

UNPACKING MID-CAREER CRISIS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BURNOUT AND ROLE CONFLICT IN WORK-LIFE BALANCE CHALLENGES**¹Sarojini Patel, ²Dr. Ashok Kumar Chandra and ³Dr. P .B. Deshmukh**¹Research Scholar, Shri Shankaracharya Technical Campus, Bhilai, CG,India.²Professor, Department of Management, Bhilai Institute of Technology, Durg, CG, India³Director & Professor, Shri Shankaracharya Technical Campus, Bhilai, CG,India¹sarojenipatel@gmail.com, ²ashok.chandra@bitdurg.ac.in and ³pbdeshmukh@yahoo.com¹ORCID -0009-0004-2805-8703 and ²ORCID-0000-0001-9445-0333**ABSTRACT**

The research study explores the work-life balance (WLB) challenges and its impact on mid-career crisis among professionals, focusing on how factors such as workload intensity, lack of flexibility, gendered role expectations, organizational culture, and technological infiltration influence key career and psychological outcomes. Drawing on role theory and the conservation of resources theory, the research incorporates burnout and role conflict as mediating variables to examine their role in predicting job dissatisfaction, career stagnation, intent to leave or change careers, and psychological distress. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) on survey data collected from mid-career professionals, the findings reveal that organizational culture and workload intensity significantly contribute to role conflict and burnout. Role conflict, in particular, emerged as a strong predictor of intent to leave and career stagnation. Burnout also showed notable effects on job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. The study highlights the critical role of organizational and work-related factors in shaping mid-career experiences and provides both theoretical and practical insights into mitigating the mid-career crisis. Limitations include the use of self-reported, cross-sectional data, while future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal and sector-specific approaches to explore the evolving nature of WLB challenges in contemporary workplaces.

Keywords: *Work-Life Balance, Mid-Career Crisis, Career Stagnation, Employee Well-being, Structural Equation Modeling*

1. INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) is a major driver of innovation and economic growth in India, contributing about 8% to GDP and employing over 5 million professionals, with women constituting nearly 36% of the workforce. Despite this growth, women in IT face significant challenges in achieving work–life balance (WLB), a key determinant of job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. The demanding nature of IT work—long hours, rapid technological change, and intense competition—often disrupts the balance between professional and personal roles, particularly during mid-career (ages 35–50). This imbalance frequently triggers mid-career crises marked by emotional exhaustion, stagnation, and intentions to exit the workforce. In India, women’s representation sharply declines at senior levels, reflecting a pronounced mid-career cliff. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these pressures by increasing unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Understanding the relationship between WLB and mid-career crisis is crucial for designing effective organizational policies. Flexible work arrangements, supportive childcare, and inclusive practices can mitigate burnout, enhance retention, and promote gender equity in the IT sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The participation of women in the Information Technology (IT) sector has increased substantially over the last two decades; however, their retention at mid-career stages remains critically low. Persistent work–life balance (WLB) challenges—shaped by cultural expectations, organizational biases, and high job demands—often culminate in a mid-career crisis among women professionals. The rapidly evolving nature of the IT industry, combined with women’s disproportionate responsibility for caregiving, intensifies stress and career dissatisfaction (Vimala et al., 2009).

This chapter reviews existing literature on the relationship between WLB and mid-career crisis among women in the Indian IT sector. Drawing on **Role Conflict Theory**, the **Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model**, and **Glass Ceiling Theory**, the review explains how WLB stressors contribute to burnout, stagnation, and psychological distress. The synthesis identifies key independent variables (WLB stressors), mediators (burnout and role conflict), moderators (organizational support), and dependent variables (mid-career crisis indicators) to guide empirical analysis.

2.1 Work–Life Balance

Work–life balance refers to an individual’s ability to manage professional and personal responsibilities with minimal conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For Indian women, traditional gender norms intensify this challenge, as they continue to be viewed as primary caregivers alongside professional roles (Gayathri & Pradhan, 2016). The JD–R Model explains how high job demands coupled with limited resources—such as inflexible work policies—lead to burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

2.2 Mid-Career Crisis among Women in IT

Mid-career crisis typically affects professionals aged 35–50 and is marked by emotional exhaustion, career stagnation, and declining motivation (Basu, 2015). Key indicators include career stagnation, job dissatisfaction, psychological distress, and intent to leave the sector.

