

## Stress in paradise: Empirical evidence on emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives

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**Abstract:** This study examines the relationship between role stress, emotional exhaustion, well-being, and job satisfaction among holiday representatives, a critical but under-researched segment of employees in the tourism industry. Using quantitative data collected during the peak summer season, the study examines how role stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) affects the emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives employed by Serbian tour operators at seaside destinations and how emotional exhaustion affects their well-being and job satisfaction. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypotheses. The findings show that role stress has a positive and significant impact on emotional exhaustion, which in turn has a negative and significant impact on the well-being and job satisfaction of holiday representatives. In addition, the study identifies perceived organizational support as a significant moderator that effectively buffers the positive effects of role stress on emotional exhaustion. Theoretically, this study enriches the current understanding of stressors experienced by holiday representatives and proposes and empirically tests an innovative, integrated research framework. Practical implications suggest that clearer role definitions, better workload management, and stronger organizational support are needed to improve employees' resilience, job satisfaction, and well-being. Limitations and future research directions are outlined.

**Keywords:** *holiday representatives, role stress, emotional exhaustion, well-being, perceived organizational support*

**JEL Classification:** L83, O15

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the tourism industry, the initial appeal of a vacation often depends on the carefully selected photos and interesting descriptions provided by travel agencies. Potential tourists are drawn to images of idyllic landscapes, clean beaches, and luxury hotels that promise memorable experiences. However, the contrast between these idealized portrayals and the reality that tourists face when they arrive at the destination can be extreme. Tourists may find crowded beaches, poor hygiene in accommodation, bad food in restaurants, or unfriendly staff – elements that are drastically different from the expectations they built up during the sales process. Such discrepancies often lead to increased dissatisfaction, which is mainly directed against the travel agency that sold them the “ideal” vacation. The pronounced physical distance between the tourists and the travel agency leads tourists to direct their complaints to the travel agency's representative at the destination, who is now held responsible for the perceived shortcomings and on whom the overall satisfaction of the guests now depends.

Travel agency's representatives, often referred to as holiday representatives or holiday reps (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005), serve as an “extended arm” of the travel agency at the destination (Spasić & Pavlović, 2018) and act as intermediaries between tourists, the travel agency and the service providers at the destination (Busoi, Ali & Gardiner, 2022). Their tasks usually include organising airport transfers, greeting guests, conducting welcome meetings, providing information about local attractions, selling and coordinating excursions, handling logistical issues, dealing with paperwork, handling complaints and crises – including serious incidents such as deaths, medical emergencies and disruptive behaviour related to alcohol consumption or aggression – and generally ensuring that tourists have a positive experience from arrival to departure (Guerrier & Adib, 2003; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Theocharous & Massengale, 2013). Due to the nature of their responsibilities, holiday reps are in constant

contact with guests, which blurs the “boundaries between work and leisure” (Busoi et al., 2022, p. 2) and makes them the “most socially exposed employees” (Brzezińska-Wójcik & Widz, 2017, pp. 19–20) in the tourism industry. Both travel agencies and tourists expect holiday reps to remain empathetic and effective in all interactions – from presenting enjoyment at leisure events to providing emotional support in crises (Guerrier & Adib, 2003).

Although in the proximity to blue environment, which according to Blue Mind theory can enhance physical and mental health (Nichols, 2015) and induce a state of calm and mindfulness, constant exposure to challenging situations can counteract these effects by increasing stress hormones, a condition described as red mind (Ahmed, Poto & Heckman, 2025). The constant pressure to manage their emotions while ensuring that guests’ vacation is “free of any problems that might cause dissatisfaction” (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005, p. 109) can have a negative impact on the well-being and job satisfaction of these employees, which in turn negatively affects their efficiency and service quality (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Despite their key role in ensuring guest satisfaction, holiday representatives are often overlooked in research (Busoi et al., 2022). Apart from a few papers that qualitatively addressed the emotional labour of holiday reps (e.g., Busoi et al., 2022; Constanti & Gibbs, 2005; Guerrier & Adib, 2003), no papers were found that empirically measured the stress experienced by holiday reps during the peak summer season and its implications.

