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Original Research Article

Burnout, workaholism and their consequences

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Abstract: Burnout and workaholism, known to decrease efficiency and lead to depersonalisation, have negative effects on both employees and organisations. The survey aimed to analyse the correlation between burnout and workaholism among selected employees in the public and private sectors in Slovenia. The goal was to compare the results obtained in the administrative units and at the two selected banks. Various methodological approaches were employed, including statistical tests such as multivariate analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Survey results indicate statistically significant differences between employees in administrative units and those in two banks. Workaholism is higher among employees in administrative units than at banks. Positive correlations were found between workaholism and the two dimensions of burnout, both among employees in administrative units and in the selected banks.

Keywords: administrative units; banks; burnout; workaholic; workaholism

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1. Introduction

Work is of key importance for adults, as it enables them to earn a salary and develop personally. Additionally, it encourages the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, shapes relationships with fellow human beings, and provides a sense of well-being, meaning, dignity, and self-worth. Employees are driven by both internal and external motives, but in some cases, they fail to set boundaries and end up working excessively, unknowingly becoming workaholics[1]. This excessive work or workaholism can lead to burnout, characterized by workplace exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficiency[2]. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies dedicated to understanding workaholism and burnout. However, ambiguity persists in the definition, conceptualization, and measurement of workaholism, resulting in a divergence of opinions on whether it is a negative or positive phenomenon[3,4]. Research results[2,5–7] have indicated that there is a need to study workaholism and burnout further. Proposals should be put forth for introducing organizational changes that could help reduce workaholism and burnout among employees.

The research aimed to analyse the interrelationship between workaholism and burnout among employees in the public and private sectors in Slovenia. While global studies[2,6,7] have demonstrated a link between workaholism and burnout, no similar survey has been conducted among public and private sector employees in Slovenia. Therefore, the goal was to assess the levels of workaholism and burnout and determine whether a correlation exists between them, and if so, what type of correlation. Foreign research results[8] also indicate gender differences in workaholism and burnout. Consequently, the aim was to explore whether such differences exist (and if so, what they are) based on gender among employees in the public and private sectors

in Slovenia. The ultimate objective was to propose organizational changes based on the findings that could contribute to more effective strategies for addressing workaholism and burnout among employees in both sectors in Slovenia.

In the public sector survey, employees from all fifty-eight administrative units in Slovenia were included. The private sector survey focused on two selected organizations in the service activities sector, specifically banking. These two banks were chosen based on their employee count, aiming for a comparable number to the employees in the administrative units. The survey aimed to assess the rates of workaholism and burnout in the selected organizations and determine whether a positive correlation exists between workaholism and burnout. The findings served as the basis for proposing changes or interventions to enhance effectiveness in addressing workaholism and burnout. The article begins by presenting the theoretical framework of workaholism and burnout, exploring their consequences and correlations. The research section provides a comparative analysis of survey results on workaholism and burnout among employees in administrative units and selected private sector organizations in Slovenia. Additionally, results are presented concerning gender differences among respondents. The subsequent sections include hypothesis testing, a discussion, and the presentation of findings.

2. Theoretical frameworks

2.1. Workaholism and its consequences

Workaholism, defined as an uncontrollable need for constant work or an addiction to work that becomes unmanageable[9], is akin to alcohol addiction or alcoholism. It often arises from various factors, including the avoidance of problems, impaired self-esteem, consequences of childhood trauma, the need for control in one's life, fear of failure, boredom, laziness, pursuit of success, competitiveness and financial responsibilities like putting children through school or saving for retirement[3,10].

Workaholism manifests when employees exceed the expected demands of their job[3]. Overcoming addiction to work is challenging, as individuals addicted to work are often unaware of it, and their dedication compels them to work even more. The severity of addiction correlates with the seriousness, intensity, and lasting impact of the consequences, posing greater risks to overall well-being. Individuals may experience physical, behavioural, emotional, and social consequences[11].

These consequences extend beyond the individual to impact co-workers, especially when the workaholic holds a leadership position, leading to resentment, conflict, and a negative organizational atmosphere; workaholics often struggle to collaborate, avoid delegating tasks, demand excessively, exhibit a critical attitude towards others, and may work inefficiently[12]. O'Connor[13] supports this view, highlighting that overworked employees are prone to making mistakes and may be less efficient due to excessive dedication and difficulty trusting colleagues.