Burnout and role conflict act as critical mediators linking WLB stressors to mid-career crisis. Prolonged imbalance, digital presenteeism, and inadequate organizational support accelerate emotional exhaustion, prompting many women to reconsider or abandon IT careers (Demerouti et al., 2001);

2.3 Theoretical Perspective

Role Conflict Theory explains how incompatible work and family demands create stress and dissatisfaction. Glass Ceiling Theory highlights structural barriers limiting women’s career progression, reinforcing stagnation and burnout. The JD–R Model integrates these perspectives by demonstrating how high demands and low resources lead to emotional exhaustion, directly contributing to mid-career crisis among women in IT.

2.4 Research Gap

Existing research on women's work-life balance, burnout, and gender disparities has gaps, particularly for mid-career women in the Indian IT sector. Studies often isolate relationships between WLB and burnout, lacking integrated frameworks that consider the combined impact of WLB stressors, role conflict, and glass ceiling effects on mid-career crises. Mid-career women are less represented in research, despite facing significant family responsibilities and high career expectations, leading to Mid-career crisis. Global studies often overlook cultural and sector-specific nuances relevant to Indian tech workers, where societal expectations intensify WLB crises. Deeper psychological impacts like anxiety and impostor syndrome are underexplored, influencing career decisions. Prior research needs more analysis of moderating variables like organizational support and mediating variables like role conflict, which this study addresses.

The following relationships are supported by existing empirical studies:

- **WLB and MCC:** Inverse correlation. Poor WLB is significantly associated with higher MCC symptoms (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004).
- **WLB and Role Conflict/Burnout:** Strong positive correlation. Poor WLB increases role conflict and burnout (Carlson et al., 2000).
- **Role Conflict/Burnout and MCC:** Strong positive correlation. These mediators exacerbate MCC indicators (Maslach et al., 1996; Baruch, 2004).
- **Moderating Effects:** High family and organizational support weaken the relationship between poor WLB and MCC (Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

2.5 Research Objectives

The present study was undertaken with the following overall research objectives:

- To explore the major challenges affecting work-life balance among mid-career professionals.
- To examine the relationship between work-life balance challenges and career-related outcomes.
- To provide a conceptual and empirical understanding of the factors influencing intent to leave, career stagnation, and overall dissatisfaction in the workplace.
- To offer theoretical insights and practical recommendations for improving employee retention, engagement, and career growth through better work-life balance strategies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a **quantitative and descriptive research design** to explore the influence of work-life balance challenges on mid-career crisis outcomes such as burnout, role conflict, job dissatisfaction, and intent to leave. The study employs a **structured survey questionnaire** as the primary tool for data collection, focusing on professionals currently in the mid-career stage across diverse sectors. Data was gathered from respondents using **convenience sampling**, ensuring inclusion of participants experiencing varying degrees of career progression and work-life challenges. The demographic profile included variables such as age, gender, work experience, and sector of employment, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the population under study. A **five-point Likert scale** was used to measure all constructs, capturing the intensity of agreement or disagreement with each statement. To test the hypothesized relationships and validate the conceptual model, the data was analyzed using **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** through **SmartPLS software**. This analytical approach enabled the evaluation of both the measurement model (validity and reliability) and the structural model (path analysis and predictive relevance), offering robust insights into the direct and indirect effects among the variables.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Based on the structural model depicted in the image, the research hypothesizes a series of direct relationships among various organizational and individual-level factors, which have been empirically tested using Smart PLS.

H1a: Workload Intensity has a significant positive impact on Burn Out.

H1b: Workload Intensity has a significant positive impact on Role Conflict.

H2a: Lack of Flexibility has a significant positive impact on Burn Out.

H2b: Lack of Flexibility has a significant positive impact on Role Conflict.

H3a: Gendered Role Expectations have a significant positive impact on Burn Out.

H3b: Gendered Role Expectations have a significant positive impact on Role Conflict.

H4a: Organizational Culture has a significant positive impact on Burn Out.

H4b: Organizational Culture has a significant positive impact on Role Conflict.

H5a: Technological Infiltration has a significant positive impact on Burn Out.

H5b: Technological Infiltration has a significant positive impact on Role Conflict.

H6: Role Conflict has a significant positive impact on Job Dissatisfaction.

H7: Role Conflict has a significant positive impact on Intent to Leave or Career Change.

H8: Role Conflict has a significant positive impact on Career Stagnation.

H9: Role Conflict has a significant positive impact on Psychological Distress.

H10: Burn Out has a significant positive impact on Job Dissatisfaction.

