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Quantitative Research Article

The Effect of Punitive Supervision on Job Burnout in the Hospitality Sector: A Serial Mediation Model of Organizational Injustice and Work Alienation

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Abstract

Background: Job burnout is a critical issue among frontline hospitality employees, often intensified by punitive supervision. Although the harmful link is established, the precise sequential psychological mechanism—from organizational injustice to work alienation—remains an underexplored theoretical gap.

Objective: Based on conservation of resources (COR) and job demands-resources (JD-R) theories, this study examines how punitive supervision impacts job burnout through the sequential mediation of organizational injustice and work alienation.

Design and Methodology: Using a cross-sectional, survey-based design, data were collected from 306 frontline employees in Egyptian hotels. The study focuses on the psychological pathway through which punitive supervisory behavior triggers a cascade of resource loss, ultimately leading to job burnout.

Results: Results of a serial mediation analysis indicated that the relationship between punitive supervision and job burnout was significantly mediated in serial by organizational injustice and work alienation (indirect effect = .09, 95% CI [.04, .15]). This demonstrates that organizational injustice and work alienation jointly mediate the relationship between punitive supervision and burnout, such that punitive supervisory practices increase perceptions of unfairness, which subsequently fosters work alienation and ultimately intensifies employee burnout.

Conclusion and Implications: This study highlights the negative consequences of punitive supervision and extends application of COR and JD-R models by delineating the sequential links from perceived injustice to alienation. To foster positive behavior, change, organizations should implement behavior-based training for supervisors to reduce punitive actions and design policies that institutionalize procedural justice, thereby protecting the emotional resources of employees and mitigating burnout.

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Employee well-being has become a major concern in service-oriented industries, as high job demands and emotional labor often place frontline staff under considerable psychological strain (Angerer, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). In the hospitality sector, employees are particularly vulnerable due to constant customer interactions, performance pressures, and emotional labor, which can compromise both their mental health and job engagement (Bumrah, 2025; Coşkun, 2025; Gharbi et al., 2025; Wallace & Coughlan, 2023). Despite the recognized importance of employee well-being, frontline hospitality staff continue to experience high levels of job burnout, often exacerbated by negative supervisory practices, such as punitive supervision, whose sequential psychological effects remain underexplored (Ahmed et al., 2025; Sarwar et al., 2022; Yu & Xu, 2020).

Job burnout has been a common problem in the hospitality industry, especially in front-line employees who operate under intense customer-confronting and emotional labor circumstances (Coşkun et al., 2025;

Wallace et al., 2023). Punitive supervision with coercive control and disciplinary surveillance is liable to intensify psychological pressure and undermine the welfare of workers (Ahmed et al., 2025; Sarwar et al., 2022). These behaviors are accountable for feelings of organizational injustice and emotional exhaustion (Shoukat et al., 2025) ultimately resulting in burnout—a syndrome that is detrimental to individual and organizational performance (AlZgool et al., 2023). While the link between negative supervision and burnout is recognized, the critical question remains: How exactly does this external pressure transform into internal exhaustion? Specifically, the literature lacks a clear understanding of the sequential psychological chain where perceived unfairness leads to a sense of alienation, eventually depleting an employee's capacity to function.

In the context of the Egyptian hospitality industry, this problem is particularly acute. Egyptian hotels have faced unprecedented operational and economic pressures due to fluctuating tourism demands, often leading to a high-stress work environment where managerial styles may lean toward strict disciplinary control to maintain service standards (Salama et al., 2022). This research addresses this gap by moving beyond simple associations to investigate the complex, step-by-step mechanism that drives burnout in this specific cultural setting.

Despite mounting evidence on abusive or punitive supervision styles, the sequential processes through which punitive supervision leads to burnout through organizational injustice and work alienation) remain largely unexplored in hospitality and service environments (Yu et al., 2020). The core of the problem lies in the fact that employee perceptions of injustice are not static; they often evolve into a broader state of work alienation, yet empirical evidence for this specific serial path remains scarce. Furthermore, empirical studies on work alienation as a psychological mediator of supervisory behavior and employee burnout are still rare (Liu et al., 2025; Sarwar et al., 2022), particularly in Middle Eastern and North African cultures, where hierarchical power distance and managerial control are common. Specifically, the Egyptian culture is characterized by a relatively high-power distance, where hierarchical structures are deeply ingrained in organizational life. In such a context, punitive behaviors by supervisors may not only be more prevalent but may also be perceived by subordinates as a profound violation of procedural and interpersonal justice, leading to deeper psychological withdrawal and alienation.

