



EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK–LIFE BALANCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK STRESS AND POSITIVITY IN THE TURKISH CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Mehmet Ali Canbolat

Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Türkiye

e-mail: malican70@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-1235-9013

Abdurrahman Gümrah

Selçuk University, Türkiye

e-mail: agumrah@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-2588-7448

Felizia Arni Rudiawarni

University of Surabaya, Indonesia

e-mail: felizia@staff.ubaya.ac.id

ORCID: 0000-0003-1116-4804

Tuğba Kayıkcıoğlu

Independent Researcher, Türkiye

e-mail: tgb.kayikcioglu@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-7292-6054

Corresponding author

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Abstract

Research background: Construction sector employees live in difficult conditions and usually on construction sites. In this process, especially situations such as carelessness cause occupational accidents. In this respect, the research focuses on the work-life balance in the construction sector.

Purpose: The study aimed to determine the mediating role of the work-life balance in the relationship between work stress and positivity.

Research methodology: The research, which tested the mediating effect of the work-life balance (WLB) on the effects of job stress (JS) on positivity (PO) perceived by construction workers in Turkey, was

conducted with 389 participants. The research has a quantitative design, and the data were obtained through a survey method. After reliability, frequency, and correlation analyses, the data were subjected to regression analysis using the Process Macro Model 4 developed by Hayes, and the proposed hypotheses were tested.

Results: According to the analysis findings, it was determined that JS affects WLB and WLB affects PO positively and significantly. The total effect of JS on PO was not significant. However, when WLB was included in the model, the direct effect of JS on PO became significant, and the indirect effect through WLB was also significant. Finally, it was determined that the indirect effect of JS on PO was significant, thus WLB mediated the relationship between JS and PO. The fully standardized effect size of the detected mediation effect is close to the “high” value. Accordingly, it can be concluded that WLB has a significant impact on construction workers’ tendency towards PO by reducing JS.

Novelty: Since the proposed research model has not previously been examined in the construction industry, this study addresses an important gap in the literature. By investigating the mediating role of work–life balance in the relationship between job stress and positivity among construction workers, the study provides novel evidence and contributes to a better understanding of employee well-being in this sector.

Keywords: work stress, positivity, work-life balance

JEL classification: M10, M12, M19

Introduction

While the construction sector is expanding rapidly due to global population growth and urbanization, it also makes a significant contribution to national economies. However, it is widely recognized that working conditions in this sector are particularly demanding. These challenging conditions can lead to considerable human, organizational, and economic losses (Bilim, Çelik, 2018, p. 726), and are associated with increased occupational accidents and related mortality rates (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2023, p. 2). Indeed, the construction industry is consistently reported as one of the sectors with the highest rates of work-related injuries and fatalities (Jung et al., 2020, p. 1). In this context, job stress (JS) is a critical factor that negatively affects both employee performance and safety outcomes (Leung et al., 2016b, p. 6). Moreover, high levels of JS have been associated with psychological problems such as depression (Mira, 2011; Putera, Martiana, 2022). Managerial support is identified as a key motivational resource that helps construction workers maintain effective performance under such demanding conditions (Leung et al., 2016a, p. 7), and may contribute to more positive psychological states.

In addition to these psychological pressures, construction workers are exposed to physically demanding working environments characterized by heavy manual labour, repetitive

tasks, noise, dust, and adverse climatic conditions (Devi, Kiran, 2014, p. 4944). In particular, extreme temperature, humidity, protective clothing requirements, wind, and intense physical exertion contribute to heat stress, which may increase susceptibility to various health problems (Acharya et al., 2018, p. 5). Furthermore, long working hours, weekend shifts, and non-standard schedules contribute to emotional exhaustion and elevated levels of job stress among construction employees. Consequently, maintaining a balance between work and family life has become increasingly important, particularly in an industry where burnout, anxiety, and deteriorating health conditions are prevalent (Chan et al., 2020, p. 2).

