

Burnout and Life Satisfaction among Head Load Workers: A Cross-Sectional Study in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat, Kerala

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Abstract: Head load workers constitute an important segment of Kerala's informal and physically demanding labour force. Their work is characterized by manual handling of goods, uncertain work arrangements, long working hours and limited access to employment-linked benefits, circumstances that may influence both occupational well-being and overall satisfaction with life. The present study examined burnout and life satisfaction among head load workers in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat, Thrissur District, Kerala. A quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive design was adopted. Sixty head load workers were selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a self-constructed questionnaire for socio-demographic characteristics and views on government interventions, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the 16-item Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation. The study found that most respondents were married, a substantial proportion reported monthly incomes between Rs.20,000 and Rs.25,000, and the great majority worked 8–12 hours per day. Although respondents reported selected indicators of fatigue and the need for recovery after work, the overall findings of the dissertation indicated that most were not highly affected by burnout and most were satisfied with their lives. Burnout and life satisfaction showed a negligible negative and statistically non-significant relationship ($r = -0.060$, $p = .647$, $n = 60$). Respondents nevertheless expressed substantial unmet welfare needs: 95% sought greater government intervention, 80% were dissatisfied with government bonus/advance provisions, 63.3% were dissatisfied with their income, and 93.3% reported not receiving government medical insurance. The findings suggest that occupational burnout and global life satisfaction may not necessarily move together in this workforce, while economic security, health protection and welfare coverage remain important areas for policy and social-work intervention.

Keywords: burnout; life satisfaction; head load workers; informal labour; occupational well-being; Kerala; social security

1. Introduction

Head load work is a distinctive form of manual labour involving the loading, unloading, carrying and stacking of goods. In Kerala, head load workers have historically occupied a visible place in markets, commercial centres and transport-linked workplaces. Despite their economic contribution, the nature of the occupation exposes workers to physical strain, irregular employment, uncertainty in earnings and limited formal employer–employee arrangements. The source dissertation emphasizes that many workers operate in the unorganized sector without written contracts or conventional employment benefits, and that these conditions can affect both work and personal life.

Burnout is commonly understood as an occupational response to prolonged work-related stress. Maslach and Leiter (2016) describe burnout as a multidimensional experience associated with exhaustion, psychological distancing or cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), used in the present study, approaches burnout through the broad dimensions of exhaustion and disengagement. For workers engaged in sustained physical labour, burnout may be experienced not only as emotional depletion but also as persistent tiredness, difficulty recovering after work, reduced engagement and a mechanical approach to tasks.

Life satisfaction, in contrast, represents a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole rather than a momentary emotional state. Diener et al. (1985) developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to assess this global

judgement. Life satisfaction may reflect multiple domains—family relationships, financial security, health, social support, perceived achievement and adaptation to life circumstances. Consequently, demanding work does not automatically imply low life satisfaction; workers may evaluate their lives positively despite occupational hardship, particularly when family, social or personal resources are strong.

Existing literature cited in the dissertation indicates that informal workers may experience stress and burnout because of long working hours, insecure employment, low income and poor working conditions. At the same time, studies of disadvantaged populations suggest that subjective life satisfaction is not determined solely by material deprivation. This creates an important empirical question: whether burnout is associated with life satisfaction among head load workers, and whether welfare concerns remain salient even when workers report reasonable satisfaction with life.

The present article is developed from the dissertation titled “Burnout and Life Satisfaction among Head Load Workers” and focuses on head load workers in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat, Thrissur District. It condenses the dissertation into a journal-style research paper while retaining its original design, sample, instruments and empirical findings.

2. Review of Literature

Head load work and social security

Research reviewed in the dissertation portrays head load workers as a group whose occupational experience is closely

linked to labour regulation and welfare mechanisms. Subair (2018), in a study of registered and other categories of head load workers in Kerala, reported that social-security measures were associated with positive workplace behaviour and that workers showed moderate awareness and satisfaction regarding welfare schemes. The study also reported a positive relationship between social welfare and job satisfaction. Research on Mathadi or head load workers in Maharashtra similarly highlights the distinction between registered and unregistered workers and the protective role of institutional welfare mechanisms.

Burnout in informal and demanding occupations

Burnout emerges when persistent demands exceed the resources available to workers. The literature reviewed in the dissertation links informal work with long hours, insecure employment, lower income and limited paid leave, all of which can contribute to stress and burnout. The dissertation cites evidence that workload and worker characteristics can be associated with burnout and that chronic occupational stress has consequences for individuals as well as organizations. These concerns are especially relevant to head load workers because their occupation combines physical exertion with uncertainty regarding work, income and social protection.

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a global cognitive judgement of the quality of one's life. The SWLS developed by Diener et al. (1985) is a widely used five-item measure that asks respondents to evaluate whether their life is close to their ideal, whether life conditions are excellent, whether they are satisfied with life, whether they have obtained important things they want, and whether they would change little if they could live life again.

Literature reviewed in the dissertation also suggests that objectively disadvantaged groups may report levels of life satisfaction that are higher than might be expected from their material circumstances, indicating the importance of adaptation and non-financial resources.