To address these critical gaps and advance theoretical development in behavioral science, the present study examines a comprehensive serial mediation model. Specifically, it investigates how punitive supervision influences job burnout through the sequential psychological mechanism of organizational injustice and work alienation (Khan et al., 2024; Mensah et al., 2025). Informed by the conservation of resources (COR) and job demands-resources (JD-R) theories, this research employs a cross-sectional, survey-based design among frontline in Egyptian 4-to-5-star hotels. Studying this model in Egypt's premium hotel sector is crucial, as these establishments are the backbone of the national tourism economy. Any decline in employee well-being due to punitive management directly threatens service quality and the industry's recovery in a highly competitive global market.

Using the process macro, this research aims to provide robust empirical evidence for the sequential and indirect influences of punitive supervision. In doing so, it seeks to offer actionable behavioral recommendations for burnout reduction and the promotion of equitable, supportive supervision practices in the hotel sector. Consequently, this study aims to address three research questions:

1. Does punitive supervision directly influence job burnout among frontline hospitality employees?
2. Do organizational injustice and work alienation individually mediate the relationship between punitive supervision and job burnout?
3. Is there a sequential (serial) mediation effect of organizational injustice and work alienation in the relationship between punitive supervision and job burnout?

Literature Review

The literature review highlights the foundational frameworks of conservation of resources (COR) and job demands-resources (JD-R) theories, which provide the theoretical lens for this study. Furthermore, it

integrates prior empirical research that supports the proposed relationships among the key variables: punitive supervision, organizational injustice, work alienation, and job burnout. This synthesis demonstrates how existing evidence informs the sequential mechanisms by which punitive supervisory behaviors can deplete employees' psychological resources, leading to chronic stress and burnout in hospitality work environments.

Theoretical Framework

Punitive supervision is a managerial style characterized by strict control, criticism, and negative feedback, often causing employees to feel devalued or unfairly treated (Zafar, 2022). Job burnout is a psychological syndrome marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged work stress (Maslach et al., 2001). Organizational injustice reflects employees' perception of unfair treatment at work, including distributive, procedural, and interactional unfairness (Akram et al., 2022). Work alienation describes a state in which employees feel disconnected from their work, experiencing a loss of meaning, and control (Ahmed et al., 2025).

This study integrates the COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) with the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001) to explain how punitive supervision leads to job burnout. COR theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources, including social support, fairness, and self-esteem. Psychological stress occurs when resources are threatened, lost, or investment in resources fails to yield gains. Punitive supervision constitutes a threat to key resources, initiating an initial perception of organizational injustice. Employees invest remaining resources to cope; however, when these efforts fail to produce gains, deeper psychological strain emerges, manifesting as work alienation. This sequential depletion culminates in job burnout (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

The JD-R framework complements COR theory by categorizing work characteristics into job demands and job resources. Punitive supervision acts as a high job demand, requiring continuous physical, emotional, and cognitive effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Insufficient job resources, such as supportive supervision or organizational justice, intensify the impact of these demands. The sequential role of organizational injustice and work alienation illustrates how stress from punitive supervision can evolve into chronic psychological distress, ultimately leading to job burnout (Hlado et al., 2025).

The sequential process can be summarized as follows. Punitive supervision threatens key resources, such as fairness and respect, leading to perceptions of organizational injustice (Akram et al., 2022). In response, employees attempt to cope by investing emotional and cognitive resources, but these efforts often fail to produce adequate gains, resulting in resource depletion (Sarnecki, 2024). This continued depletion fosters psychological detachment and loss of engagement, which manifests as work alienation (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Punitive Supervision and Job Burnout

Recently, it has been found that one of the most prevalent organizational stressors that directly contribute to an increase in job burnout is punitive supervision. supervision that entails frequent placing of blame, negative interactions, as well as excessive measures of control, consumes the psychological and emotional resources of an individual, resulting in emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Sarwar et al., 2022). Recently, within the hotel industry, it was found that emotional exhaustion, that is, the first dimension of job burnout, acts as an organizational mediator in the association existing between punitive supervision and poor job performance, which clarifies the fact that this form of supervision exhausts an individual's energy levels, making employees feel perpetually drained (Bumrah, 2025). Moreover, it was found that punitive supervision was a factor that increased job stress among employees. This was identified as the first precursor of burnout. This provides deeper insight into the matter that this form of supervision generates a toxic work environment, which subsequently generates higher levels of exhaustion (Ahmed et al., 2025). Punitive supervision, typified by an excessive focus on criticizing, fault-finding, and threatening, can be considered destructive leadership acting as a substantial job demand in the JD-R model (Bakker et al., 2017). Based on the COR theory, this leadership practice translates into a threat of resource loss (Social

support resources, self-esteem resources, and fair personal treatment resources), which stands as a fundamental cause of stress (Hobfoll et al., 2018). As employees become continually exposed to this job demand of resource threat, the depletion of their psychological resources automatically leads to the fundamental aspects of burnout, which include emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Zafar, 2022). Accordingly, the first hypothesis (H1) is proposed:

H1: Punitive supervision has a positive and significant effect on job burnout.