The aim of this study is to investigate how role stress affects the emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives and how emotional exhaustion further influences their well-being and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the role of organizational support in mitigating the negative effects of role stress will be analysed. By exploring these challenges, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature on understanding work stress and emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives and propose solutions to improve their well-being and job satisfaction. To achieve the research objective, this article is structured as follows. The second part provides an overview of the literature on the variables being studied, after which the hypotheses are formulated. Then, the used research methodology is explained, and the research findings are presented and analysed. Finally, implications for theory and practice are offered.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Role stress

Work role is the result of expectations of the behaviour that is desirable in a particular environment. These expectations, which come from the employees themselves, from people in their surroundings, inside and outside the organization, can cause good or bad feelings in employees. Role stress is usually accompanied by negative feelings, including physical, behavioural (Beehr & Glazer, 2005) and psychological effects of role aspects (O’Brien & Cooper, 2022). The three fundamental components of role stress include: role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload (Bauer & Simmons, 2000; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). Role ambiguity emerges when information about expected role behaviour is insufficient and unclear (Cengiz, Yoder & Danesh, 2021; Raub, Borzillo, Perretten & Schmitt, 2021). In contrast, role conflict refers to an excess of conflicting information (Tubre & Collins, 2000), leading to the emergence of a psychological conflict in which the employee is unable to fulfill each expected role simultaneously (Schmidt, Roesler, Kuserow & Rau, 2012). Role overload occurs when the volume of tasks is overwhelming while the time available to complete them is limited (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). Previous research has documented a positive relationship between three core components of role stress and emotional exhaustion: role ambiguity (Mwakyusa & Mcharo, 2024), role conflict (Alexander Hamwi, Rutherford & Boles, 2011), and role overload (Ng, Sambasivan & Zubaidah, 2011), both individually and all together (Posig & Kickul, 2003). Holiday representatives are usually exposed to complex situations that involve a heavy workload, great responsibility, and often long working hours, leading to physical and, consequently, emotional exhaustion (Busoi et al., 2022). In line with the results of previous studies, we hypothesize the following:

*H1: Role stress has a positive influence on the emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives.*

### 2.2. Emotional exhaustion

The job of a holiday representative in the tourism industry requires the display of a wide range of emotions. They are expected to have a positive attitude, to be sympathetic when tourists have problems, and to be able to manage negative feelings. This involves emotional labour (Guerrier & Adib, 2003), i.e., the management of emotions to comply with organisa-

tional rules (Grandey & Sayre, 2019), which can be beneficial for employees, their employers and customers (Humphrey, Ashforth & Diefendorff, 2015). However, such extensive emotional labour may also have negative consequences for employees (Riforgiate, Howes & Simmons, 2022) and often leads to emotional exhaustion (Rafiq, Abbasi, Ali Sair, Mohiuddin & Munir, 2020). Emotional exhaustion can be described as “feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work. It is manifested by both physical fatigue and a sense of feeling psychologically and emotionally ‘drained’” (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 486). Previous research has found that this condition negatively impacts well-being (e.g., Lin, Huang, Yang & Chiang, 2014; Wong & Wang, 2009) and job satisfaction (e.g., Lee & Ok, 2012; Park & Kim, 2021), which is especially true for employees who are in direct contact with customers (Amissah, Blankson-Stiles-Ocran & Mensah, 2022; Chu, Baker & Murrmann, 2012), such as holiday representatives (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005). With this in mind, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H2: Emotional exhaustion has a negative influence on the well-being of holiday representatives.*

*H3: Emotional exhaustion has a negative influence on the job satisfaction of holiday representatives.*

### 2.3. Well-being and job satisfaction

Well-being refers to “optimal psychological functioning and experience” (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142). It is a sophisticated construct explained by two leading perspectives, including the hedonic approach, which focuses on the personal experience of feeling good, and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on living well (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sonnentag, 2015). Therefore, well-being can be seen as a desirable outcome in itself that simultaneously influences other outcomes (Jawad & Scott-Jackson, 2016). In the context of the work environment, well-being does not refer exclusively to the relationship between employees and the organization, but rather to the quality of relationships between individuals (Biggio & Cortese, 2013), i.e., interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and customers, all of which influence an employee’s well-being (Falter & Hadwich, 2019; Nielsen, Nielsen, Ogbonnaya, Käsälä, Saari & Isaksson, 2017). Previous research has recognized the essential role of employees’ well-being for their job satisfaction (Biedma-Ferrer, Medina-Garrido, Bogren & Almeida, 2024). Job satisfaction, described as an in-