It is accepted that work-family conflicts have emerged with the increasing participation of female employees in the labour force, especially since the 1960s, and have led to unsustainable/poor WLB (Kotera et al., 2020, p. 291). Indeed, work and family are two of the most important factors in human life (Saeed, Farooqi, 2014, p. 9). Therefore, achieving WLB is an issue that needs to be emphasised in the construction industry in terms of both organisational effectiveness and occupational health (Lingard et al., 2007, p. 807). In recent years, WLB has received increasing attention in the construction industry due to its simultaneous effects on employee mental health, labour turnover and project performance. Likewise, work-life imbalance is now recognised as a persistent and dangerous source of stress in the construction industry worldwide (Tijani et al., 2022, p. 2671).

From an institutional perspective, although occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations aim to reduce risks and improve working conditions in the construction sector, their effectiveness largely depends on enforcement mechanisms and compliance levels. Prior research indicates that although many countries have established comprehensive legal frameworks, differences in implementation and monitoring continue to contribute to high accident rates in the construction industry (Watts, 2009; Hinze et al., 2013; Guo et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2020). In Turkey, occupational safety regulations have been strengthened in recent years; however, challenges related to enforcement and safety culture remain, similar to those observed in many developing countries. Compared to developed countries, where safety standards are more strictly implemented, these differences may increase workers' exposure to occupational risks and stress.

In this study, the mediating role of a work-life balance in the relationship between job stress and positivity was examined among construction workers. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no prior study has investigated these three variables together, which highlights the originality of the research. The study is based on the assumption that WLB may serve as a key mechanism through which job stress is transformed into positive psychological

outcomes. Construction workers often experience prolonged separation from their families while working under challenging on-site conditions, including limited living environments such as modular bunkhouses or temporary shelters. Although such conditions naturally increase job stress, it is assumed that an effective work–life balance may help employees maintain a more positive psychological outlook.

This study focuses specifically on the Turkish construction industry, where working conditions are shaped not only by physically demanding tasks but also by a distinct occupational, legal, and organizational framework. Although occupational health and safety regulations exist in Turkey, as in many other countries, their effectiveness depends on enforcement practices, organizational compliance, and safety culture. Therefore, in addition to physically demanding conditions, the institutional and regulatory context plays a crucial role in shaping employees' stress levels and well-being. Within this framework, understanding how job stress is transformed into positive psychological outcomes through a work–life balance is particularly important in the Turkish construction sector.

1. Conceptual framework

According to the Turkish Language Association dictionary, stress is used in the sense of mental tension (Turkish Language Society [TDK], 2023). JS refers to the stress experienced by the employee in the organisation due to individual, organisational or various reasons (Tezcan, 2022, p. 32). JS is forcing the mind and body to deviate from its classical functions after the interaction of employees with their jobs (Beehr, Newman, 1978, p. 666). JS can also be expressed as the negative reaction of employees to excessive pressure or other types of demands imposed on them (Kerdpitak, Jermisittiparsert, 2020, p. 587). The needs, expectations and values of employees may change over time. Something that is important today may become unimportant tomorrow. This situation indicates that job stress has a dynamic structure. For this reason, the stress factor is an issue that should be taken into consideration in organisations (Schuler, 1980, p. 192). As a matter of fact, JS is a costly factor for organisations (Saeed, Farooqi, 2014, p. 10). JS is a situation that affects emotions and the thinking process. The gap between the available resources and the requirements of the job causes JS, which makes people feel more negative and dissatisfied (Irawanto et al., 2021, p. 4). General stress situations such as financial problems, family problems or illness etc. can also cause JS (Kerdpitak, Jermisittiparsert, 2020, p. 587). JS is common in almost every sector, especially in the construction industry (Langdon, Sawang, 2018, p. 1). Stress factors that construction workers may encounter are divided into

five groups: task-related, organisational, personal, interpersonal and physical (Leung et al., 2010, p. 1095).

