relationship between stressors and stress responses [24]. Stress-Emotion Models show that workplace stressors do not directly cause behavioral outcomes but rather first generate negative emotions in individuals. These emotions (anxiety, anger, frustration) lead to subsequent behaviors. To cope with or reduce negative emotions, individuals can engage in a variety of behaviors (for example, excessive labor). Zhao et al. showed that high levels of psychological capital promote relatively positive career attitudes, which allows employees to promote science career development by better career planning and less stress [25]. Avey J B et al. demonstrate that psychological capital serves as a moderating (buffering) factor in the relationship between work stress and employee anxiety/turnover intention, exemplifying a conventional "stress buffer" mechanism [26]. Zhao et al. found that individuals with low psychological capital are at greater risk of experiencing occupational strain than those with high psychological capital [27]. Furthermore, Ma Chao et al. validated that improving individual psychological capital can significantly lower perceived stress levels [28]. Wuet al. demonstrated that psychological capital not only attenuates the positive association between hindering stressors and emotional exhaustion but also mitigates the additional depletion caused by challenging stressors [29].

In conclusion, the proposed research hypotheses are as follows:

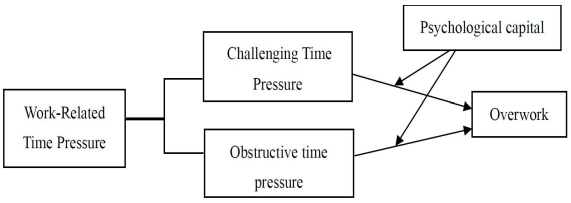

Figure 1. Study Model

Hypothesis 3: Psychological capital serves as a positive moderator in the relationship between

challenging time pressure and overwork;
Hypothesis 4: Psychological capital acts as a negative moderator in the relationship between hindering time pressure and overwork. The theoretical framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Sample

The sample data were collected through two channels: offline field visits to business districts for distributing paper questionnaires, and online distribution of web-based questionnaires. Specifically, 136 copies of the questionnaire were collected offline, while 251 copies were obtained online. After integrating all data information and eliminating invalid responses, a total of 350 valid questionnaires were retained. The research sample demonstrated good representativeness in terms of proportional distribution across gender, age, educational background, and management hierarchy.

3.2 Variable Measurement

This research utilized established scales from the literature, incorporating necessary modifications to fit the specific research context. Work-related time pressure was assessed using the Time Pressure Scale created by Chong et al., which employs a 5-point Likert-type response format [8]. This instrument exhibits enhanced item design compared to other time pressure scales, offering greater granularity and comprehensiveness for accurately evaluating employees' experiences of time pressure in work processes. The scale has undergone validation in various empirical studies, showing high internal consistency and stability, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.802.

Overwork was measured using the "Self-Diagnostic Checklist for Accumulated Fatigue in Workers," which was issued by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2004. This checklist, developed based on medical research findings, is not only simple and practical but also scientifically valid. Widely applied in Japanese enterprises, it was later adopted by Chinese scholars when China began addressing overwork issues. Its good reliability and validity have demonstrated the applicability of this self-diagnostic checklist in the Chinese context. The checklist consists of two components: self-perceived symptoms evaluation and work status assessment. The former contains 13 items, with perceived fatigue levels categorized into four grades according to total scores; the latter comprises 7 items, with total scores similarly divided into four grades. Based on these classifications, workload scores are determined by combining the grades of both self-perceived conditions and work status, representing overwork scores (see Table 1). The Cronbach's α coefficient of the checklist is 0.830.

Table 1. Overwork Rating Scale

	Working condition				
		A	B	C	D
Fatigue symptoms	I	0	0	2	4
	II	0	1	3	5
	III	0	2	4	6
	IV	1	3	5	7

Psychological capital, as a moderating variable, was assessed utilizing the Chinese adaptation of the PCQ-24 scale created by Luthans et al., known for its robust reliability and validity. This scale comprises 24 items, with six items corresponding to each dimension, and responses are captured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The Cronbach's α coefficient for this instrument was 0.867.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

Statistical data analysis in this study utilized SPSS 26.0. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis were performed with this software, while the moderation effect was assessed using the SPSS PROCESS macro procedure.

4. Research Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The data range of the sample indicates that, in terms of gender composition, males accounted for 54.3% and females accounted for 45.7% among survey participants. Regarding age distribution, the largest proportion (51.7%) fell within the 26-35 age group, while individuals aged 55 and above constituted only 2.3%. In marital status, unmarried individuals significantly outnumbered married ones, accounting for 69.1% and 30.9% respectively. Concerning educational attainment, bachelor's degree holders formed the largest group (49.7%), whereas those with junior high school education or below represented only 2.0%. Based on income level classification, the highest

proportion (31.7%) was observed in the ¥5,000–¥10,000 monthly income bracket. Regarding organizational hierarchy, frontline employees constituted the majority (70%), while middle managers and senior executives accounted for relatively smaller proportions at 7.1% and 2.3% respectively. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Sample Characteristics