2.2. Burnout and its consequences

Burnout is characterized by a gradual emotional exhaustion and loss of motivation among individuals who have initially worked with dedication and enthusiasm[14]. This phenomenon involves a decline in values, dignity, spirit, and will; initially studied not as an individual's stress response but in terms of workplace relationships, emotions, and values associated with work[2], burnout encompasses clinical perspectives on symptoms and mental health issues, as well as social aspects related to interpersonal relationships and situational contexts. According to the World Health Organization[15], burnout is considered an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed[16].

Kaiser et al.[17] identified, through multiple regression, that job demands are the most significant predictors of burnout. Halbesleben and Buckley[18] define burnout as a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced efficiency, and depersonalization. Pšeničny[19] cautions against equating burnout with stress or unfulfilled expectations, emphasizing the key role of interpersonal factors and individual personality in its development. Moczydłowska[20] notes that burnout, a negative state associated with work, occurs gradually in generally healthy individuals and results from differences between expectations and the realities of professional life. Balducci et al.[11] add that burnout involves chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors experienced at work, affecting individuals' responses to work tasks, organizations, co-workers, clients, and themselves. Conversely, Schmiedel[21] argues that burnout, developing gradually with unpleasant but not yet dangerous symptoms, should be seen as something potentially beneficial, indicating issues in an individual's life.

Researchers Cole[16], Halbesleben and Buckley[18], and Livingston[22] note that burnout occurs at three levels: physical (e.g., headache, heart problems), mental (e.g., lower concentration, lack of motivation), and emotional (e.g., nervousness, pessimism). Importantly, the consequences of burnout extend beyond the individual, impacting anyone associated with the person experiencing burnout[16].

2.3. The connection between workaholism and burnout

Schaufeli et al.[23] found that to improve their competitiveness, organisations additionally reward employees, which increases the possibility of employees developing workaholism and, consequently, the possibility of becoming burnt out. Özsoy[24] compared the level of workaholism of public and private sector employees and found, among other things, that workaholism occurs in both managerial and non-managerial positions but is more common in managerial positions as they bring more responsibility and decisions are more strategic and complex. Cheung et al.[2] found in their study that workaholism is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and negatively correlated with feelings of personal fulfilment. Organizations and leaders also have a strong influence on an individual's workaholism. The results of studies[23,24] show that workaholism, especially due to competition in the market and greater opportunities for monetary rewards for employees, is more prevalent among employees (in both managerial and non-managerial jobs) in private sector organisations.

Studies on the burnout of employees in the public and private sectors already exist and find, similarly to workaholism[23,24], that managers or employees in higher positions have reached a higher level of burnout than those employed in lower positions[19]. Gorji[5] finds that men and older employees with a higher level of education are more burnt out. It has also been found that in addition to burnout, employee productivity is also affected by emotional exhaustion. This means that employee performance and efficiency are reduced due to increased emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. Dias and Angélico[25] studied the existing empirical studies to determine the prevalence and factors associated with burnout syndrome. Two studies that examined the prevalence of burnout in more detail showed that more than half of the respondents had already experienced burnout. Burnout was noticeably most prevalent among those employees whose working hours are longer than 40 h per week and those who have direct contact with clients in their work. Employees reported high exposure to verbal abuse by clients as well as by management. Similar results were obtained by Amigo et al.[26] in their study. However, as there is less research on workaholism in the public and private sectors than on burnout, this research has focused more on the field of workaholism with the aim of preparing measures to reduce or prevent it.

Snir and Harpaz[27] found that workaholism determined based on the number of hours worked per week is more prevalent in men than in women. Similarly, Burke et al.[8] state that men predominate among workaholics. Doerfler and Kammer[28] studied the association between workaholism and the gender of the individual and found that gender has no statistically significant effect. Spence and Robbins[29] found that women have a higher level of enthusiasm for work and enjoy work more than men. However, women also reported higher levels of work-related stress and more health problems. Burke et al.[8] finds that there are no statistically significant differences between men and women in terms of work inclusion, sense of enthusiasm, and enjoyment at work. However, differences emerged in other work-related variables, namely that women were more likely to experience work-related stress than men, and women were found to exhibit a higher level of perfectionism (which may be one of the causes of workaholism). Beiler-May et al.[30] argue that workaholism in women is underestimated due to cultural norms. According to traditional expectations regarding gender roles, men are supposed to work and provide financial support to the family, while women are supposed to do most of the household chores and take care of the children. Wojdyło[31] and Behson[32] have also shown that workaholism is higher in women than in men. To succeed in their professional lives, women often must prove that they can do the assigned task just as well as men[33].