On the other hand, supporting the highest level of functionality of the person is among the main objectives of positive psychology (Özhan, Üzbe Atalay, 2022, p. 2). As cited by Çıkrıkçı et al. (2015, p. 58) from the research of Peterson (2000) and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology is “a discipline that focuses on teaching people how to develop their positive characteristics throughout their lives so that they can hold on to life and be on the positive side of life”. Positive psychology places the improvements that make the person strong at a central level (Çıkrıkçı et al., 2015, p. 59). Recently, one of the prominent concepts in the field of positive psychology is “positivity” (Duy, Yıldız, 2020, p. 3). PO was first expressed as “positive thinking” and later started to be used in the literature in the style of “positive orientation” or “positivity” (Yıldız, 2016, p. 217). The common point of most views on PO is the idea that it involves having positive expectations for one’s future (Scheier, Carver, 1993, p. 26). In general, PO can be defined as having a positive orientation towards oneself, one’s past experiences and future, or evaluating this situation positively (Yıldız, 2016, p. 218). PO corresponds to the latent dimension underlying self-esteem, life satisfaction and optimism, which is affected by people’s cognitions, emotions and actions (Bakır, 2017, p. 30). Kozma et al. (2000) draw attention to PO as the main determinant of subjective well-being. Employees with high levels of PO are expected to have high work performance, well-being and productivity (Dalgıç, 2019, p. 76; Shahid, Muchiri, 2019).

Due to time constraints such as long working hours, flexible working schedules or overtime work, individuals may reduce the time they need to devote to their families, which may negatively affect their work and family life (Demircan, Turunç, 2017, p. 49). As a matter of fact, Adah et al. (2023), in their bibliometric research on the construction sector, identified the prominent factors affecting the WLB of employees as organisational culture, salary, heavy workload, long working hours and inflexible working conditions. Employees may need to make some strict decisions because work and life have different demands. This situation may create an excessive burden on the employee and cause a conflict between work and life (Bekmezci et al., 2021, p. 5). For this reason, it is of great importance to keep two different platforms such as work and life in balance. WLB is one of the most fundamental issues that have an impact on employees’ potential in work life, families and organisations (Şahin-Söylemez, Alpar, 2022, p. 228). The concept of WLB is built on the idea that work life and private life complement each other in providing excellence in one’s life (Irawanto et al., 2021, p. 3). WLB generally refers to

the state of balance between an individual's work-related demands and personal life demands (Kuzulu et al., 2013, p. 91).

2. Hypotheses of the research

In the literature, the differences between JS and WLB according to gender (Solanki, Mandaviya, 2021), the relationships between JS, job satisfaction and job performance (Sullivan, Bhagat, 1992), the effect of WLB and JS on turnover intention (Javed et al., 2014) and the relationships between JS, WLB, well-being and work-life conflict (Bell et al., 2012) have been tried to be examined. In addition, researchers have found that there is a negative relationship between JS and WLB (Aruldoss et al., 2020; Irawanto et al., 2021), there is no significant relationship between JS and WLB (Saeed, Farooqi, 2014), and JS and a work-life imbalance affect turnover intention (Kerdpitak, Jermstittiparsert, 2020). Adah et al. (2023) suggest that WLB and JS are among the issues that need to be investigated in the construction sector. Finally, researchers have found that JS has an effect on WLB (Yavuz, Doğan, 2018; Serbest, 2024). The hypothesis put forward in line with this information is as follows:

H1: Job stress has an effect on work-life balance.

Researchers have found that WLB plays a mediating role in the effect of PO on job satisfaction (Orkibi, Brandt, 2015). Bakır (2017) found that stress coping techniques have a significant effect on PO. In addition, researchers have found that income level affects life satisfaction and PO level (Şekeroğlu, 2019), and climate of fear negatively affects PO (Dalgıç, 2019). There are also studies examining the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and PO (Yıldız, 2016), the mediating effect of intolerance to uncertainty, depression, anxiety and stress in the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and PO (Bakioğlu et al., 2021), and the mediating role of hope in the relationship between PO and psychological well-being (Özhan, Üzbe Atalay, 2022). The hypothesis put forward in line with this information is as follows:

H2: Work-life balance has an effect on positivity.

In the light of the literature, a negative relationship between PO and JS has been identified (Yavuz, İlhan, 2020; Bakioğlu et al., 2021). There are also studies on WLB and perfectionism level (Ayseşli, Aşkın, 2022), organisational commitment (Malone, Issa, 2013) and work-life conflict (Umer, Zia-ur-Rehman, 2013). Haar et al. (2014) found that there is a positive relationship between job and life satisfaction of individuals with high WLB. Low WLB may

lead to increased JS and decreased quality of life (Kotera et al., 2020). Attar et al. (2020) found that WLB does not have a regulatory role in the effect of JS on job satisfaction. In addition, it was determined that WLB has a partial mediating effect on the effect of work-life policies on organisational commitment (Oyewobi et al., 2022).