Organizational Injustice and Job Burnout

Organizational injustice is identified as one of the most influential negative predictors of job burnout, as it is seen as a significant stressor on the organizational level that can potentially endanger the emotional integrity of the exceptional individual. The current research literature attests that the experience of injustice about the distribution of rewards (distributive injustice) or the application of organizational procedures (procedural injustice) is directly related to an increased experience of job burnout (Sarnecki et al., 2024). From the perspective of a mediation framework, job burnout acts as a mediator concerning organizational injustice, placing it in the center of the chain of negative experiences within an organizational setting. Organizational injustice, specifically concerning injustice experienced about outcomes (distributive injustice), plays an influential role in raising the level of job burnout, which acts as an antecedent of the demonstrated "quiet quitting" behavior (Chitamba, 2025). Perceived organizational injustice, which is the feeling that one is not being fairly treated by the organization or its representatives, is considered an important stressor. For the JD-R approach, injustice stands as a chronic job demand requiring ongoing cognitive processing efforts (Sarnecki et al., 2024). Based on the COR framework, injustice serves as an indication of a clear loss of the resource of fairness or an indication of psychological contract breach, leading to a spiraling loss of resources resulting in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which depict job burnout (Greenberg, 1990). Accordingly, the second hypothesis (H2) is proposed:

H2: Organizational injustice has a positive and significant effect on job burnout.

Work Alienation and Job Burnout

Work alienation can be defined as a condition of psycho-behavioral separation from work, which serves as an antecedent state leading to the onset of job burnout. An individual who lacks meaning as well as a lack of power in their work becomes predisposed to emotional exhaustion, since the motivation levels of this individual will continue declining, thus reducing the motivation to invest energy into work, leading to an increased feeling of fatigue (Wang et al., 2025). Recent studies show that work alienation acts as a mediator within the association among other sources of stress, including job insecurity. The association among research studies reveals an affirmative position that feeling detached acts as an intrinsic psychological mechanism of heightened vulnerability to negative consequences, including job burnout (Zhu et al., 2025). Moreover, work alienation exhibits a negative association with work life quality, which serves as an indicator of a deteriorated overall psychological environment predisposing an individual to professional exhaustion (Elsawy et al., 2025). Alienation from work represents an experience of a psychological state of estrangement, powerlessness, and meaninglessness about work (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014). As a psychosocial state, it represents an experience of serious depletion of fundamental psychological resources like feelings of control, efficacy, and meaning, which are fundamental to the preservation of well-being. This process can be explained through COR theory (Ahmed et al., 2025). Alienation from work is, therefore, a direct antecedent of burnout since the experience of lack of meaning and control will undermine intrinsic motivation and resilience, making the worker susceptible to chronic stress from the workplace (Angerer et al., 2003). From this argument, the third hypothesis can be proposed:

H3: Work alienation has a positive and significant effect on job burnout.

Punitive Supervision and Organizational Injustice

Punitive supervision can thus be seen as a kind of organizational injustice known as interactional injustice, which refers to supervisors' improper or unfair behavior. Punitive behaviors, which consist of

improper or unfair acts of blaming or withholding information, violate the precepts of interactional injustice. According to research, organizational injustice acts as a mediator variable that mediates both negative leadership behavior and poor outcomes on the employee side (Sarnecki et al., 2024). Of course, there is research that uses "abusive supervision" as an overall variable. However, the essence of this specific relationship is based on the employees' impression of the supervisor's punitive behavior as an improper act of the company's injustice (Sarwar et al., 2022). Punitive supervision is an unjust form of managerial behavior. Often, it entails arbitrary application of rules, a lack of transparency, and harsh interpersonal interactions, which directly violate the precepts of procedural and interpersonal justice (Day, 1964). Workers perceive this as direct evidence of an unjust organization. The COR theory verifies this relationship by asserting that the supervisor's punitive behavior is an immediate threat or challenge to the resource of fair treatment, which directly leads to organizational injustice (Cropanzano et al., 2002). From this, it can be hypothesized that:

H4: Punitive supervision has a positive and significant effect on organizational injustice.