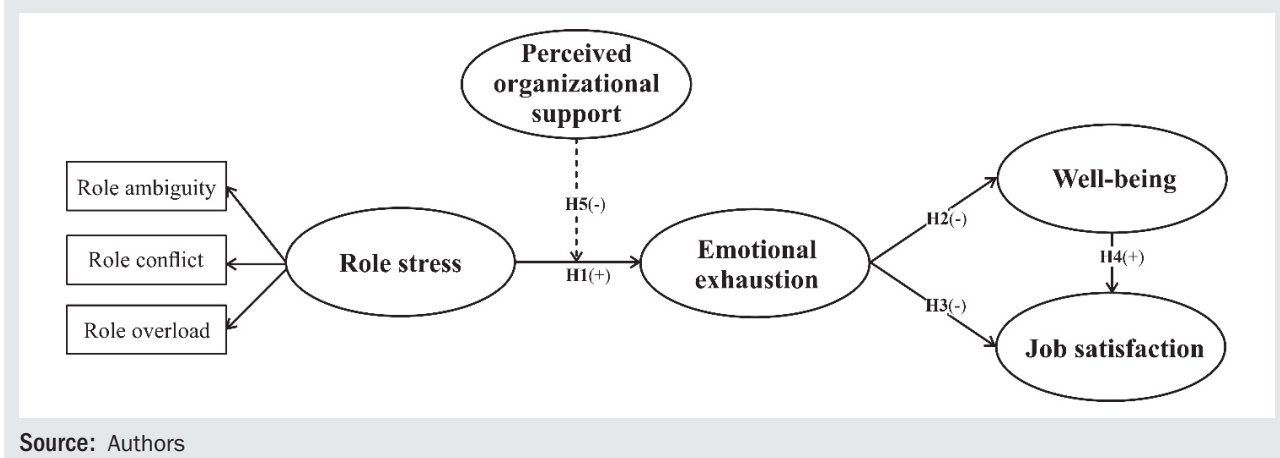
dicator of employees’ overall positive attitude towards their work (Kong, Jiang, Chan & Zhou, 2018), is considered essential for a labour-intensive sector such as tourism (Lillo-Bañuls, Casado-Díaz & Simón, 2018). Based on the present findings and the observation of holiday representatives as an integral part of the tourism sector, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H4: Well-being has a positive influence on the job satisfaction of holiday representatives.*

### 2.4. Perceived organizational support

Role stress leads to emotional exhaustion and contributes to its increase, especially among frontline employees (Essawy, 2016; Hu, Hu & King, 2017). Emotionally exhausted employees become ineffective in interpersonal encounters and tend to dehumanize customers by viewing them as objects rather than people. This depersonalization leads to the development of cynicism and a negative attitude towards others and the work itself (Mann, 2004), resulting in increased levels of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the emotional exhaustion of workers has notable negative effects on work performance (Hur, Kim & Park, 2015). Therefore, the quick recovery of emotionally exhausted employees is in the best interest of organizations. To achieve this, supervisors in particular should pay more attention to employees’ development, needs, and interests (Zhang, Zhou, Zhan, Liu & Zhang, 2018). With proper support from their side, it is possible to influence the reduction of employees’ emotional exhaustion (Karatepe, 2010). Based on organizational support theory, employees’ perceptions of how much their organization values their work contributions and genuinely cares about their well-being represent perceived organizational support or POS (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock & Wen, 2020). POS leads to several positive outcomes, such as improving work engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, as well as reducing employees’ emotional exhaustion and work stress (Yan, Zhang & Choo, 2024). In addition, previous studies have shown that POS moderates the relationship between hindrance stressors and emotional exhaustion, namely, the negative impact of hindrance stressors on emotional exhaustion becomes less pronounced when employees perceive high organizational support (Bao & Zhong, 2019). Referring to previous findings on POS and the recognition of holiday representatives as employees who are highly exposed to stress and prone to emotional exhaustion (Busoi et al., 2022), the following hypothesis is proposed:

Figure 1: Proposed research model



Source: Authors

H5: POS negatively moderates the positive relationship between role stress and emotional exhaustion of holiday representatives.

Figure 1 illustrates the research model developed for this study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data collection

The target population for this study consisted of holiday representatives employed by Serbian travel agencies, who were working at international summer tourism destinations. However, as there are no official registers or publicly available records of the total number of holiday representatives employed by Serbian tour operators (and considering information obtained through consultation with travel agencies indicating that representatives are often shared among multiple agencies in certain destinations), it was not possible to accurately determine the size of the total population. Therefore, a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods was used to recruit participants. Data gathering was conducted via an online self-report questionnaire. To distribute the questionnaire, a link was initially sent to travel agencies in Serbia, with a request to forward it to their holiday representatives. Additionally, the questionnaire was sent to personal contacts in the tourism sector, who were then asked to share it further within their professional networks. The survey was conducted during the peak summer season, from June to September 2024. Only holiday representatives who were actively working at the destination during

this period were surveyed to accurately capture their experiences. A total of 55 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis. Due to logistical constraints related to a limited time and space access to the target population, it was not possible to obtain a larger sample. Although the small sample size may limit the statistical power and reduce the generalizability of the results, the findings provide insights that can inform future research.