H3: Job stress has an effect on positivity.

H4: Work–life balance has a mediating effect on the effect of job stress on positivity.

The research model developed in line with the hypotheses put forward is as shown in Figure 1.

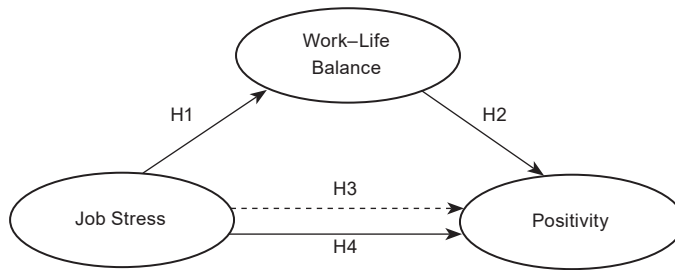


Figure 1. Research model

Source: authors' own elaboration.

3. Methodology

The research was designed in a quantitative research design in order to determine the perceptions of JS, WLB and PO of the employees working in the building construction sector and the questionnaire technique was used. Before starting the study, ethics committee approval was obtained from the scientific research and publication ethics committee of a university with decision number 04-2022/66.

3.1. Population and sample

The population of the research consists of construction workers working in building constructions of contractors operating in Turkey. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute [TÜİK] data, according to the building licences obtained in 2023, 339 buildings with a total of 1,661 flats in Karaman, 3,722 buildings with a total of 20,195 flats in Konya and 138,270 buildings with a total of 843,077 flats in Turkey. On the other hand, in the same year, the

number of paid employees in building construction was recorded as 1,124,955 (TÜİK, 2023). In this case, according to the simple ratio proportion calculation, it can be assumed that 33,040 people in the TR52 region, which includes Karaman and Konya, work as wage earners in building construction. In cases where the research population is known, it is considered sufficient to reach 384 participants for a research sample according to the calculation formula suggested by Cochran (1977) for the sample calculation. For this reason, in order to reach at least 384 valid data collection forms, 471 data collection forms were obtained as a result of the study conducted by the researcher with construction workers working in randomly selected building constructions in the TR52 region between September–December 2023. Uniform and invalid forms were cancelled and the research was conducted with 389 data collection forms.

3.2. Data collection tools

The data collection form comprises four sections: (1) demographic characteristics with 5 questions, (2) an 8-item positivity scale, (3) a 5-item job stress scale, and (4) a 20-item work-life balance scale.

The positivity scale was developed by Caprara et al. (2012) and its Turkish validity and reliability was performed by Çıkrıkçı et al. (2015). The 6th item of the scale consisting of a single dimension is the reverse coded item (Cronbach Alpha value was calculated as 0.68 in this study).

The basis of the scale used to measure JS is a scale consisting of 7 statements developed by House and Rizzo (1972). Çelik (2013) carried out the Turkish adaptation of the scale in his research. Yurttaş et al. (2020), on the other hand, recalculated the factor loads in their study and excluded items 2 and 4 from the scale, and then determined the validity and reliability of the 5-item job stress scale (the Cronbach Alpha value was calculated as 0.79 in this study).

Finally, the scale used to measure WLB is the work-life balance scale developed by Apaydın (2011) in Turkish. Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20 in the scale are reverse coded items. (the Cronbach Alpha value was calculated as 0.77 in this study). All scales were preferred among the scales with high validity and reliability and were used with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strictly disagree to 5-strictly agree.

3.3. Findings

Firstly, a frequency analysis was performed for the distribution of demographic characteristics of the participants. Accordingly, the findings obtained are as shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 20–30 (33.7%), high school graduates (53.7%), with 6–10 years of occupational experience (26.7%), married (54.2%) and all of them were male.

Table 1. Demographic findings (N = 389)

Specification		Frequency	Percent	Specification		Frequency	Percent
Age	19 and under	66	17.0	Occupational Experience (years)	0–1	17	4.4
	20–30	131	33.7		2–5	90	23.1
	31–40	90	23.1		6–10	104	26.7
	41–50	100	25.7		11–20	96	24.7
	51 and over	2	0.5		Over 20	82	21.1
	Total	389	100.0		Total	389	100.0
Education Level	Primary education	148	38.0	Marital Status	Married	211	54.2
	High School	209	53.7		Single	178	45.8
	University	27	6.9		Total	389	100.0
	Abandonment	5	1.3	Gender	Male	389	100.0
	Total	389	100.0		Total	389	100.0

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Table 2 shows the findings of the correlation analyses conducted to determine the relationships between the variables before the hypothesis tests.