Variables	Category	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	190	54.3
	Female	160	45.7
Age	18-25years	69	19.7
	26-35 years	181	51.7
	36-45years	82	23.4
	46-55years	10	2.9
	Over 55years	8	2.3
Marital Status	Unmarried	242	69.1
	Married	108	30.9
Education Level	Junior high school or below	7	2.0
	High school/Secondary vocational education	14	4.0
	Associate degree	87	24.9
	Bachelor's degree	174	49.7
	Master's degree or higher	68	19.4
Income	¥1,000-5,000	67	19.1
	¥5,000-10,000	111	31.7
	¥10,000-20,000	82	23.4
	Over ¥20,000	90	25.7
Occupational level	Entry-level employee	245	70
	Grassroots manager	76	21.7
	Middle Managers	21	6.0
	Senior Managers	8	2.3

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Challenging working time pressure demonstrated significant negative correlations with hindering working time pressure, perceived fatigue, work status, and overwork (R=-0.892, p<0.01; R=-0.582, p<0.01; R=-0.399, p<0.01), while showing a positive correlation with psychological capital (R=0.205, p<0.01). Hindering working time pressure exhibited significant positive correlations with perceived fatigue, work status, and overwork (R=0.502, p<0.01; R=0.476, p<0.01; R=0.969, p<0.01), but showed a negative correlation with psychological capital (R=-0.206, p<0.01). Psychological capital presented negative correlations with both perceived fatigue and overwork (R=-0.218, p<0.01; R=-0.187, p<0.01). Perceived fatigue and work status both showed positive correlations with overwork (R=0.464, p<0.01; R=0.577, p<0.01). Additionally, perceived fatigue demonstrated a positive correlation with gender (R=0.139, p<0.01), suggesting that females may experience higher levels of occupational fatigue compared to males. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients of Main Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Challenge-related working time pressure	1					
2. Hindrance-related working time pressure	-0.892**	1				
3.Psychological capital	0.205**	-0.206**	1			
4. Perceived fatigue	-0.582**	0.502**	-0.218**	1		
5. Work status	-0.399**	0.476**	-0.113*	-0.158**	1	
6. Overwork	-0.942**	0.969**	-0.187**	0.577**	0.464**	1
7.Gender	-0.101	0.083	0.057	0.139**	0.003	0.102
8. Age	0.049	-0.039	-0.036	-0.070	0.014	-0.046
9. Educational attainment	-0.030	0.005	0.033	-0.002	0.089	0.020
10. Marital status	0.006	0.004	0.069	0.115*	-0.085	0.021
11.Occupational level	0.050	-0.089	-0.065	-0.094	0.042	-0.086

Note: N=350, **p<0.01; *p<0.05

4.3 Regression Analysis

The research utilized hierarchical regression analysis to explore the connections between challenging work time pressure, hindering work time pressure, and overwork behaviors, while also assessing the direct impact of psychological capital, as a moderating variable, on the dependent variable of overwork behaviors. First, overwork behaviors were designated as the dependent variable in the linear regression procedure conducted using SPSS 26.0. Subsequently, control variables including gender, age, educational level, marital status, job rank, and income were introduced in Model 1. Challenging work time pressure was added in Model 2, followed by the inclusion of hindering work time pressure in Model 3, and finally psychological capital was incorporated in Model 4. The analytical results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Work-Related Time Pressure and Psychological Capital on Overwork

Variables	Dependent Variable - Overwork			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables				
Gender	0.300	0.013	0.026	0.022
Age	0.024	0.053	0.012	0.011
Education Level	0.068	0.008	0.014	0.012
Marital Status	0.021	0.089	0.065	0.061
Occupational level	-0.220	-0.121*	-0.034	-0.030
Income	-0.055	-0.033	-0.004	-0.002
Independent Variables				
Challenge-Inducing Worktime Pressure		-2.269**		
Hindrance-Inducing Worktime Pressure			1.595**	
Moderating Variable				
Psychological Capital				0.047
R^2	0.020	0.890	0.970	0.970
AdjustedR^2	0.003	0.888	0.969	0.969
F	1.184	396.472	1355.717	1214.172

Note: N=350, **p<0.01; *p<0.05

As shown in Table 4, after controlling for the control variables, challenging time-related work pressure demonstrates a significant negative effect on overwork (β = -2.269, $p < 0.01$), thereby testing hypothesis H1; meanwhile, hindering time-related work pressure shows a significant positive effect on overwork (β = 1.595, $p < 0.01$), thus testing hypothesis H2 as well. Psychological capital does not exhibit a statistically significant relationship with overwork ($\beta = 0.047 < 0.05$), indicating no direct effect between psychological capital and overwork. Furthermore, since psychological capital is not at the same hierarchical level as the independent variables, this provides preliminary validation for its moderating role in the relationship between time-related work pressure and overwork.