Punitive Supervision and Work Alienation

The association between supervisory punitive behavior and work alienation represents a strong causal association, with punishment being one of the most robust predictors of job alienation. Punishing behaviors reduce the employee's sense of control (powerlessness) and increase the feeling of separation from the work environment and co-workers (social isolation). In a new study, researchers demonstrated that punitive supervision led to job alienation, which mediates the relationship between punitive supervision and job well-being (Sarwar et al., 2022). This type of supervision also creates resentment and a sense of impotence over what is decided by others, heightening their sense of loss of meaning in work, which is an essential component of the definition of work alienation (Liu, 2025). In addition to creating an experience of unfairness, punitive supervision directly contributes to an experience of alienation from the work itself (Akram et al., 2024). The ongoing criticism and fault-finding erode the employee's sense of competence and worth, fostering feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, which are the major components of alienation (Maslach et al., 2001; Sarwar et al.,2022). This relationship can be explained with the JD-R model, in that, the punitive style acts as a demand that depletes the employee of the psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy, autonomy) necessary for engagement, which, in turn, fosters work alienation (Hakanen et al., 2008). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: Punitive supervision has a positive and significant effect on work alienation.

Organizational Injustice and Work Alienation

Organizational injustice is a powerful antecedent of work alienation, as perceived inequity in the distribution of resources or, the implementation of procedures leads to feelings of animosity toward the organization's mission and objectives (Davis, 2025). A recent study found that organizational injustice directly increases work alienation in high stakes work domains, including the field of nursing. The study showed that unfairness generates a state of alienation and detachment from the work environment (Ojobu, 2024). Additional research has found that work alienation is a mediating variable in the relationships between procedural injustice and work stress. That is, injustice produces alienation, and alienation increases psychological stress and professional stress on the employee (Shoukat et al., 2025). When employees perceive that they are being treated unfairly (organizational injustice), their trust in the organization is diminished, and they respond by psychologically withdrawing from their roles (Colquitt et al., 2001).

This response is a protective mechanism where the employee attempts to conserve remaining resources by detaching from the source of the threat COR Theory. This psychological detachment, driven by the desire to avoid further resource loss, manifests as work alienation—a state of reduced commitment and increased estrangement from the work environment (Usman et al., 2025). It has been established that when employees feel they are experiencing unfair employee treatment (organizational injustice), their trust in their employer decreased, followed by a psychological withdrawal from their job (Colquitt et al. 2001). This represents a protective mechanism when employees try to retain their remaining resources by psychologically dissociating from the source of the threat COR Theory. They become psychologically

withdrawn from the experience of work and minimalized commitment to their job because they want to conserve remaining resources, also called work alienation (Usman et al. 2025). For this reason, the following hypothesis (H5) is proposed:

H6: Organizational injustice has a positive and significant effect on work alienation.

Organizational Injustice and Work Alienation as Serial Mediators

The influence of the four variables illustrates the presence of a sequential, complex process of influence that can be explained through the serial mediation model. Specifically, the negative impact of punitive supervision does not directly cause job burnout but does so through a negative interaction process via a series of variables. The employee may interpret punitive supervision as a form of organizational injustice, particularly interactional injustice. This perception can lead to feelings of work alienation, including a loss of meaning and control, which in turn contributes to job burnout (emotional exhaustion). Recent research has highlighted the value of serial mediation models for examining employee behavioral outcomes; for example, de Angelis et al. (2021) explored sequential mediation involving job insecurity and performance through two mediators, supporting the use of such models to describe the pathway through which punitive leadership affects employees. The primary premise of this study is that punitive supervision initiates a sequential process of resource loss and strain accumulation, beginning with the perception of organizational injustice as a loss of fairness-related resources.

The persistent experience of organizational injustice acts as a prolonged source of stress, leading to further resource depletion and psychological withdrawal, which is conceptualized as work alienation (loss of meaning and control resources). This reflects a cumulative and sequential loss of resources, ultimately resulting in severe job burnout, consistent with the conservation of resources (COR) theory. In summary, this model integrates the organizational-behavioral perspective (injustice) and the psychosocial perspective (alienation) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pathway from destructive leadership to employee health outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Punitive supervision positively and significantly affects job burnout through the serial mediation of organizational injustice and work alienation.