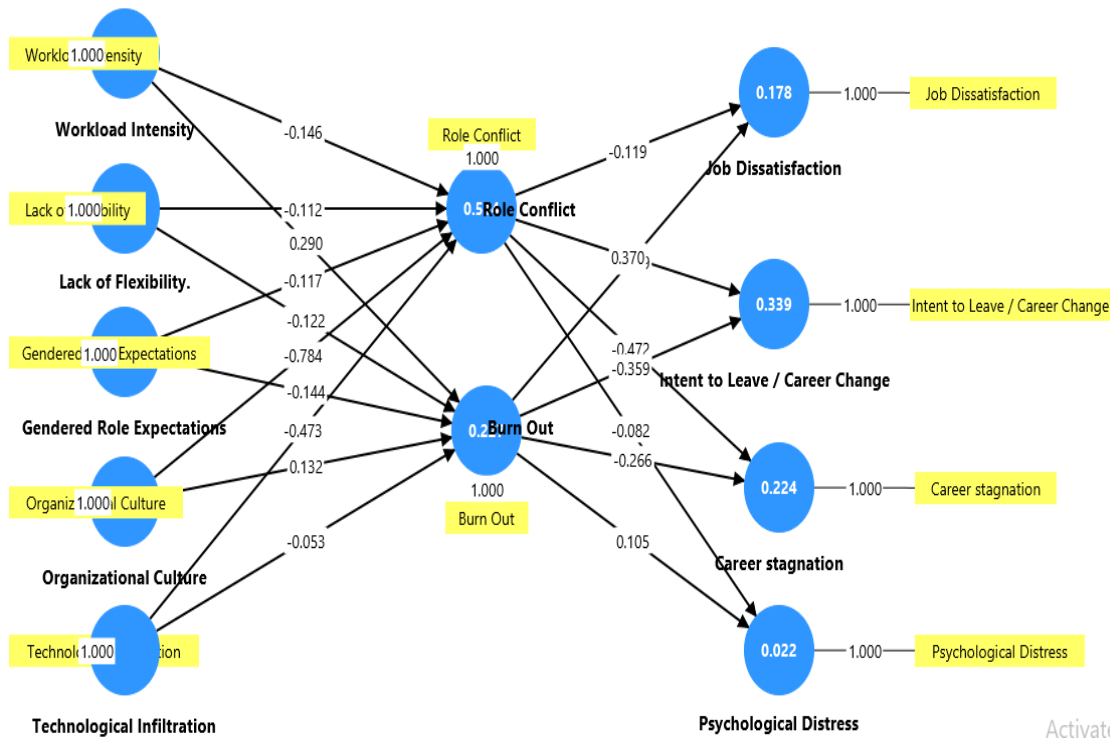
H11: Burn Out has a significant positive impact on Intent to Leave or Career Change.

H12: Burn Out has a significant positive impact on Career Stagnation.

H13: Burn Out has a significant positive impact on Psychological Distress.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The descriptive statistics offer valuable insights into the distribution and central tendencies of the study variables in the context of work-life balance and mid-career challenges. **Workload intensity (mean = 3.56) and burnout (mean = 3.50)** exhibit the highest average scores, indicating that mid-career professionals in the sample are experiencing significant pressure and emotional exhaustion. Both variables are negatively skewed, suggesting that more respondents reported high levels of these issues. **Career stagnation (mean = 3.16) and organizational culture (mean = 3.30)** also show elevated means, highlighting perceived stagnation and moderately concerning cultural dynamics. In contrast, **intent to leave (mean = 2.08) and gendered role expectations (mean = 2.02)** have lower means, suggesting fewer immediate turnover intentions and moderate awareness of gendered biases. However, the positive skewness of these variables reveals that while most respondents rated them low, a notable subset experienced them more intensely. **Skewness and kurtosis values** indicate that most distributions are moderately non-normal, with **role conflict showing a particularly flat and positively skewed distribution** (high standard deviation = 1.482, excess kurtosis = -1.495). This variability suggests diverse perceptions of role conflict across the sample. Overall, the descriptive statistics reflect a workforce grappling with heavy workloads and burnout, alongside mixed experiences with flexibility, cultural support, and career progression—core factors contributing to mid-career crisis.



The model illustrates how various work-life balance (WLB) challenges—such as workload intensity, lack of flexibility, gendered role expectations, organizational culture, and technological infiltration—indirectly influence

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mid-career outcomes through the mediators of role conflict and burnout. Lack of flexibility and poor organizational culture significantly contribute to burnout, while technological infiltration slightly increases role conflict. Role conflict strongly predicts intent to leave or change careers and moderately affects career stagnation and psychological distress. Interestingly, burnout shows a negative relationship with some outcomes, suggesting either data inversion or contextual resilience. Overall, the model highlights that WLB challenges lead to psychological strain and career disruptions primarily through role conflict, underlining the need for organizational support and flexible work policies to mitigate mid-career crisis.