Table 2. Correlations (N = 389)

Specification	Mean	Std. Deviation	JS	PO	WLB
JS	3.16	0.726	1		
PO	3.18	0.474	−0.050	1	
WLB	3.17	0.413	0.597*	0.208*	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

According to Table 2, there is a positive and moderately significant relationship between JS and WLB and a positive and weakly significant relationship between WLB and PO. However, there is no significant relationship between JS and PO ($p > 0.01$).

Regression analyses based on the bootstrap technique were conducted to test whether there is a mediating role of WLB in the effect of the level of JS felt by construction sector employees as a result of intense work tempo on PO. These analyses were conducted using

Process Macro (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2018). Model 4 has a technique that can test all hypotheses simultaneously. The Bootstrap 5000 resampling option was used in the analyses. Table 3 presents the findings of the analyses.

Table 3. Regression analysis results related to mediation test (N = 389)

Estimation Variables	Outcome Variables					
	M (WLB)			Y (PO)		
		<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>
X (JS)	<i>a</i>	0.340*	0.023	<i>c'</i>	−0.177	0.039
M (WLB)	—	—	—	<i>b</i>	0.424*	0.069
Constant	<i>i_M</i>	2.098*	0.075	<i>i_Y</i>	2.389*	0.178
		$R^2 = 0.357$			$R^2 = 0.09$	
		$F(1; 387) = 214.817; p < 0.001$			$F(2; 386) = 19.21; p < 0.001$	

* $p < 0.001$; *se*: Standard Error. Unstandardized beta coefficients (*b*) are reported.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

According to Table 3, JS has a significant and positive effect on WLB ($b = 0.34$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.2945, 0.3857], $t = 14.657$, $p < 0.001$). JS explains approximately 36% ($R^2 = 0.357$) of the change in WLB. According to these findings, hypothesis H1 is accepted. It was also found that WLB significantly and positively affected PO ($b = 0.424$, 95% CI [0.2879, 0.5609], $t = 6.113$, $p < 0.001$). In this case, H2 hypothesis was accepted. The total effect of JS on PO was not significant ($b = -0.033$, 95% CI [−0.0977, 0.0326], $p = 0.327$). However, when WLB was included as a mediating variable, the direct effect of JS on PO became significant ($b = -0.177$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, JS and WLB explained approximately 9% of the variance in PO ($R^2 = 0.0905$). These findings indicate that the effect of JS on PO occurs through WLB. Accordingly, H3 is rejected. Finally, it was found that the indirect effect of JS on PO was significant, thus WLB mediated the relationship between JS and PO ($b = 0.144$, 95% CI [0.0886, 0.2057]). At the same time, the lower and upper confidence intervals do not include zero (0) value. This is an important prerequisite for hypothesis acceptance. The fully standardized effect size of the mediation effect is 0.22 and it can be said that this value is close to “high” (Gürbüz, 2021). In this case, the H4 hypothesis of the study is accepted.

4. Conclusion and discussion

This research tested the mediating effect of Work-Life Balance (WLB) on Job Stress (JS) perceived by construction workers, affecting their Positivity (PO). The study involved 389 participants. The research uses a quantitative design, and the data were obtained through a questionnaire method. The data obtained were subjected to a regression analysis through the Process Macro Model 4 developed by Hayes after a frequency and correlation analyses and the hypotheses put forward were tested. Firstly, according to the results of the frequency analysis, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 20–30 (33.7%), high school graduates (53.7%), with 6–10 years of occupational experience (26.7%), married (54.2%) and all of them were male. According to the results of the correlation analysis, it was determined that there was a positive and moderately significant relationship between JS and WLB. Solanki and Mandaviya (2021) and Javed et al. (2014) also found the existence of a positive relationship between JS and WLB. However, Bell et al. (2012), Aruldoss et al. (2020) and (Irawanto et al., 2021) found a negative relationship between JS and WLB. Attar et al. (2020) and (Saeed, Farooqi, 2014) found that there is no statistically significant relationship between JS and WLB. In this case, research findings show similarities and differences with the literature. This may be due to sectoral or cultural differences. In order to ensure WLB, a person may experience JS with the intention of earning more income by working harder. For example, a person may earn additional income by working more overtime in order to meet the needs of his/her family. In this case, while JS may increase, it may also provide WLB. According to the correlation analysis findings, it was also found that there is a positive and weakly significant relationship between WLB and PO. Orkibi and Brandt (2015) also found a positive relationship between WLB and PO. The findings of the research coincide with the limited research results in the literature. In this case, although there is no generalisation, it can be assumed that people with PO will be more successful in achieving WLB. However, no significant relationship was found between JS and PO. On the other hand, Bakioğlu et al. (2021) and Yavuz and İlhan (2020) found that there is a negative relationship between stress and PO. JS or stress is a negative variable and PO is a positive variable. It can be accepted as an expected situation that these variables are not in a relationship with each other or have an inverse relationship.