Through an overview of the basic theories and the proposed hypotheses about the relationship between punitive supervision, organizational injustice, based on the relationships among punitive supervision, organizational injustice, work alienation, and job burnout, the authors propose a conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Proposed Conceptual Framework
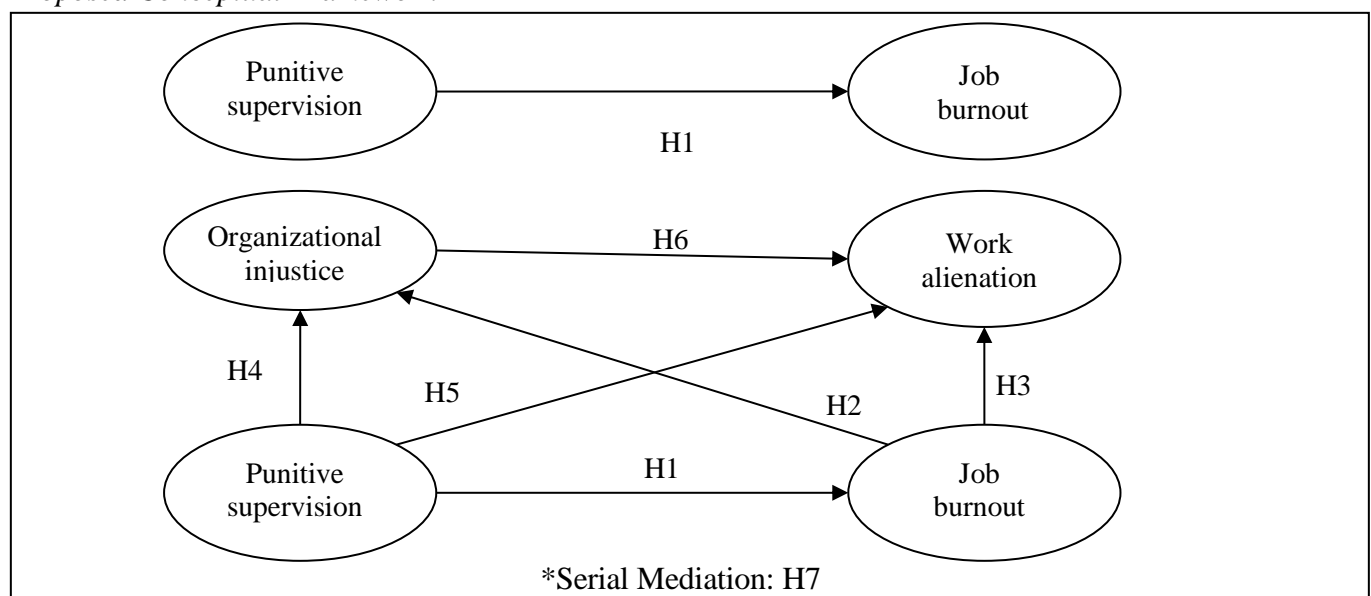
Method

Research Design

The current study adopts a deductive theoretical approach, which involves testing an existing theory by collecting and analyzing new data from participants through statistical methods (Becker, 2012). To investigate the relationships between variables in an experimental context, this study employed a quantitative research method. This method aligns with the scientific principles of the positive paradigm (Creswell, 2014). further, a survey strategy was implemented for data collection and analysis, as it is a widely recognized approach in quantitative research (Bell et al., 2019).

Participants

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period, from March 2025 to May 2025. To ensure a wide reach, the research team contacted the human resources departments at 40 hotels, of which 28 agreed to participate. Approximately 550 survey links were distributed electronically through email and professional social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp and LinkedIn). A total of 306 valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of 55.6%.

To assess potential non-response bias, we compared early and late respondents regarding the main constructs; no significant differences were found, suggesting that non-response bias is not a major concern for this study. The demographic profile of the 306 respondents indicated that (62%) were male and (38%) were female. Most participants (55%) were aged between 25 and 35 years, and 70% held a bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding tenure, participants had average work experience of (4.5) years in their current roles.

This procedure followed a non-probability convenience sampling approach. Participants were eligible if they (1) were employed full-time as frontline staff in a four- or five-star hotel in Egypt and (2) had worked under their current supervisor for at least six months. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of full anonymity and confidentiality. To reduce the risk of common method bias (CMB), procedural remedies were implemented in accordance with Podsakoff et al. (2024). Respondents were guaranteed anonymity, informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and exposed to varied response formats where appropriate.

Instruments

Punitive supervision construction was measured using a 5-item questionnaire adapted from Zafar et al. (2022). An example item is, "My supervisor often ridicules me in front of others." Organizational injustice: The 10-item scale developed by Colquitt (2001) was used, consisting of a 6-item procedural justice subscale and a 4-item distributive justice subscale. Interpersonal and informational justice items were strategically excluded because our theoretical focus is on the structural and outcome-based consequences of punitive supervision. All items were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate greater injustice. A sample item is: "Does your outcome reflect the effort you have put into your work?" Work alienation is measured using a 6-item scale created by Kanungo (1983), with an example item stating, "I feel little commitment to my work." Job burnout was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2008). A sample item is: "I feel emotionally drained from my work."