4.4 Moderation Effect Analysis

Based on the standardized processing of independent variables and moderating variables, interaction terms were constructed between challenging work time pressure and psychological capital, as well as between hindering work time pressure and psychological capital. Subsequently, in the linear regression analysis using SPSS 26.0, excessive overwork was designated as the dependent variable. Model 5 incorporated control variables including gender, age, educational background, marital status, job rank, and income. Model 6 added challenging work time pressure and psychological capital, while Model 7 further introduced the interaction term between challenging work time pressure and psychological capital. The results are presented in Table 5. As shown in the table, when the interaction term between challenging work time pressure and psychological capital was included in the regression equation, the coefficient of the interaction term reached statistical significance (β = -0.312, $p < 0.01$), indicating that psychological capital exerts a moderating effect on the relationship between challenging work time pressure and excessive overwork.

Table 5. Test of the Moderating Role of Psychological Capital under Challenging Work Time Pressure

Variables	Dependent Variable - Overwork		
	Model5	Model6	Model7
Gender	0.300	0.013	0.006
Age	0.024	0.053	0.055
Education Leve	0.068	0.008	0.007
Marital Status	0.021	0.089	0.092
Occupational level	-0.220	-0.121	-0.096
Income	-0.055	-0.033	-0.032
Challenge-Inducing Worktime Pressure		-2.269**	-2.279**
Psychological Capital		-0.001	0.040
Challenge-Based Worktime Pressure (Standardized) * Psychological Capital (Standardized)			-0.312**
R^2	0.020	0.890	0.897
AdjustedR^2	0.003	0.888	0.894
F	1.184	345.899	327.850

Note: N=350, **p<0.01; *p<0.05

Examining hindrance working time pressure as an independent variable, the same methodology was utilized to assess the moderating influence of psychological capital. The findings are summarized in Table 6. The table indicates that the inclusion of the interaction term between hindrance working time pressure and psychological capital in the regression model yielded a statistically significant coefficient for the interaction term (β = -0.141, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that psychological capital moderates the relationship between hindrance working time pressure and overwork.

Table 6. Test of the Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital under Hindrance-Related Working Time Pressure

Variables	Dependent Variable - Overwork		
	Model5	Model6	Model7
Gender			
Age	0.300	0.054	0.053
Education Leve	0.024	-0.014	-0.016
Marital Status	0.068	0.021	0.022
Occupational level	0.021	0.044	0.048
Income	-0.220	0.006	-0.007
Hindrance-Inducing Worktime Pressure	-0.055	0.011	0.010
Psychological Capital			
Hindrance-Inducing Worktime Pressure (Standardized) * Psychological Capital (Standardized)		2.461**	2.481**
R^2		0.026	0.010
AdjustedR^2			-0.141**
F	0.020	0.941	0.942
AdjutedR^2	0.003	0.939	0.940
F	1.184	676.363	612.636

Note: N=350, **p<0.01; *p<0.05

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Work time pressure and overwork are important issues in the workplace and have a large impact. Based on Conservation of Resources Theory and Stress-Emotion Model, we investigate how work time pressure influences overwork and how psychological capital plays a role. Using SPSS software on 350 samples, we found several interesting results. Challenging work time pressure has a negative effect on overwork (β=-2.269, p<0.01), meaning higher challenging work time pressure is associated with less overwork intensity, meaning that employees become more efficient in managing their resources and solving immediate tasks when faced with challenges, thus preventing overwork occurences. Hailing work time pressure is

positively associated with overwork (β=1.595, p<0.01), meaning more hindering work time pressure increases overwork severity. This means that employees who suffer from hindering work time pressure feel stronger psychological burdens such as anxiety and fear of failure, lose confidence and motivation to work, lose efficiency, need overtime, and overwork. Psychological capital also plays an important role in the moderating effect between work time pressure and overwork. As psychological capital increases, the negative effect of challenging work time pressure on overwork grows (β=-0.3254, p<0.05), and the positive effect of hindering work time pressure on overwork decreases (β=-0.1347, p<0.05). Hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4 are supported.

As the society and society evolve and change, people have more and more demands for work environments and ambiances. Setting reasonable and healthy work environment is a major trend and direction for enterprises. Based on these results, management can make several recommendations: 1) Increase employee work resources by Investing more in skill training and career development support, and more resources and opportunities, so that employees can better deal with occupational challenges and stressors and avoid work overload; 2) Promote positive work environment through better leadership styles and organizational culture development, increase employee enthusiasm and motivation, thereby reducing work overload; 3) Integrating psychological capital assessment criteria in hiring to select candidates with higher psychological capital; 4) Priority employees psychological well being through mental health training and counseling programs and counseling services to improve psychological capital, stress coping abilities, time management under work pressure, and ultimately reduce the risk of excessive labor.

However, this study has several limitations. For instance, it only examined the moderating role of psychological capital between workhour pressure and overwork without considering the effects of specific dimensions of psychological capital on the outcomes. Future research could analyze each dimension of psychological capital separately to more comprehensively explain its moderating effects on the relationship between workhour pressure and overwork. Additionally, future studies could broaden the research scope by investigating the mechanisms through which team-level workhour pressure operates, with a focus on boundary conditions such as team leadership styles. These further investigations will contribute to theoretical deepening and expansion while providing more comprehensive and effective guidance for managerial practices.

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