#### 3.2. Measurement of variables

The measurement instruments were developed from the existing literature. Three items for role ambiguity and three items for role conflict were developed from Bowling et al. (2017). Role overload was measured using three items adapted from Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley (1990) and three items adapted from Peterson et al. (1995). Emotional exhaustion was measured using five items from the scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986). Respondents' well-being was assessed using the WHO-5 Well-being index developed by Bech (2004). Job satisfaction was measured using four statements from Brown and Peterson (1994), while POS was measured using three items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986). All statements were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 7 for "strongly agree". The complete list of construct measurements is presented in Appendix A.

#### 3.3. Analytical method

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (version 25) and SmartPLS (version 4). Specifically, SPSS was used to describe the sample and to assess

the normality of the indicator distributions using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Significance of these tests verified non-normality for all variables. Subsequently, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was performed using SmartPLS, which is considered suitable due to the exploratory nature of the study, the non-normality of the data distributions and small sample (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019; Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2022). Additionally, PLS-SEM enables the analysis of hierarchical latent variable models (Seočanac, 2024; Sharma, Shmueli, Sarstedt, Danks & Ray, 2021). In this study, role stress was conceptualized as a type I (Becker, Klein & Wetzels, 2012) higher-order (second-order) latent variable represented by lower-order (first-order) constructs, specifically role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. This type was chosen because these first-order variables “reflect the meaning and concept of the same attribute” (Rasoolimanesh & Ali, 2018, p. 239).

Using the disjoint two-stage approach, the measurement model was first assessed to ensure the validity and reliability of the indicators. In the first stage of the reflective measurement model assessment, all constructs were examined in terms of indicator reliability through outer loadings, internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability ( $\rho_C$ ), and rho A ( $\rho_A$ ), convergent validity via average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity by examining heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios. In this stage, latent variable scores for lower-order variables (i.e., role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) were obtained and subsequently used to create and estimate the hierarchical latent variable role stress in the second stage. The reflective measurement model of the higher-order latent variable is evaluated in the second stage to determine the reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the indicators (Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Becker & Ringle, 2019). Finally, the structural model was evaluated using a bias-corrected bootstrapping method (10,000 resamples) (Sarstedt, Hair, Pick, Liengard, Radomir & Ringle, 2022). First, it was confirmed that there were no collinearity issues between the latent variables (by observing the VIF values). The size and statistical significance of the path coefficients were then determined. In a final step, calculations of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and the effect size ( $f^2$ ) were performed to determine the predictive power of the structural model (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011).

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. Basic profile of respondents

The sample of this study consisted predominantly of female holiday representatives (69.1%), with most participants aged between 30 and 41 (36.4%). Almost half of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (47.3%), and a significant proportion had either less than one year or four to six years of experience as a holiday representative (25.5% each). Additionally, the majority of respondents (63.6%) reported working more than 40 hours per week (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 55)

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	16	29.1
Female	38	69.1
Missing	1	1.8
<b>Age</b>		
18–29	12	21.8
30–41	20	36.4
42–53	19	34.5
54–65	4	7.3
<b>Education</b>		
High school degree	8	14.5
Associate's degree	8	14.5
Bachelor's degree	26	47.3
Master's degree	13	23.6
<b>Work experience</b>		
less than one year	14	25.5
one to three years	10	18.2
four to six	14	25.5
seven to ten	10	18.2
more than ten years	7	12.7
<b>Working hours per week</b>		
less than 30 hours	10	18.2
30 to 40 hours	10	18.2
40 to 50 hours	13	23.6
50 to 60 hours	9	16.4
more than 60 hours	13	23.6

Source: Authors

### 4.2. Analysis

#### 4.2.1. Measurement model assessment

The reliability of the indicators was assessed by checking the outer loadings of the indicators. Examination of the values shown in Table 2 revealed that all indicators loaded with scores above the threshold of 0.708

**Table 2:** Reliability and internal consistency of indicators

Latent variable	Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_C)	AVE
Role ambiguity (RA)	RA1	0.888	0.821	0.858	0.892	0.733
	RA2	0.788				
	RA3	0.889				
Role conflict (RC)	RC1	0.841	0.805	0.830	0.884	0.719
	RC2	0.798				
	RC3	0.901				
Role overload (RO)	RO1	0.867	0.933	0.939	0.947	0.749
	RO2	0.857				
	RO3	0.814				
	RO4	0.912				
	RO5	0.857				
	RO6	0.884				
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	EE1	0.885	0.932	0.938	0.948	0.786
	EE2	0.886				
	EE3	0.914				
	EE4	0.822				
	EE5	0.923				
Well-being (WB)	WB1	0.889	0.922	0.922	0.941	0.761
	WB2	0.888				
	WB3	0.856				
	WB4	0.892				
	WB5	0.836				
Job satisfaction (JS)	JS1	0.908	0.893	0.935	0.925	0.758
	JS2	0.735				
	JS3	0.884				
	JS4	0.941				
Perceived organizational support (POS)	POS1	0.932	0.903	0.906	0.939	0.838
	POS2	0.921				
	POS3	0.893				