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with anchors adapted to match each construct (e.g., from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree or from never to always). The construct reliability, validity, and factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26) in conjunction with Hayes' (2022) PROCESS macro. Descriptive statistics, correlation matrices, and Cronbach's alpha were first computed to assess the dataset and the reliability of the measurement scales. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then conducted using AMOS to validate the distinctiveness and construct validity of the four latent variables. Direct hypotheses (H1–H6) were tested via simple and multiple regression analyses, whereas the serial mediation hypothesis

(H7) was evaluated using Model 6 of PROCESS. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples generated bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, and mediation was considered significant if the interval excluded zero.

Results

Sample Description

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, and work experience.

Table 1

Demographic Description of Respondents

Demographics	Category	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	190	62.1
	Female	116	37.9
Age	21–30 years	95	31.1
	31–40 years	135	44.1
	41 years and above	76	24.8
Work experience of	1–5 years	90	29.4
employees	6–10 years	110	36.0
(years)	11–15 years	65	21.2
	More than 16th places	41	13.4

The study included 306 respondents. The majority were male (62.1%), with most participants aged between 31 and 40 years (44.1%). A significant portion of respondents had 1 to 10 years of work experience (65.4%). These results highlight a diverse range of ages and professional experience, providing a well-rounded perspective on organizational practices. All research variables met the criteria for reliability and convergent validity, as shown in Table 2. The factor loadings exceeded the .50 threshold, indicating that each indicator adequately reflects its latent construct. The composite reliability values (.90–.96) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (.88 – .95) were above the recommended level of .70, confirming strong internal consistency. In addition, the AVE values (.59 – .73) exceeded the .50 cut-off, indicating that more than half of the variance in the indicators is explained by their respective constructs. Therefore, the measurement instruments used in this study are reliable and valid for further analysis.

Table 2

Validity and Reliability of Scales

Items	Factor loading	Cronbach	CR	AVE
Punitive supervision (PS)				
PS1	.87	.88	.91	.73
PS2	.81			
PS3	.86			
PS4	.80			
PS5	.85			
Organizational injustice (OI)				
OI1	.90	.92	.94	.64
OI2	.80			
OI3	.91			
OI4	.83			
OI5	.91			
OI6	.81			
OI7	.91			
OI8	.93			
OI9	.91			
OI10	.84			

Table 2 *(Continued)*

Items	Factor loading	Cronbach	*CR*	*AVE*
Work alienation (WA)				
WA1	.81	.89	.90	.59
WA2	.75			
WA3	.70			
WA4	.87			
WA5	.85			
WA6	.84			
Job burnout (JB)				
JB1	.71	.95	.96	.67
JB2	.85			
JB3	.70			
JB4	.80			
JB5	.75			
JB6	.81			
JB7	.74			
JB8	.76			
JB9	.80			
JB10	.84			

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. Punitive supervision was slightly below the midpoint of the five-point scale ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.81$), indicating moderate variance. Organizational injustice was relatively low ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.77$), while work alienation was slightly above the midpoint ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.25$), and job burnout was moderate ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.05$). All correlations were positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level, supporting the initial hypotheses (H1–H6). Specifically, punitive supervision was positively associated with job burnout ($r = .25$), organizational injustice with job burnout ($r = .28$), and work alienation with job burnout ($r = .21$). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the fornell-larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The square roots of the average variance extracted exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, and all HTMT values were below 0.78, indicating adequate discriminant validity among constructs.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Discriminant Validity (N = 306).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
Punitive supervision	2.81	.81	.85			
Organizational injustice	1.68	.77	.23**	.81		
Work alienation	3.15	1.25	.20**	.21**	.78	
Job burnout	2.55	1.05	.25**	.28**	.25**	.82

*Note.* $* p < .05.$, $** p < .01.$ $*** p < .001.$

Table 4 presents the direct relationships proposed in hypotheses H1 to H6. All direct paths were statistically significant, with positive estimates supporting the hypothesized directions. Punitive supervision was a significant predictor of job burnout ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$), supporting H1. Organizational injustice was positively associated with job burnout (H2: $\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), and work alienation also significantly predicted job burnout (H3: $\beta = .10$, $p < .05$). These results indicate that punitive supervision and its related mediators are meaningful predictors of burnout, although the magnitudes suggest that burnout is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by multiple organizational factors. Practically, even small increases in perceived punitive behavior or organizational injustice may statistically elevate an employee's risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion (see Figure 2).