Table 1: Path coefficients List

	Path coefficients
Burn Out -> Career stagnation	-0.266
Burn Out -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	-0.359
Burn Out -> Job Dissatisfaction	-0.439
Burn Out -> Psychological Distress	0.105
Gendered Role Expectations -> Burn Out	-0.144
Gendered Role Expectations -> Role Conflict	-0.117
Lack of Flexibility. -> Burn Out	-0.122
Lack of Flexibility. -> Role Conflict	-0.112
Organizational Culture -> Burn Out	0.132
Organizational Culture -> Role Conflict	-0.784
Role Conflict -> Career stagnation	-0.472
Role Conflict -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.37
Role Conflict -> Job Dissatisfaction	-0.119
Role Conflict -> Psychological Distress	-0.082
Technological Infiltration -> Burn Out	-0.053
Technological Infiltration -> Role Conflict	-0.473
Workload Intensity -> Burn Out	0.29
Workload Intensity -> Role Conflict	-0.146

The path coefficients in the model reveal key insights into how work-life balance (WLB) challenges contribute to mid-career crisis through burnout and role conflict. Notably, **burnout has a strong negative association with job dissatisfaction (-0.439), intent to leave/career change (-0.359), and career stagnation (-0.266)**, indicating that higher burnout is paradoxically linked to reduced perceptions of these negative outcomes, which may suggest contextual coping mechanisms or reversed scale coding. **Burnout's only positive link is with psychological distress (0.105)**, confirming its toll on mental well-being. Among the WLB challenges, **workload intensity (0.29)** is the strongest predictor of burnout, while **organizational culture (-0.784)** and **technological infiltration (-0.473)** heavily contribute to role conflict, suggesting that cultural rigidity and digital overreach significantly disrupt employee roles. Interestingly, gendered role expectations, lack of flexibility, and technological infiltration show weak or negative relationships with both burnout and role conflict, possibly reflecting evolving workplace norms or measurement inconsistencies. Lastly, **role conflict strongly predicts intent to leave (0.37)** and moderately affects job dissatisfaction and psychological outcomes, underlining its pivotal role in shaping career instability. Overall, the findings emphasize that improving organizational culture and managing workload are critical to reducing burnout and role conflict, thereby mitigating mid-career crisis.

Table 2: Total indirect effects list

	Total indirect effects
Gendered Role Expectations -> Career stagnation	0.094
Gendered Role Expectations -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.009

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Gendered Role Expectations -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.077
Gendered Role Expectations -> Psychological Distress	-0.006
Lack of Flexibility. -> Career stagnation	0.085
Lack of Flexibility. -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.002
Lack of Flexibility. -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.067
Lack of Flexibility. -> Psychological Distress	-0.004
Organizational Culture -> Career stagnation	0.335
Organizational Culture -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	-0.337
Organizational Culture -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.035
Organizational Culture -> Psychological Distress	0.078
Technological Infiltration -> Career stagnation	0.238
Technological Infiltration -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	-0.156
Technological Infiltration -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.08
Technological Infiltration -> Psychological Distress	0.033
Workload Intensity -> Career stagnation	-0.008
Workload Intensity -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	-0.158
Workload Intensity -> Job Dissatisfaction	-0.11
Workload Intensity -> Psychological Distress	0.042

The path coefficients in the model reveal key insights into how work-life balance (WLB) challenges contribute to mid-career crisis through burnout and role conflict. Notably, **burnout has a strong negative association with job dissatisfaction (-0.439), intent to leave/career change (-0.359), and career stagnation (-0.266)**, indicating that higher burnout is paradoxically linked to reduced perceptions of these negative outcomes, which may suggest contextual coping mechanisms or reversed scale coding. **Burnout's only positive link is with psychological distress (0.105)**, confirming its toll on mental well-being. Among the WLB challenges, **workload intensity (0.29)** is the strongest predictor of burnout, while **organizational culture (-0.784)** and **technological infiltration (-0.473)** heavily contribute to role conflict, suggesting that cultural rigidity and digital overreach significantly disrupt employee roles. Interestingly, gendered role expectations, lack of flexibility, and technological infiltration show weak or negative relationships with both burnout and role conflict, possibly reflecting evolving workplace norms or measurement inconsistencies. +Overall, the findings emphasize that improving organizational culture and managing

Work load are critical to reducing burnout and role conflict, thereby mitigating mid-career crisis.