Source: Authors

(Hair et al., 2011). Internal consistency was established for all latent variables, as the values of composite reliability ( $\rho_C$ ) and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) are within the required limits of 0.7 – 0.95 (Hair et al., 2019) and the value of the reliability coefficient ( $\rho_A$ ) is higher than the lower limit of 0.707 (Benitez, Henseler, Cas-

tillo & Schubert, 2020). The AVE value for all latent variables is greater than 0.5. This result indicates that each latent variable explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2019), i.e., that convergent validity is established.

**Table 3:** Discriminant validity – HTMT ratios

	RA	RC	RO	EE	WB	JS	POS
RA							
RC	0.890						
RO	0.729	0.808					
EE	0.682	0.670	0.845				
WB	0.454	0.441	0.645	0.763			
JS	0.487	0.477	0.525	0.648	0.727		
POS	0.452	0.286	0.435	0.531	0.342	0.622	

Source: Authors

**Table 4:** Higher-order latent variable assessment

Latent variable	Indicators	Loadings	CR	AVE
Role stress	RA	0.880	0.923	0.801
	RC	0.902		
	RO	0.902		
<b>HTMT</b>				
Role stress	EE	0.822	JS	POS
			0.568	0.444

Source: Authors

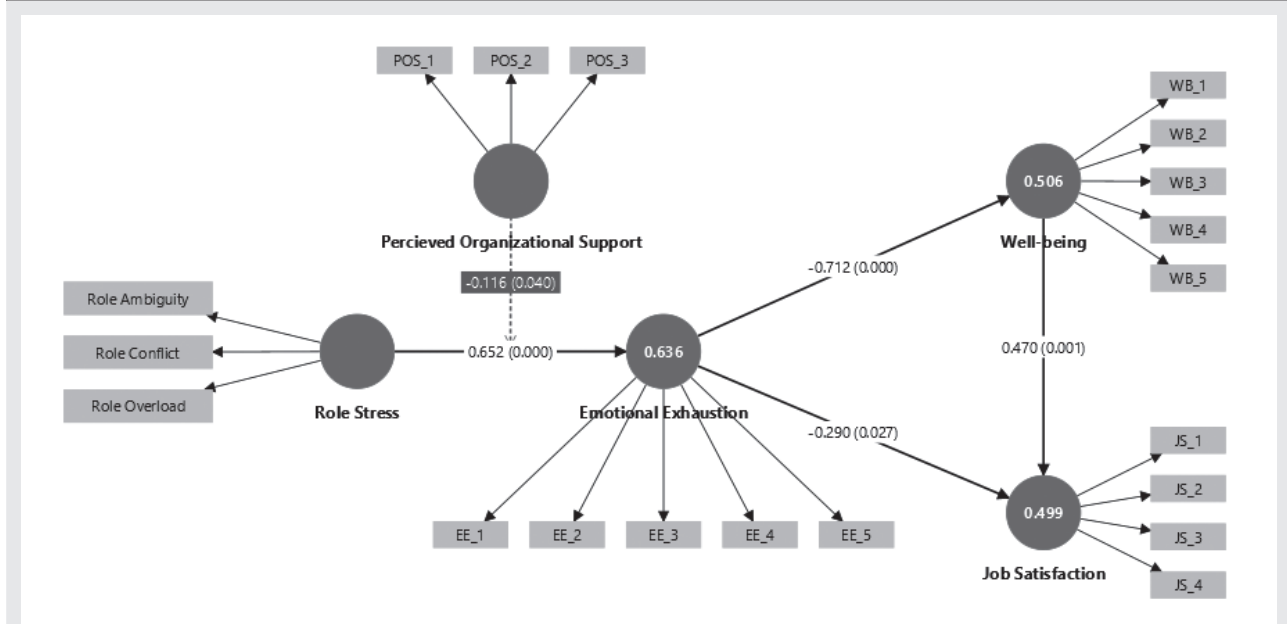
By checking the HTMT values presented in Table 3, it was found that the HTMT value for all latent variables is below the recommended upper limit of 0.85 (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015), except for the latent variables role ambiguity (RA) and role conflict (RC), for which the HTMT value is 0.89. Considering that these are conceptually similar variables, 0.9 is considered an acceptable upper limit (Henseler et al., 2015), which means that discriminant validity is established.