Table 4

Direct Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Direct effect	β	*S.E.*	*t*	Outcome
H1	PS → JB	.23**	.05	3.40	Supported
H2	OI → JB	.28**	.08	3.54	Supported
H3	WA → JB	.10*	.03	2.21	Supported
H4	PS → OI	.21**	.06	4.17	Supported
H5	PS → WA	.25**	.09	2.34	Supported
H6	OI → WA	.28**	.08	3.13	Supported

Note. PS = Punitive supervision, OI = Organizational injustice, WA = Work alienation, JB = Job burnout, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2

Results Model
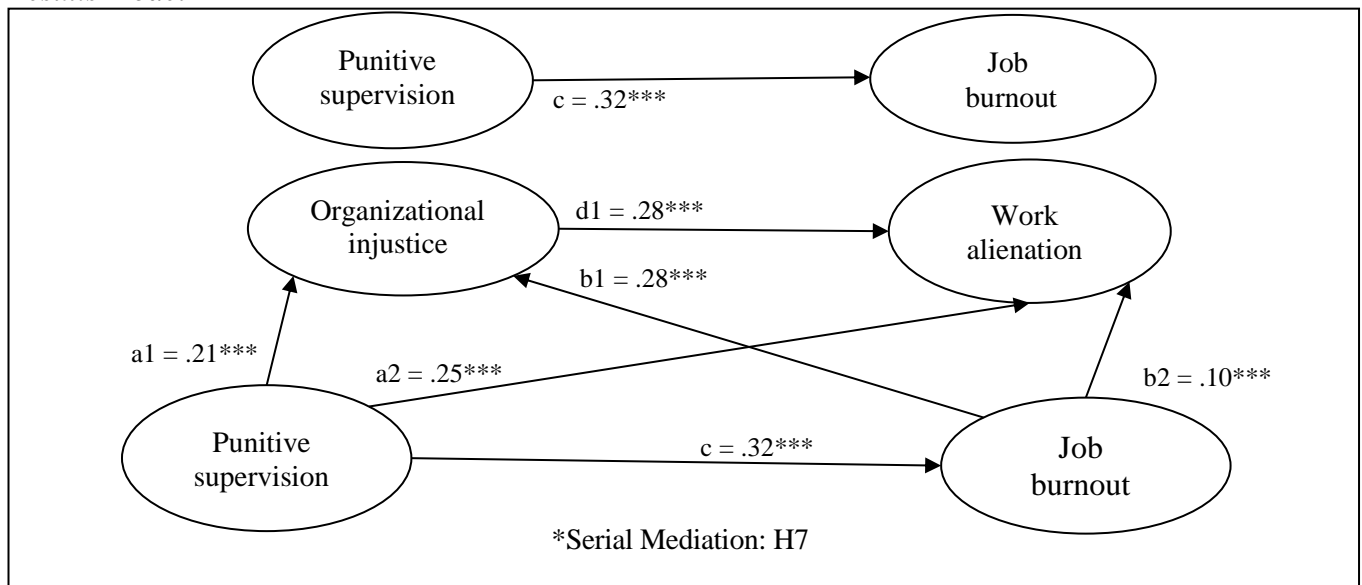
Note. *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 7 was supported, as the sequential indirect effect of punitive supervision on job burnout through organizational injustice and work alienation was significant (indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI [0.04, 0.15]; see Table 5). Although the effect size is small, these results provide empirical evidence for a sequential psychological process: punitive supervision reduces perceptions of organizational fairness, which increases work alienation, ultimately contributing to higher job burnout. These findings highlight the mediators' role in transmitting the negative effects of destructive leadership to employee outcomes.

Table 5

Indirect Hypothesis Testing

Indirect effects	Effect	Boot SE	95% confidence interval	Figure path
Punitive supervision → organizational injustice → job burnout (Simple mediation)	.06	.02	[.02, .11]	a1b1
Punitive supervision → work alienation → job burnout (Simple mediation)	.03	.01	[.00, .06]	a2b2
Punitive supervision → organizational injustice → work alienation → job burnout (Serial mediation - H7)	.00	.00	[.00, .01]	a1b1 + a2b2 + a1d1b2
Total indirect effects	.09	.02	[.04, .15]	

Note. Boot SE = bootstrap standard error. a1 = effect of the independent variable on the first mediator, b1 = effect of the first mediator on the dependent variable, a2 = effect of the independent variable on the second mediator, b2 = effect of the second mediator on the dependent variable, and d1 = effect of the first mediator on the second mediator.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the sequential mechanisms through which punitive supervision affects job burnout among frontline hotel employees in Egypt. The findings confirm that the impact of punitive supervision on employee well-being is not direct but rather transferred sequentially through perceptions of organizational injustice and work alienation.