Research gap

The dissertation identified a limited body of research examining burnout and life satisfaction together among head load workers. Studies have more commonly focused on labour welfare, socioeconomic conditions, occupational health or burnout separately. Examining the relationship between burnout and life satisfaction in a localized group of head load workers therefore contributes to understanding whether occupational strain is reflected in workers' broader evaluation of life.

3. Objectives and Hypothesis

The general objective was to examine life satisfaction and burnout among head load workers. The specific objectives were:

- 1) To describe the socio-demographic profile of the respondents.
- 2) To assess burnout among head load workers.
- 3) To analyse the life satisfaction of the respondents.
- 4) To enlist respondents' suggestions regarding

government interventions.

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and burnout among the respondents.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between life satisfaction and burnout among the respondents.

4. Methodology

Research design and setting

A quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive research design was used. The geographical area of the study was Poomangalam Grama Panchayat in Thrissur District, Kerala. The design was intended to provide a snapshot of burnout, life satisfaction and selected socio-demographic and welfare-related characteristics at the time of data collection.

Population, sample and sampling

The population comprised eligible head load workers in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat. The dissertation states that workers aged 30–50 years formed the intended unit of study and that simple random sampling was used. A list of eligible workers was compiled and 60 respondents were selected randomly. The final analytical sample was $n = 60$.

Data collection instruments

Three instruments were used. First, a self-constructed questionnaire collected socio-demographic information and respondents' views regarding government interventions. Second, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) measured global cognitive life satisfaction using five items rated on a seven-point agreement scale. Third, the 16-item Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) was used to assess burnout-related experiences, including exhaustion and disengagement.

Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted with five head load workers in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat. Based on the pre-test, questions were clarified and the self-constructed questionnaire was modified to improve comprehensibility and data quality.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. Frequencies and percentages were used for descriptive analysis.

Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to test the relationship between SWLS and OLBI scores. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

Ethical considerations

The dissertation reports that informed consent was obtained before data collection, confidentiality was maintained by avoiding the use of respondents' names, questionnaires were kept in safe custody, and collected data were used only for academic purposes.

5. Results

5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

The dissertation's consolidated findings indicate that 51.7% of respondents were in the 46–50-year age group and 21.7% were aged 41–45 years. A majority (51.7%) had not completed the 10th standard. Most respondents were married (91.7%), while 5% were separated and 3.3% were unmarried. With respect to monthly income, 46.7% reported Rs.20,000–25,000, 20% reported Rs.10,000–15,000, 16.7% reported Rs.15,000–20,000 and 16.7% reported more than Rs.25,000. The great majority (95%) worked between 8 and 12 hours per day.

Characteristic	Category	Percentage
Age	46–50 years	51.7%
Education	Below/has not completed 10th standard	51.7%
Marital status	Married	91.7%
Monthly income	Rs.20,000–25,000	46.7%
Working hours	8–12 hours/day	95.0%

5.2 Burnout-related responses

The item-level findings reveal a mixed occupational picture rather than uniformly high burnout. Most respondents reported continuing interest and challenge in their work: 68.3% agreed and 13.3% strongly agreed that they found new and interesting aspects in their work, while 61.7% agreed and 21.7% strongly agreed that their work was a positive challenge. In addition, 55% agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed that they could tolerate work pressure well.

At the same time, signs of physical or psychological recovery needs were evident. A total of 43.3% agreed that there were days when they felt tired even before arriving at work, and 40% agreed that after work they needed more time than in the past to relax and feel better. Regarding emotional depletion, 43.3% disagreed and 33.3% strongly disagreed that they often felt emotionally drained during work, suggesting that this experience was not dominant for most respondents. Just over half (51.7%) agreed that they had enough energy for leisure activities after work. However, 36.7% agreed that they sometimes felt sickened by their work tasks and 36.7% agreed that they usually felt worn out and weary after working. The dissertation's overall interpretation was that most respondents were not greatly affected by job burnout.

5.3 Life satisfaction

Responses to the SWLS items suggest a generally positive but not uniformly strong evaluation of life. Thirty-five percent agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed that their life was close to their ideal, with a further 20% slightly agreeing. For the statement that the conditions of life were excellent, the largest response category was slight agreement (26.7%), although responses were dispersed across the scale. Regarding direct satisfaction with life, 33.3% slightly agreed, 15% agreed and 13.3% strongly agreed. The dissertation therefore concluded that the majority of respondents were satisfied with their lives. Responses to the item concerning

whether respondents would change almost nothing if they could live their life over were more mixed, indicating that positive global life satisfaction coexisted with areas in which respondents might prefer change.

5.4 Government interventions and welfare concerns

Finding	Percentage
Receiving government bonus/advances	55.00%
Not satisfied with government bonus/advances	80.00%
Need more government interventions	95.00%
Not satisfied with income	63.30%
Not receiving government medical insurance	93.30%

These findings show that relatively favourable life-satisfaction responses should not be interpreted as an absence of material or welfare needs. Nearly all respondents called for greater government intervention, and medical insurance emerged as a particularly important gap.