3. Research methods

Participation in the survey included employees from all 58 administrative units (totaling 621 participants) and employees from two selected banks (comprising 404 participants). To ensure anonymity, participants were not named. The selection of the two banks was based on their size, aligning the number of employees with that of the administrative units. In total, 1025 employees from both administrative units and banks responded to the surveys. The survey, conducted in the spring of 2021, utilized an anonymous questionnaire. The survey link was electronically sent to the official addresses of all 58 administrative units and the two selected banks, accompanied by a request to distribute the survey questionnaire to all employees.

3.1. Sample

Out of all employees in the administrative units, 621 participated in the survey, constituting 27% of the total workforce. Among them, 74% (n = 462) were women, and 26% (n = 159) were men. The age distribution among respondents at administrative units was as follows: 41% in the 40–50 age group and 29% in the 51–61 age group. In terms of educational qualifications, 51% held a university degree, 19% had a higher education degree, and 16% held a master's degree. Additionally, 18% of participants from administrative units held managerial positions, while 82% were in non-managerial roles.

Similarly, in both banks, 404 employees participated in the survey, representing 27% of the total workforce. Of these, 82% (n = 332) were women, and 18% (n = 72) were men. The predominant age group at the banks was 40–50 (40%), followed by the 51–61 age group (37%). Regarding educational qualifications, 35% held a university degree, 31% had a higher education degree, and 15% had a secondary school degree. In terms of employment positions, 20% of participating employees at the banks were in managerial roles, while 80% were in non-managerial positions.

The survey sample was representative in terms of gender and age, mirroring the distribution of employees in both administrative units and banks. In this context, representativeness is crucial for ensuring that the sample structure aligns with the overall employee population, emphasizing the importance of structural representativeness rather than sample size.

3.2. Measures

For the research and to ensure international comparability, we utilized two questionnaires to measure workaholism and burnout: the Bergen Workaholism Questionnaire (BWAS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS). According to Andreassen et al.[34], the BWAS reflects seven basic elements of addiction: salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, conflict, and health and other problems.

The MBI-GS questionnaire, designed to measure burnout in three sub-dimensions—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal accomplishment—was used in its public version[35]. We employed a 4-point Likert scale (1: never, 2: rarely, 3: frequently, 4: daily), where higher scores indicate a higher level of burnout.

Using data collected from the BWAS and MBI-GS questionnaires, we examined whether there is a positive correlation between workaholism and burnout among employees in selected public and private sector organizations in Slovenia. The analysis involved the Spearman correlation coefficient.

Additionally, we explored whether workaholism rates at the two selected banks (private sector) were higher than at administrative units (public sector). The assumption was that market competition and greater opportunities for cash rewards for bank employees might increase the likelihood of workaholism. The Spearman correlation coefficient was again used for data analysis.

Furthermore, we investigated the potential co-dependence between the gender variable and the workaholism variable among employees at administrative units and the two selected banks. The assumption here was that men might focus more on their careers, spending more time on work, while women, due to family commitments, may have less time for work. The Mann-Whitney U test was employed for data analysis.

Before proceeding with analyses, we checked whether the variables were normally distributed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results in **Table 1** indicated that none of the considered variables followed a normal distribution, as the *p*-value was less than 0.001 in all cases ($p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Testing the distribution of variables.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	***df***	***Sig.***	**Statistic**	***df***	***Sig.***
Emotional exhaustion	0.050	1025	0.000	0.990	1025	0.000
Depersonalisation	0.127	1025	0.000	0.969	1025	0.000
Personal fulfilment	0.115	1025	0.000	0.966	1025	0.000
Emotional exhaustion	0.146	1025	0.000	0.975	1025	0.000

a. Lilliefors significance correction.

Because the variables are not normally distributed, nonparametric tests were used to test hypotheses H1 and H2.

4. Results

First, we sought to determine the presence of a positive correlation between workaholism and employee burnout in both administrative units and the two selected banks in Slovenia (H1). This hypothesis (H1) was rigorously tested using the Spearman correlation coefficient, and the detailed results can be found in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Spearman correlation coefficient.