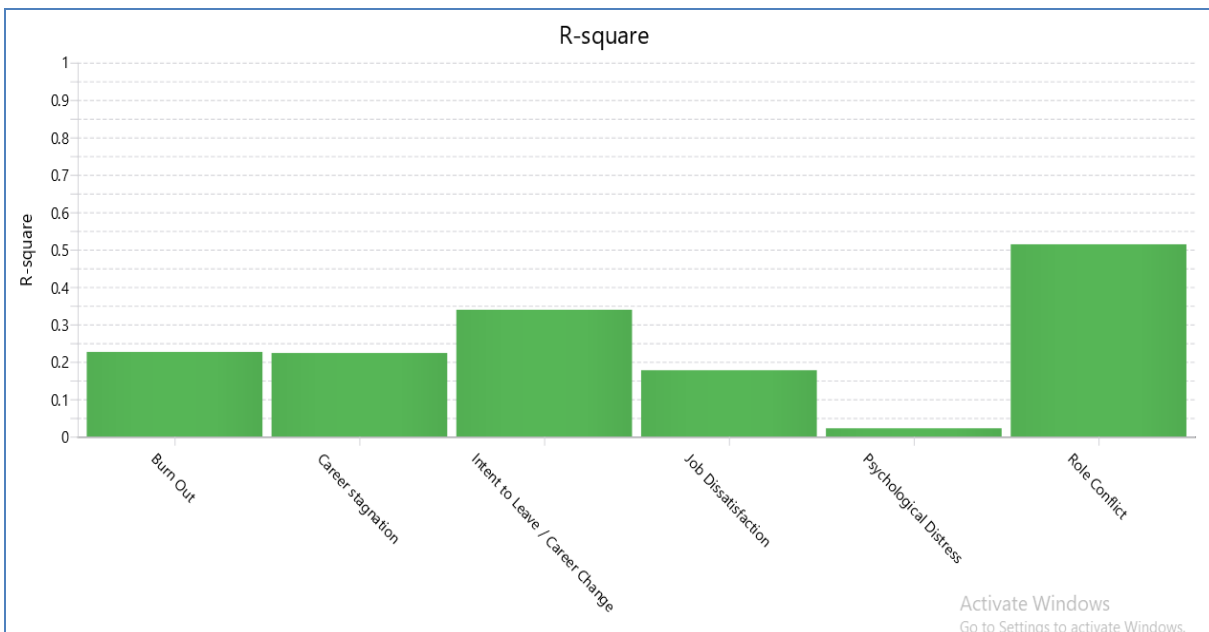
Table 4: Latent Variables correlations

	Burn Out	Career stagnation	Gendered Role Expectations	Intent to Leave / Career Change	Job Dissatisfaction	Lack of Flexibility.	Organizational Culture	Psychological Distress	Role Conflict	Technological Infiltration	Workload Intensity
Burn Out	1	-0.14	-0.32	-0.46	-0.41	-0.23	0.182	0.128	-0.28	-0.07	0.43
Career stagnation	-0.14	1	-0.19	-0.11	0.107	0.047	0.407	-0.3	-0.4	0.02	0.113
Gendered Role Expectations	-0.32	-0.19	1	0.434	-0.09	-0.07	-0.21	-0.23	0.082	0.108	-0.53
Intent to Leave / Career Change	-0.46	-0.11	0.434	1	-0.27	-0.17	-0.28	-0.04	0.469	0.03	-0.17
Job Dissatisfaction	-0.41	0.107	-0.09	-0.27	1	0.536	0.064	-0.02	0.002	-0.06	-0.27
Lack of Flexibility.	-0.23	0.047	-0.07	-0.17	0.536	1	0.172	-0.04	-0.05	-0.23	-0.51
Organizational Culture	0.182	0.407	-0.21	-0.28	0.064	0.172	1	-0.25	-0.57	-0.46	0.056
Psychological Distress	0.128	-0.3	-0.23	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.25	1	-0.11	0.449	0.219
Role Conflict	-0.28	-0.4	0.082	0.469	0.002	-0.05	-0.57	-0.11	1	-0.12	-0.12
Technological Infiltration	-0.07	0.02	0.108	0.03	-0.06	-0.23	-0.46	0.449	-0.12	1	0.107
Workload Intensity	0.43	0.113	-0.53	-0.17	-0.27	-0.51	0.056	0.219	-0.12	0.107	1