5.5 Relationship between burnout and life satisfaction

Pearson's correlation showed a negligible negative relationship between burnout and life satisfaction, $r = -0.060$, with $p = .647$ (two-tailed), $n = 60$. Because $p > .05$, the association was not statistically significant. The null hypothesis was therefore retained and the alternative hypothesis was not supported.

Variables	r	p (2-tailed)	N	Decision
Burnout × Life Satisfaction	-0.060	.647	60	Not significant; retain H0

Note. The dissertation's correlation table reports $r = -0.060$ and Sig. (2-tailed) = .647. These values are used here; one narrative sentence in the dissertation appears to interchange the correlation coefficient and p-value.

6. Discussion

The study provides a nuanced picture of occupational well-being among head load workers. The workers were situated in an occupation characterized by long hours, physical demands and limited formal employment protection, yet the dissertation did not find pervasive high burnout or generally poor life satisfaction. This is important because it cautions against assuming that occupational disadvantage automatically produces low subjective well-being.

The burnout-related responses indicate coexistence of strain and engagement. Many respondents experienced tiredness or required more time to recover after work, and a sizeable proportion felt worn out and weary.

Nevertheless, most respondents also described their work as interesting or positively challenging and reported an ability to tolerate work pressure. Such a pattern is compatible with the idea that burnout is not reducible to physical tiredness alone. Workers can experience fatigue while retaining engagement, meaning and coping capacity in relation to their work.

The life-satisfaction findings similarly suggest that global evaluations of life can remain positive even when occupational and economic conditions are imperfect. This

observation is consistent with literature reviewed in the dissertation showing that subjective life satisfaction among disadvantaged populations may be influenced by adaptation, social relationships and resources beyond income alone. For head load workers, family life, community networks, occupational identity or expectations may contribute to life evaluation, although these possible mechanisms were not directly tested in the present study.

The central statistical result— $r = -0.060$, $p = .647$ —indicates virtually no linear association between burnout and life satisfaction in this sample. The result does not establish that occupational strain is unimportant; rather, it suggests that variation in burnout scores did not correspond systematically with variation in global life satisfaction among these 60 respondents. Life satisfaction is a broad construct and may be buffered by domains outside work. Conversely, burnout may be more directly shaped by immediate job demands and resources than by a person's overall judgement of life.

An especially important finding is the contrast between subjective well-being and welfare insecurity. Although most respondents were described as satisfied with life, 95% wanted greater government intervention, 63.3% were dissatisfied with income and 93.3% reported no government medical insurance. Thus, positive life evaluation should not be used to minimize structural concerns. The data point to concrete needs in income protection, medical coverage, access to benefits and working conditions.

7. Implications for Social Work and Policy

The findings support an occupational and community social-work response that combines psychosocial support with welfare advocacy. Stress-management programmes, counselling and awareness sessions may help workers recognize exhaustion and develop recovery strategies. At the same time, social workers can act as links between workers and welfare institutions, facilitate access to eligible benefits, provide or coordinate legal assistance, and contribute evidence to policy discussions.

Policy attention is particularly warranted in the areas identified directly by respondents: medical insurance, adequate and experience-sensitive wages, broader access to government bonus or advance schemes, health protection and regulation of working hours. Since head load work carries physical risk, preventive health screening and accessible insurance mechanisms may be especially valuable. Interventions should therefore address both the psychosocial experience of work and the structural conditions under which the work is performed.

8. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was small ($n = 60$) and restricted to a single Grama Panchayat, limiting generalizability to head load workers elsewhere in Kerala or India. Second, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. Third, the measures were based on self-report and may be affected by response tendencies. Fourth, the dissertation reports item-level distributions but does not provide detailed OLB and SWLS summary statistics,

subscale means, reliability coefficients or multivariable analyses, which limits deeper interpretation. Finally, there are minor internal inconsistencies in the dissertation's reporting of age categories and in one narrative description of the correlation statistics; the present article relies on the consolidated findings and the SPSS correlation table.

9. Recommendations for Future Research

- Use larger samples drawn from multiple districts and different categories of head load workers.
- Report OLB exhaustion and disengagement subscales, SWLS total scores, means, standard deviations and internal-consistency estimates.
- Examine predictors such as income insecurity, working hours, physical morbidity, social support, union/welfare-board membership and job tenure.
- Use longitudinal designs to determine whether changes in working conditions predict changes in burnout or life satisfaction.
- Combine quantitative measures with qualitative interviews to understand how workers interpret fatigue, dignity of labour, family well-being and welfare needs.

10. Conclusion

This study examined burnout and life satisfaction among 60 head load workers in Poomangalam Grama Panchayat, Kerala. The findings portray a workforce that experiences demanding working conditions and selected signs of fatigue, but also substantial work engagement and generally positive life evaluations. Burnout and life satisfaction were not significantly correlated ($r = -0.060$, $p = .647$). At the same time, the respondents reported clear economic and social-protection concerns, particularly dissatisfaction with income and government benefits and a lack of medical insurance. The study therefore highlights the importance of distinguishing subjective life satisfaction from structural well-being. Strengthening health protection, welfare coverage, income security and working conditions can remain necessary even when workers report being broadly satisfied with life.

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