To ensure that all constructs of the reflective-reflective hierarchical latent variable meet the standard criteria for measurement models, the relationships between the higher-order latent variable (role stress) and the respective lower-order latent variables were examined (Sarstedt et al., 2019). As shown in Table 4, the measurement model of the higher-order latent variable meets the requirements for reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity.

#### 4.2.2. Structural model assessment

As part of the assessment of the structural model (Figure 2), an assessment of the collinearity between the latent variables of the structural model was carried out. It was found that the VIF value for all latent variables is 1, indicating that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a problem in the structural model (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, Danks & Ray, 2021). The size and statistical significance of the path coefficients were then determined. The results presented in Table 5 show that the exogenous latent variable, namely role stress (H1:  $\beta = 0.652, p = 0.000$ ), has a positive and statistically significant effect on emotional exhaustion. In addition, emotional exhaustion was found to have a negative and statistically significant effect on well-being (H2:  $\beta = -0.712, p = 0.000$ ) and job satisfaction (H3:  $\beta = -0.290, p = 0.027$ ), while well-being has a positive and statistically significant effect on job satisfaction (H4:  $\beta = 0.470, p = 0.001$ ).

**Figure 2:** Structural model assessment



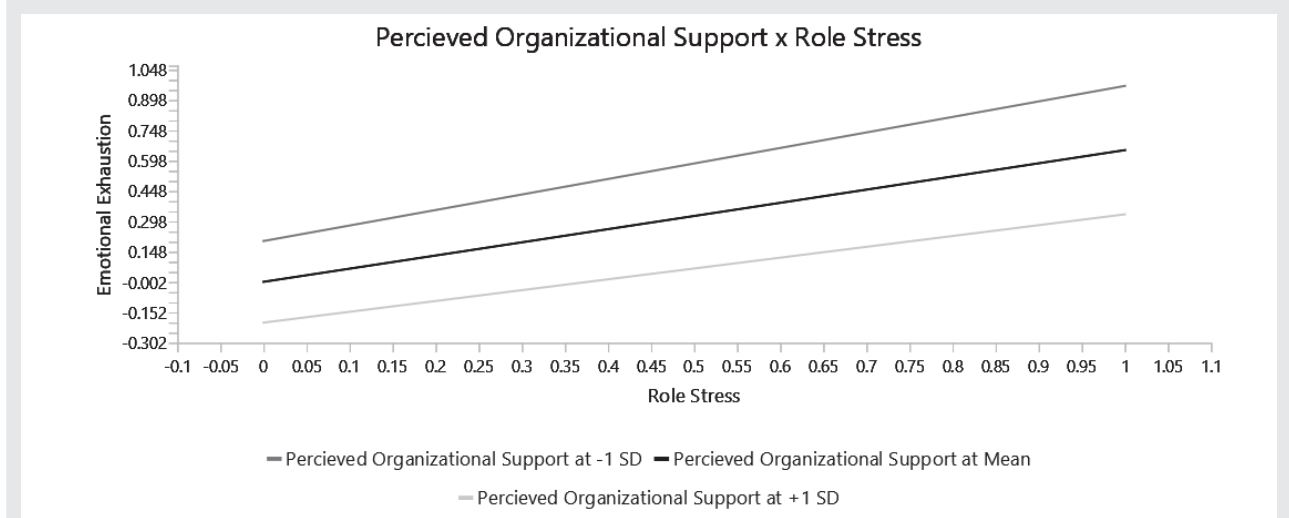
Source: Authors

**Table 5:** Path coefficients between latent variables of the structural model: testing the research hypotheses

Path	$\beta$	t	p	Decision
H1: Role stress → Emotional exhaustion (+)	0.652	7.081	0.000	Supported
H2: Emotional exhaustion → Well-being (-)	-0.712	10.335	0.000	Supported
H3: Emotional exhaustion → Job satisfaction (-)	-0.290	1.925	0.027	Supported
H4: Well-being → Job satisfaction (+)	0.470	3.232	0.001	Supported
H5: Perceived organizational support x Role stress → Emotional exhaustion (-)	-0.116	1.747	0.040	Supported

Source: Authors

**Figure 3:** Simple slope analysis



Source: Authors

(H4:  $\beta = 0.470, p = 0.001$ ). Based on the standardized beta coefficient, it can be concluded that the strongest relationship exists between emotional exhaustion and well-being ( $\beta = -0.712$ ), as it is closest to -1. Moreover, the results showed that perceived organizational support negatively and significantly moderates the positive relationship between role stress and emotional exhaustion (H5:  $\beta = -0.116, p = 0.040$ ), which is also confirmed by the simple slope analysis shown in Figure 3.