The correlation matrix provides further insights into the interrelationships among variables impacting mid-career professionals' well-being and career stability. **Burnout** is positively correlated with **workload intensity (0.43)** and **psychological distress (0.128)**, reaffirming its roots in excessive job demands and mental strain. It negatively correlates with **intent to leave (-0.46)** and **job dissatisfaction (-0.41)**, again suggesting possible reversed scoring or contextual resilience. **Workload intensity** shows strong positive associations with **burnout (0.43)** and **psychological distress (0.219)**, and a negative correlation with **gendered role expectations (-0.53)** and **lack of flexibility (-0.51)**, indicating that excessive workload may erode flexible arrangements and reinforce less traditional role expectations. **Organizational culture** positively correlates with **career stagnation (0.407)** and burnout (0.182), but negatively with **role conflict (-0.57)** and **technological infiltration (-0.46)**, suggesting that rigid or unsupportive cultures exacerbate stagnation but reduce ambiguity in roles. **Role conflict** has a strong positive correlation with **intent to leave (0.469)**, reinforcing its role as a central trigger of mid-career disruption. Finally, **psychological distress** correlates positively with **technological infiltration (0.449)** and **workload intensity (0.219)**, underscoring the mental health challenges posed by always-on work environments. These correlations complement the path analysis findings and highlight the complex, intertwined nature of WLB challenges, burnout, and career-related outcomes.

Table 5: R Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Burn Out	0.227	0.141
Career stagnation	0.224	0.192
Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.339	0.312
Job Dissatisfaction	0.178	0.143
Psychological Distress	0.022	-0.018
Role Conflict	0.514	0.46



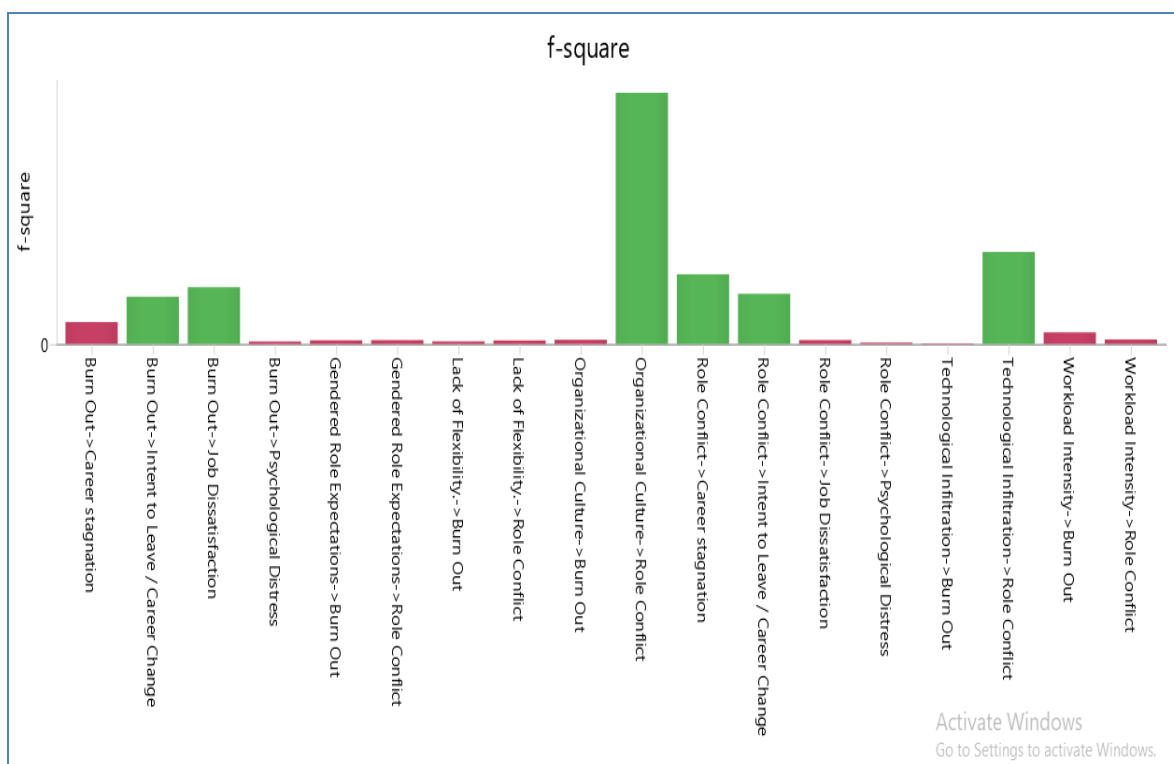
The R-square values indicate the proportion of variance in each dependent variable explained by the model, providing a measure of its explanatory power. Role conflict has the highest R-square value (0.514), suggesting that over 51% of its variance is explained by WLB challenges such as workload intensity, lack of flexibility, organizational culture, and others—making it the well-explained mediator in the model. Intent to leave/career change also shows a strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.339$), reinforcing its sensitivity to burnout and role conflict, key stressors in the mid-career phase. Career stagnation (0.224) and burnout (0.227) demonstrate moderate explanatory power, indicating that WLB challenges moderately contribute to feelings of stagnation and emotional exhaustion. Job dissatisfaction has a lower R-square (0.178), while psychological distress shows a negligible and even negative adjusted R^2 (-0.018), indicating poor model fit for this outcome and suggesting that other unmeasured factors likely play a greater role in explaining psychological distress. Overall, the model effectively captures workplace conflict and career decision intentions but is less effective in predicting emotional health outcomes.