		Workaholism
Emotional exhaustion	**Spearman correlation coefficient (*ρ*)**	0.611**
	P	0.000
	N	1025
Depersonalisation	**Spearman correlation coefficient (*ρ*)**	0.327**
	P	0.000
	N	1025
Personal fulfilment	**Spearman correlation coefficient (*ρ*)**	–0.099
	P	0.001
	N	1025

** The correlation is statistically significant at 0.01 (2-sided).

Table 2 reveals a robust positive correlation between workaholism and emotional exhaustion ($\rho = 0.611$; $P = 0.000$), a weak positive correlation between workaholism and depersonalization ($\rho = 0.327$; $P = 0.000$), and a negligible negative correlation between workaholism and personal accomplishment ($\rho = –0.164$; $P = 0.001$). This aligns with the findings of Cheung et al.[2], who also observed a positive correlation between workaholism and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while noting a negative correlation with the sense of accomplishment. As a result of the positive correlation between workaholism and two elements of employee burnout in both administrative units and selected banks in Slovenia, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

Subsequently, hypothesis H2 was tested: the level of workaholism among employees at the two selected banks is higher than at the administrative units. This hypothesis was assessed using the Mann-Whitney U test, a nonparametric test designed to detect differences between two independent samples[36].

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test.

		N	**Average rang**	**Mann-Whitney U**	***P***
Workaholism	Administrative units	621	542.29	107250.000	0.000
	Banks	404	467.97	-	-
	Total	1025	-	-	-

Table 3 reveals a statistically significant difference in the level of workaholism between employees at administrative units and banks (Mann-Whitney U = 107250.000; $P = 0.000$). Notably, the level of workaholism among employees at administrative units (i.e., the public sector) is higher than in the private sector (the two selected banks). These findings contrast with the conclusions drawn by Snir and Harpaz[27] and Özsoy[24]. Consequently, hypothesis H2 is rejected.

Next, hypothesis H3 was assessed: whether the phenomenon of workaholism is more prevalent in men than in women in both administrative units and the two selected banks. The Mann-Whitney U test was employed to examine the correlation between the gender variable and the workaholism variable among employees at administrative units and those at the two selected banks.

Table 4 indicates that the phenomenon of workaholism is more evident in women than in men in administrative units (Mann-Whitney U = 30,660.500; $P = 0.002$). Conversely, at the two selected banks, the table shows that the phenomenon of workaholism is not more pronounced in men than in women (Mann-

Whitney U = 10,946.000; $P = 0.262$). This result contradicts the initial expectation, as it was assumed that men, as suggested by Dudek and Szpitalak[33], would exhibit a higher propensity for workaholism due to their perceived focus on careers. Therefore, hypothesis H3 is rejected.

Table 4. Relationship between workaholism and gender of employees (Mann-Whitney U test).

			N	Average range	Mann-Whitney U	*P*
Administrative units	**Workaholism**	Men	159	272.83	30,660.500	0.002
		Women	462	324.14		
		Total	621	-		
Banks	**Workaholism**	Men	72	188.53	10,946.000	0.262
		Women	332	205.53		
		Total	404	-		

5. Discussions

This study highlights the complex nature of work addiction and burnout and its profound impact on individuals and the workplace. Work addiction is a multi-faceted phenomenon that resembles an addiction and is driven by an uncontrollable urge to work. Various factors, such as the need for control, fear of failure, and financial obligations, contribute to its development. Workaholics often unknowingly exceed expectations for their work, which can lead to negative consequences. The effects go beyond a person's work habits and can have serious consequences for their physical, behavioural, emotional, and social well-being. These consequences include burnout-like symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and depersonalisation. Workaholism can have a negative impact on colleagues, especially when workaholics hold leadership positions. The resulting resentment, conflict, and negative organisational atmosphere can affect collaboration, delegation, and trust within teams. This, in turn, can lead to inefficiency and lower job satisfaction among employees. Recognising workaholism as a problem is crucial both for the well-being of the individuals involved and for promoting a healthy and productive work environment. By recognising the signs of workaholism and providing support and interventions, companies and individuals can help break the cycle of addiction and promote a more balanced work-life dynamic.