From the perspective of job demands-resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), punitive supervision acts as a critical job demand that drains employee energy. Our results illustrate that this demand triggers a health-impairment process, where the initial stressor (punitive oversight) leads to psychological strain (alienation) and eventual exhaustion (burnout). Furthermore, through the lens of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), punitive behaviors represent a threat to social and emotional resources. To protect their remaining resources, employees may psychologically withdraw, manifesting as organizational injustice and alienation, ultimately culminating in burnout as their resource pool is depleted. The results indicate that punitive supervision positively predicts job burnouts, and that organizational injustice and work alienation also significantly contribute to burnout. These findings highlight the interconnected role of managerial behavior, employees' perceptions of fairness, and psychological states in shaping emotional exhaustion. Specifically, employees who experience a punitive supervisory style tend to perceive greater injustice within the organization, which in turn increases feelings of alienation at work, ultimately elevating the risk of chronic burnout. Finally, the sequential mediation analysis confirms that the influence of punitive supervision on job burnout occurs through organizational injustice and work alienation (H7), providing a more comprehensive understanding than simple mediation models. This pathway demonstrates the nuanced psychological mechanism by which destructive leadership translates into long-term employee stress and burnout.

Limitations

Although this study provides valuable insights, it is subject to several limitations that must be considered. First, self-report bias: The reliance on self-reported survey data, despite the use of a "cross-sectional, survey-based design to minimize common method bias, may still be susceptible to social desirability and common source variation. Future research could include objective measures of job performance or turnover intentions to triangulate the findings. Second, generalizability. The sample was exclusively taken from 4 to 5-star hotels in Egypt. While this provides strong relevant insights into the hospitality sector in the Middle East, specific cultural and organizational factors may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographic regions or industries. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the relationships: although data collection took time, the relationships examined are still correlational and do not establish definitive causality. Longitudinal studies with several measurement points are needed to confirm the directionality of sequential effects over a longer period. Finally, omitted variables. The model, although robust, does not account for all potential mediators or moderators. Future research could explore the role of employee flexibility, organizational support, or cultural factors (e.g., power distance) as potential boundary conditions for the proposed relationships.

Implications for Behavioral Science

The findings show that punitive supervision functions as a high-intensity job demand that initiates a progressive depletion of employees' psychological resources, ultimately leading to burnout. This pattern is consistent with the JD-R model, which posits that excessive job demands exhaust energy and impair well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001), and with The Conservation of Resources theory, which explains how sustained exposure to stressors produces loss spirals across cognitive and emotional resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The results further indicate that punitive supervision first erodes fairness perceptions, which then evolve into organizational injustice as a form of cognitive strain, in line with justice theory emphasizing employees' evaluative responses to managerial treatment (Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2002; Greenberg, 1990). Empirical evidence from hospitality and healthcare contexts similarly shows

that punishment-based leadership intensifies injustice perceptions and psychological distress (Akram et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2024; Sarnecki et al., 2024).

The findings also demonstrate that organizational injustice leads to burnout through work alienation, confirming alienation as a central psychological mechanism in this process. As theorized by Kanungo (1983) and O'Donohue and Nelson (2014), alienation reflects a loss of meaning, belonging, and control, and the results show that injustice accelerates this psychological withdrawal before emotional exhaustion emerges. This pattern aligns with evidence that alienation mediates the effects of adverse work conditions on employee well-being in hospitality and other service sectors (Sarwar et al., 2022; Sobaih et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Burnout appears as the behavioral endpoint of cumulative cognitive and emotional strain rather than an immediate response to punitive leadership, consistent with classical burnout models (Hakanen et al., 2008; Maslach et al., 2001) and recent hospitality research linking injustice and alienation to exhaustion and turnover-related outcomes (Salama et al., 2022; Wallace & Coughlan, 2023).

Conclusion

The current study offers strong evidence that punitive supervision is a significant predictor of job burnout among frontline hotel employees, and this impact is sequentially mediated by organizational injustice and work alienation. Ultimately, this research underscores that mitigating burnout requires a behavioral shift in organizational culture—one that prioritizes psychological safety and procedural transparency. By addressing the root punitive supervisory behaviors that trigger alienation, hospitality leaders can foster a resilient workforce capable of maintaining high service standards without sacrificing mental health.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
Ethical Approval Statement: This study was conducted following the guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration. Approval was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee of the Higher Institute for Administrative Sciences, Egypt (Code: HIAS/REC/25-002, dated March 15, 2025). All participants provided voluntary informed consent, confirming that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, data confidentiality, and their right to decline participation.
Use of AI in the Paper: Generative AI tools (e.g., Google Gemini, ChatGPT) were used only for language editing, including clarity, tone, and grammar. All core content, analysis, and conclusions are the original research work.

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