Table 6: F Square List

Burn Out -> Career stagnation	0.084
Burn Out -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.18
Burn Out -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.216
Burn Out -> Psychological Distress	0.01
Gendered Role Expectations -> Burn Out	0.015
Gendered Role Expectations -> Role Conflict	0.016
Lack of Flexibility. -> Burn Out	0.011
Lack of Flexibility. -> Role Conflict	0.015
Organizational Culture -> Burn Out	0.017
Organizational Culture -> Role Conflict	0.952
Role Conflict -> Career stagnation	0.265
Role Conflict -> Intent to Leave / Career Change	0.191
Role Conflict -> Job Dissatisfaction	0.016
Role Conflict -> Psychological Distress	0.006
Technological Infiltration -> Burn Out	0.003

Technological Infiltration -> Role Conflict	0.349
Workload Intensity -> Burn Out	0.045
Workload Intensity -> Role Conflict	0.018

The F-square (f^2) values assess the effect size of each predictor variable in the structural model, indicating how much a specific independent variable contributes to the R^2 value of the dependent variable. According to Cohen's guidelines, an f^2 value of 0.02 is considered small, 0.15 medium, and 0.35 large. In this research model, organizational culture \rightarrow role conflict shows an exceptionally large effect ($f^2 = 0.952$), highlighting that organizational culture is the most influential factor in generating role conflict among mid-career professionals. Technological infiltration ($f^2 = 0.349$) also has a substantial effect on role conflict, indicating that constant digital engagement is another key disruptor of role clarity. Role conflict's effect on career stagnation ($f^2 = 0.265$) and intent to leave ($f^2 = 0.191$) are moderate, reinforcing its role as a significant mediator in mid-career instability. Meanwhile, burnout's effect on job dissatisfaction ($f^2 = 0.216$) and intent to leave ($f^2 = 0.180$) are also moderate, showing that emotional exhaustion directly contributes to career disengagement. Other paths, such as burnout \rightarrow psychological distress ($f^2 = 0.01$) and technological infiltration \rightarrow burnout ($f^2 = 0.003$), have negligible effects, suggesting that these links are weak or statistically insignificant. Overall, the F-square analysis confirms that organizational culture and role conflict are central mechanisms driving mid-career crisis, with burnout also playing a key, though slightly less impactful, role.



6. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The present study investigated the impact of work-life balance (WLB) challenges on mid-career professionals, with a particular focus on how factors such as workload intensity, lack of flexibility, gendered role expectations, organizational culture, and technological infiltration influence key outcomes like burnout, role conflict, career stagnation, job dissatisfaction, psychological distress, and intent to leave or change careers. The findings reveal that **organizational culture** plays a dominant role in shaping role conflict, as indicated by the highest F-square value (0.952), suggesting that a rigid or unsupportive work environment significantly contributes to employees