To determine the predictive power of each independent latent variable in the structural model, i.e., to determine whether the independent variables are meaningful predictors of the dependent variables,

the  $f^2$  value was calculated and classified according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines. Based on Table 6, it can be seen that the greatest effect in the model has emotional exhaustion on well-being ( $f^2 = 1.026$ ). The analysis of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of the endogenous latent variables shows the percentage to which the exogenous variables explain the endogenous variable. A moderate  $R^2$  value was obtained for all three dependent latent variables (Hair et al., 2011). The highest value of the coefficient of determination was obtained for the latent variable emotional exhaustion ( $R^2 = 0.636$ ), which indicates that 63.6% of the endogenous variable is explained by the exogenous variable.

**Table 6:** Effect size and coefficient of determination

Predictor	$f^2$ effect size	Latent variable	$R^2$ value
Role stress → Emotional exhaustion	0.965 (large)	Emotional exhaustion	0.636
Emotional exhaustion → Well-being	1.026 (large)	Well-being	0.506
Emotional exhaustion → Job satisfaction	0.083 (small)	Job satisfaction	0.499
Well-being → Job satisfaction	0.218 (medium)		

Source: Authors

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

This study extends theoretical knowledge on tourism employees' job stress by empirically examining the effects of role stress (manifested in role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload) on emotional exhaustion and further exploring how emotional exhaustion affects holiday representatives' well-being and job satisfaction. The results show that role stress contributes positively to emotional exhaustion. Specifically, holiday representatives faced with unclear or conflicting job expectations and excessive workloads reported significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion, which negatively impacted their well-being and job satisfaction. However, the study also found a significant positive impact of well-being on job satisfaction, underlining the crucial role of employees' psychological health as a determinant of their job satisfaction. In addition, the study found that perceived organizational support is an important moderator mitigating the negative effects of role stress on emotional exhaustion.

These findings provide important empirical support for previous qualitative studies. For example, the relationship found between role stress and emotional exhaustion supports the qualitative findings of Guerrier and Adib (2003), who reported that unclear and conflicting expectations contribute significantly to employee stress. Similarly, the findings on the negative impact of role overload confirm the observations of Constanti and Gibbs (2005) that excessive workload due to managers' unrealistic expectations negatively impacts employees' health and work attitudes. Furthermore, the moderating effect of POS found in this study empirically confirms the view of Busoi et al. (2022), who identified supervisor support as essential in mitigating negative workplace outcomes among holiday representatives. This finding supports the arguments of Hur et al. (2015), who emphasize the importance of a supportive organizational environment in reducing employee stress.

While proximity to blue environments has been associated with improved psychological well-being (Nichols, 2015), this study shows that chronic role stress can lead to persistent psychological stress, or 'red mind' (Ahmed et al., 2025), even in these environments. Specifically, this study found that the emotional exhaustion resulting from high role stress negatively impacts the well-being of holiday representatives working at seaside destinations. By empirically demonstrating how emotional exhaustion

significantly decreases employees' well-being and job satisfaction, this study supports previous theoretical assertions that consider psychological well-being and job satisfaction as critical outcomes affected by work stress (Lee & Ok, 2012; Lin et al., 2014; Wong & Wang, 2009). Moreover, the positive relationship found between psychological well-being and job satisfaction represents a significant theoretical extension of existing research and empirically confirms previous claims that psychological health directly increases employees' overall satisfaction with their jobs (Biedma-Ferrer et al., 2024). This finding highlights the fundamental role that well-being plays as a driver of job satisfaction and highlights its potential as an important target for management interventions aimed at improving organizational outcomes.

### 5.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for tour operators. The finding that role stress has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion points to the urgent need for clearly defined job descriptions and expectations for holiday representatives. Detailed orientation programs should be conducted to reduce role ambiguity, and changes or updates in job responsibilities should be communicated regularly. To address role conflict and overload, tour operators should set realistic workload expectations, ensure adequate staffing levels during peak seasons, and provide regular breaks. Developing training programs that focus on skills, such as emotion regulation, mindfulness techniques, and conflict resolution, could significantly reduce stress and increase job satisfaction among holiday representatives.

The significant moderating effect of organizational support highlights the need to foster a supportive work environment. Support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as clear channels for communication and feedback, should be provided. Moreover, as a positive relationship between well-being and job satisfaction was found, companies should regularly monitor employee well-being as a strategic priority. Practical steps include conducting regular employee well-being surveys and proactively addressing identified stressors. Finally, improving employee well-being and job satisfaction should be considered an integral part of overall business objectives, including maintaining high-quality customer service, reducing turnover rates, and improving business performance.

### 5.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this study offers valuable insights, it also has some limitations that suggest opportunities for future research. A significant limitation is the small sample size, which may restrict statistical power and generalizability. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting and generalizing these findings to broader populations of holiday representatives. Future research should aim to replicate this study with larger and more diverse samples to increase confidence in the findings, improve statistical validity, and allow for more generalizable conclusions regarding occupational stress in the tourism sector.