According to the results of the regression analysis in which the hypotheses were tested, it was determined that JS has a significant and positive effect on WLB. JS explains approximately 36% of the change in WLB. According to these findings, hypothesis H1 is accepted. In the literature, the research findings of Yavuz and Doğan (2018) are similar, while according to

the research findings of Serbest (2024), JS has a negative effect on WLB. Therefore, it can be said that JS can be expected to have a positive or negative effect on WLB according to the sector. In addition, it was determined that WLB has a significant and positive effect on PO. In this case, H2 hypothesis is also accepted. There is no research in the literature to discuss these findings. In addition, it has been determined that JS has no significant effect on PO in the absence of WLB, which is the mediating variable. According to these findings, H3 is rejected. Bakioğlu et al. (2021) found that stress, depression and anxiety have a negative effect on PO. This may be due to the differences between JS and general stress. After all, JS may end when a job is completed, while general stress may continue.

Finally, it was determined that the indirect effect of JS on PO was significant, thus WLB mediated the relationship between JS and PO. The full standardized effect size value of the mediating effect was found to be close to “high”. In this case, the H4 hypothesis of the study was accepted. Oyewobi et al. (2022) also found that WLB has a partial mediating effect on the effect of work-life policies on organisational commitment. In addition, low WLB can lead to increased JS and decreased quality of life (Kotera et al., 2020). Attar et al. (2020) found that WLB did not have a moderating role in the effect of JS on job satisfaction. Orkibi and Brandt (2015) found that WLB plays a mediating role in the relationship between PO and job satisfaction. In line with these findings, although there is no research similar to the research model in the literature, it can be concluded that WLB is an important mediator or moderator variable among a number of variables.

The application of the research model in various sectors and samples can make significant contributions to the deficiencies in the literature. This is extremely important in order to generalize the research results. Sector managers have a great responsibility in ensuring and increasing the WLB of their employees. As a matter of fact, it should not be forgotten that an important variable that directs JS to PO is WLB. Positive people can be considered as depression-free and productive people. They may also spread positive attitudes and behaviours to those around them. In addition, as compiled from the literature, long working hours should be avoided in establishing the WLB of employees, legal wages for overtime should be paid on time, care should be taken for leaves on holidays, working conditions should be constantly improved and importance should be given to work-family life. The research is limited to data obtained from the sample working in the construction sector in only two provinces.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study should also be interpreted in relation to occupational safety regulations and organizational practices in the construction sector. Although occupational health and safety measures such as the mandatory use of safety helmets,

steel-toe boots, construction safety nets, and protective mesh systems to prevent falls from height are legally regulated in both Turkey and many developed countries, the effectiveness of these measures largely depends on their implementation and compliance levels in practice. Therefore, differences in enforcement practices and organizational safety culture may play a critical role in shaping employees' work stress levels and work-life balance. Recently, issues related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles have also gained increasing attention in the construction industry, particularly regarding employee well-being and sustainable organizational practices. In this context, it can be argued that improvements in both regulatory enforcement and organizational support mechanisms are essential not only for reducing job stress but also for enhancing the work-life balance and fostering positive psychological outcomes among construction workers. Future research may benefit from using a mixed-method approach by incorporating qualitative data such as interviews or open-ended questions to complement the quantitative findings and provide deeper insights into employees' experiences.

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