Burnout is a complex problem characterised by a gradual decline in emotional well-being and motivation, affecting individuals who originally approached their work with dedication and enthusiasm. Chronic stress at work plays an important role in the development of burnout. It is a psychological syndrome that includes emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and depersonalisation. Burnout not only affects the individual but also impacts colleagues, clients, and family members. It is a reminder of the importance of managing workplace stress and promoting well-being to maintain a healthier and more productive work environment. The study highlights sectoral differences in work stress and burnout, with work stress more prevalent in private sector companies and burnout occurring at different levels of employment. Men, older workers, and those with higher levels of education are more prone to burnout. The issue of gender and work addiction is complex. Research shows mixed results, and societal expectations play an important role.

The use of established questionnaires, the Bergen Workaholism Questionnaire (BWAS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS), ensures reliability and enables international comparability. The BWAS, which reflects elements of addiction, and the MBI-GS, which assesses burnout in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and a low sense of personal fulfilment, provide a solid basis for data collection and analysis. The use of the Spearman correlation coefficient is a valuable statistical method for examining the relationships

between work addiction and burnout. It allows quantification of the associations between these constructs and helps to determine whether one is positively associated with the other. Comparing workaholism rates between the public and private sectors is an important component that provides insight into how sector-specific differences may influence work-related behaviours. The assumption that private sector employees in banks may have higher workaholism rates due to market competition and monetary incentives is an important hypothesis to explore. Examining the co-dependency between gender and workaholism is an important aspect of the study. The potential differences in men's and women's work patterns, shaped by societal expectations and family obligations, have important implications for understanding work-related behaviours.

The results show a positive correlation between workaholism and burnout among workers. There is a strong positive correlation between workaholism and emotional exhaustion, a weak positive correlation with depersonalisation and a negligible negative correlation with personal performance. These findings are consistent with previous research by Cheung et al.[2] and suggest that workaholism is associated with key elements of burnout in workers. The results showed a statistically significant difference, with higher levels of workaholism in the administrative units than in the two selected banks. These results contradict previous research findings[24,28]. This unexpected result highlights the importance of examining sector-specific factors in more detail to understand the dynamics. The results suggest that workaholism in administrative units is more common among women than men. However, for the two selected banks, the data show no significant difference between men and women in terms of workaholism. This result challenges the original expectation that men are more prone to workaholism due to their career-oriented approach, as claimed by Dudek and Szpitalak[33]. The complexity of gender roles and work addiction is underlined, highlighting the need for a deeper investigation of these dynamics.

These findings highlight the complicated nature of workaholism, which can manifest differently in different sectors and gender groups. Workaholism is not exclusively tied to the private sector, nor is it a predominantly male phenomenon. The research sheds light on the complexity of work-related behaviours and emphasizes that sector-specific factors and cultural influences, including gender norms and expectations, play a significant role. The unexpected finding regarding sector-specific levels of workaholism suggests that factors beyond monetary rewards and competition may contribute to the phenomenon. Further research into work culture, management practises and organisational expectations in both the public and private sectors could shed light on these differences. The gendered findings also highlight the need for more comprehensive research on how social norms and gender roles interact with work addiction tendencies. This understanding is critical for organisations and policymakers seeking to promote a healthier work-life balance and employee well-being. The study offers valuable insights into the complicated dynamics of work addiction and burnout and how they influence each other. It highlights the importance of addressing these issues in the workplace to promote employee wellbeing and productivity. By understanding the unique challenges and stressors that each individual faces, organisations can develop effective interventions to mitigate these issues and create a healthier work-life balance for all employees. This differentiated approach is essential for managing the complexity of work-related behaviours and well-being in different work environments. Further research should incorporate controls for organizational factors, job positions, and gender, while also investigating the prevalence of burnout and workaholism in both the public and private sectors.

6. Conclusions

Work addiction is a complex issue that correlates significantly with employee burnout. It is associated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and has a negative impact on personal performance, which

is consistent with previous research. Sector-specific differences were analysed, and the expectation that workaholism is higher in private sector banks compared to public sector administrative units was refuted. Surprisingly, workaholism was more prevalent in administrative units. Women showed more workaholic tendencies in administrative units, but there was no significant gender difference in banks. This challenges the assumption that men are more prone to workaholism because of their career orientation. These findings provide valuable insights into work-related behaviours, sector-specific influences, and gender dynamics in the Slovenian context and underline the need for a nuanced understanding of these complex phenomena.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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