Future studies could further investigate possible moderating and mediating factors such as emotional intelligence, personality traits, or coping mechanisms, and mindfulness practices. Examining the interaction between individual characteristics and organizational interventions can provide practical strategies for management approaches. As role stress and emotional exhaustion negatively impact job satisfaction,

future research should empirically examine broader organizational outcomes, including employee turnover, tourist satisfaction, and organizational profitability. By addressing these limitations and extending research in the suggested directions, future scholarly work can significantly enrich theoretical understanding and practical approaches to managing emotional labor in the tourism context and ultimately contribute to creating a healthier work environment.

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## APPENDIX A

### Role ambiguity

1. Sometimes I'm not sure exactly what my responsibilities are.
2. The specific demands of my role are not always clear.
3. It's often unclear what exactly is expected of me in my job.

### Role conflict

1. I often feel different groups (tourists, managers, local service providers) are pulling me in different directions.
2. I am regularly confronted with competing demands from tourists and my organization.
3. My supervisors often instruct me to do two different things that can't both be done.

### Role overload

1. I often don't have enough time to complete all my tasks.
2. I often feel rushed when completing my responsibilities.
3. I rarely have free time during my working day.
4. I feel overburdened in my work role.
5. My role involves too many responsibilities for one person to handle.
6. I am given more work than I can effectively manage.

### Emotional exhaustion

1. I often feel emotionally drained by my responsibilities.
2. The constant interaction with tourists places significant stress on me.
3. I often feel frustrated in my work role.
4. I have the feeling that I work too hard at my job.
5. Sometimes I feel completely exhausted and unable to cope with my tasks.

### Well-being

1. In the last two weeks I have generally felt cheerful and in a good mood.
2. I have felt calm and relaxed during my recent duties.
3. Lately I have felt energetic and active.
4. I usually wake up feeling refreshed and rested before I start my daily tasks.
5. My daily routine has been filled with activities and tasks that really interest me.

### Job satisfaction

1. My job as a holiday representative is very pleasant.
2. My job as a holiday representative is very worthwhile.
3. Compared to other jobs, my job is better than most.
4. I find my role as a holiday representative fulfilling and rewarding.

### Perceived organizational support

1. The tour operator I work for appreciates my contributions to its well-being.
2. The tour operator I work for values my opinion.
3. The tour operator I work for provides me with the resources and support I need to do my job effectively.

## Apstrakt

### Stres u raju: empirijski dokazi o emocionalnoj iscrpljenosti agencijskih predstavnika

Marijana Seočanac, Ivana Veljović

Ova studija ispituje odnos između stresa koji potiče iz radne uloge, emocionalne iscrpljenosti, blagostanja i zadovoljstva poslom među agencijskim predstavnicima, kritičnog, ali nedovoljno istraženog segmenta zaposlenih u turističkoj delatnosti. Koristeći kvantitativne podatke prikupljene tokom letnje sezone, studija ispituje kako stres koji potiče iz radne uloge (neodređenost radne uloge, konflikt uloge i preopterećenost uloge) utiče na emocionalnu iscrpljenost agencijskih predstavnika zaposlenih kod srpskih turopredatora na primorskim destinacijama i kako emocionalna iscrpljenost utiče na njihovo blagostanje i zadovoljstvo poslom. Modeliranje strukturalnim jednačinama metodom parcijalnih najmanjih kvadrata (PLS-SEM) korišćeno je za testiranje hipoteza. Nalazi pokazuju da stres koji potiče iz radne uloge ima pozitivan i značajan uticaj na emocionalnu iscrpljenost, koja negativno i značajno utiče na blagostanje i

zadovoljstvo poslom agencijskih predstavnika. Pored toga, studija je identifikovala percipiranu organizacionu podršku kao značajnog moderatora koji efikasno ublažava pozitivne efekte stresa koji potiče iz radne uloge na emocionalnu iscrpljenost. Teorijski, ova studija obogaćuje sadašnje razumevanje stresora koje doživljavaju agencijski predstavnici i predlaže i empirijski testira inovativni, integrisani istraživački okvir. Praktične implikacije sugerišu da je neophodno jasnije definisati radne uloge, bolje upravljati opterećenjem i obezbediti veću organizacionu podršku kako bi se poboljšala otpornost zaposlenih, zadovoljstvo poslom i blagostanje. Navedena su ograničenja i budući pravci istraživanja.

**Ključne reči:** *agencijski predstavnici, stres radnih uloga, emocionalna iscrpljenost, blagostanje, percipirana organizaciona podrška*

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