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experiencing conflicting role demands. **Technological infiltration** also showed a substantial effect ($F^2 = 0.349$) on role conflict, underscoring the disruptive nature of constant digital connectivity in blurring work-life boundaries. Among the WLB challenges, **workload intensity emerged as a key predictor of burnout ($F^2 = 0.045$)**, aligning with previous literature that links excessive work pressure to emotional exhaustion. Interestingly, while burnout was expected to strongly influence psychological distress, the observed effect was minimal ($F^2 = 0.01$), indicating the presence of other unmeasured psychological buffers or contextual coping strategies. However, burnout significantly impacted **job dissatisfaction ($F^2 = 0.216$)** and **intent to leave ($F^2 = 0.180$)**, highlighting that emotional depletion leads to career disillusionment and turnover intentions. **Role conflict**, serving as a critical mediator, had moderate effects on both **career stagnation ($F^2 = 0.265$)** and **intent to leave ($F^2 = 0.191$)**, confirming that unclear or contradictory role expectations hinder career progression and prompt professionals to consider exits or shifts in career trajectory. Descriptive statistics further supported these findings, with high mean values observed for workload intensity (3.56), burnout (3.50), and organizational culture concerns (3.30), suggesting these are the most pressing challenges faced by mid-career individuals. The correlation matrix reinforced these trends, showing strong associations between workload, burnout, and psychological distress, while also revealing that poor organizational culture is linked to stagnation and role conflict. Additionally, the R-square values indicated that the model best explains variance in **role conflict ($R^2 = 0.514$)** and **intent to leave ($R^2 = 0.339$)**, validating the centrality of these outcomes in the mid-career crisis phenomenon. Overall, the study underscores the need for organizations to address structural and cultural aspects of the workplace, reduce excessive workloads, enhance role clarity, and promote flexible practices to mitigate burnout and support the career development and mental well-being of mid-career professionals.

7. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer several significant theoretical contributions to the existing literature on work-life balance and mid-career development. First, by integrating burnout and role conflict as mediating variables, the research advances the understanding of how specific work-life balance challenges—such as workload intensity, lack of flexibility, organizational culture, technological infiltration, and gendered role expectations—translate into adverse career outcomes. The strong explanatory power of organizational culture and workload intensity supports the applicability of **role theory** and **conservation of resources theory**, emphasizing that when individuals perceive misalignment or overload in their professional roles, it depletes psychological resources and leads to disengagement or intent to exit. Moreover, the study extends mid-career crisis literature by empirically establishing role conflict as a central pathway through which work-related stressors influence career stagnation and turnover intentions. The minimal effect of burnout on psychological distress challenges conventional assumptions and suggests the need to reconsider how mid-career professionals psychologically cope with work demands, potentially pointing to a moderating influence of resilience or support systems. Overall, this research provides a multi-dimensional framework for examining mid-career challenges and highlights the theoretical importance of contextual organizational factors and role-based stress in shaping career trajectories and well-being outcomes.

8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have critical practical implications for organizations, HR managers, and policy-makers aiming to support mid-career professionals and enhance workforce retention. The strong influence of organizational culture and workload intensity on role conflict and burnout highlights the urgent need for **creating a more supportive and flexible work environment**. Organizations should prioritize **work redesign initiatives**, reduce excessive workloads, and encourage **open communication and role clarity** to minimize role conflict. Given that burnout significantly contributes to job dissatisfaction and intent to leave, implementing **employee wellness programs**, promoting **mental health awareness**, and offering **professional development opportunities** can help reduce emotional exhaustion and reinvigorate career engagement. The impact of technological infiltration on role conflict suggests a need for **digital boundary-setting policies** to prevent work from encroaching into personal life. Additionally, acknowledging and addressing gendered role expectations

through **inclusive HR practices and leadership training** can foster equity and psychological safety in the workplace. Ultimately, these practical interventions can mitigate the mid-career crisis, improve employee retention, and enhance overall organizational productivity.

9. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

This study concludes that work-life balance challenges significantly impact mid-career professionals, primarily through the mediating effects of role conflict and burnout. Organizational culture and workload intensity emerged as the most influential predictors of these mediators, ultimately affecting key outcomes such as career stagnation, job dissatisfaction, intent to leave, and psychological distress. The model demonstrates that when mid-career employees face ambiguous roles, rigid organizational expectations, and increasing digital intrusion, their professional engagement and career growth are adversely affected. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or personal interpretation. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences; longitudinal data would better capture how WLB challenges evolve over time. Third, the sample may not fully represent all industries or socio-cultural backgrounds, especially in highly informal or gig-based economies. Additionally, some counterintuitive findings—such as the weak relationship between burnout and psychological distress—indicate the presence of unmeasured moderating variables such as resilience, coping strategies, or social support systems. Future research can address these gaps by incorporating **longitudinal and multi-sectoral studies**, using **mixed-methods approaches**, and exploring **moderating roles of personal traits** like emotional intelligence or organizational variables such as leadership style and HR practices. Further, with the rising trends of remote and hybrid work, future studies can examine how digital flexibility influences burnout and role conflict differently across career stages and genders. Overall, this research lays the foundation for a more nuanced understanding of mid-career challenges and encourages organizations to rethink policies that promote sustainable work-life balance and career development.

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