

# Determinants of **Burnout and Turnover Intention** in **Travel Agencies (Iran)**: The Investigation of Family Work Conflict, Nepotism and Customer Aggression on **Employees' Performance**

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**Abstract** | The study aimed at investigating the role of FWC (Family Work Conflict), nepotism, and aggression of customers towards burnout and turnover intention among employees. Employees of several Iranian travel agencies served as a study setting. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews with managers from 30 different travel agencies in Northern Iran were conducted in 2017. For interviews, an interview script was used with audio recorded permission. The interviews took an average of 30 minutes to complete (from Persian to English) and then analysed using a software. Based on interviews, FWC influenced the burnout and turnover intention among employees. The other salient point is the positive effect of customer aggression on the emotional exhaustion of employees; however, the study revealed that nepotism has a negative effect on burnout. To date, research on the role of FWC, nepotism and customer aggression in travel is lacking. This study is therefore a pioneer in the field of research. The researchers have recommended to examine these effects in other countries in Asia or the Middle East and evaluate the results in order to identify other psychological factors that affect burnout. The research revealed that FWC and nepotism effects have significant implications for training programs, especially on how employees deal with dissatisfied customers. Employees need to be trained properly to improve interpersonal skills and how to respect customer loyalty. In addition, managers should create workspaces where employees feel safe in respect of FWC. Lastly, managers should avoid any workplace favoritism and friendship.

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## 1. Introduction

As Karatepe and Baddar (2006) argued, preventing work stress enables employees to interact with customers with impeded exhaustion, due to close contact between customers and employees, they encounter a wide level of complaint from home and family responsibilities that interfere with job responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

As such, FWC occurs when the responsibilities of home and family conflict with job responsibilities (e.g. the parents' responsibilities against child school may interfere with their duties as employees) (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006). In this vein, Heskett et al. (1994) declared job stress happens when employees often experience high level of complaints. Employees will lose productivity to offer various services through high turnover (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006). These stressors cause psychological behaviour, which also adversely affect their workplace and if employees are unable to cope with their stress, it can have a negative effect and cause burnout and turnover intention. On one hand, when employees face these unwanted emotional stressors, they are likely to try adjusting them. On the other hand, they are unable to engage both activities due to the intensive schedule coupled with responding customers.

Numerous studies have already conducted in the context of nepotism. Favoritism is perceived as awarded to relatives or close friends, irrespective of their merit. Nepotism typically takes the form of having relatives hired or favored.

The study of Arasli (2006) revealed that nepotism infiltrated tourism industry as a common behavior in service business. Nepotism is, in fact, a factor that affect the behavioral outcome such as turnover and burnout. In terms of verbal ag-

gression, previous research expresses it as "hurting or harming others, an instrumental or motor component of behavior" (Bush & Perry 1992, p. 457; Yaratan & Uludag, 2012). Several groups (such as hotel work, sales, librarian ship) are expected to be low risk service that encounters customer aggression (Chio, et al, 2012). Hills and Joyc (2013) emphasized that customer aggression are to be considered as a customer behavior that harms the company or firms, it takes place in the wide range of service locations such as retail stores, restaurants and airlines.

This occurs by face-to-face contact or by email or telephone. It causes physical or psychological harm (Bedi & Schat, 2007). Karatepe (2013), emphasized on FWC's influence on employee turnover intentions. Furthermore, the loss of creativity and customer satisfaction in the service industry also contributes to high employees' turnover (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). Taken as a whole, findings revealed that FWC, nepotism, and customer aggression must be well managed due to their negative impact on employees.

The objective of this research is to determine the opinion of managers on the effect of FWC, nepotism and customer hostility on burnout and turnover intention among employees of travel agencies and to disclose the stressors that contribute significantly to the burnout and turnover intention. A qualitative study employing semi-structured interview with 30 travel agency managers in Iran was carried out. The study revealed a positive relationship between FWC, nepotism, customer aggression and a negative impact on burnout and work outcomes (commitment, turnover intention). Another conclusion is that burnout can reduce the emotional commitment to work and affective commitment that may lead to turnover intention

among employees.

To impede employee turnover and decline in productivity, companies should contribute collectively to effective policies and support supervision. There is a lack of studies examining the role of FWC, nepotism and customer aggression on travel agencies' employees. A limited number of researches has been done in this area, that indicates a gap that has not covered geographical regions of the Middle East and Iran. In this field, a few numbers of researchers are finding a solution. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore the influencers of employees' burning out.

### 1.1. The rationale of the study

What are the causes of burnout and turnover intention? Although there may be different causes, the main cause is the transformation of the business service observed among employees during their work performance. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the factors that contribute to the behavior of employees leading to burnout and turnover intention. Questions adapted from objectives of this study are hereby presented.

**A) In what way FWC, nepotism, and customers aggression have influenced burnout and turnover among employees in previous findings.**

#### *FWC*

It was revealed in Frone 2000's research and Grzywacz and Bass (2003) that FWC has a positive relationship with anxiety disorder and increased work stress. Bhuian et al. (2005), noted that there is a positive relationship between FWC, burnout and turnover intention. FWC is acknowledged to be the cause of intention for employee turnover (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006). Numerous studies conducted by different scholars about FWC revealed that high demands from home have ne-

gative interference with the workplace including burnout. (Greenglass & Bruke, 2001; Peeters et al. 2005).

#### *Customer aggression*

With different emotions, the interest of working among employees can be enhanced or diminished. In fact, customers' emotional transition trails stress and therefore, emotionally stressful atmosphere usually paves the way for burnout to change with high psychological effect. Managing the emotions is critical for developing sustainable approach in human resource in the tourism industry. Receiving stress through work has been identified as a substantial barrier in the commitment of employees. The barrier causes loss of creativity and inefficiency among employees. Karatepe et al. (2004), conducted a quantitative study on frontline employees to evaluate WFC and FWC. They highlighted that verbal aggression is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Yaran & Uludag (2012), who used a study to evaluate the impact of aggression among university students, found that verbal aggression was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism. It would then ultimately result in low performance, depression and employee burnout (Yaran & Uludag, 2012).

#### *Nepotism*

Nepotism has also been cited as an important factor in quitting the job. This can be attributed to the lack of skills in managing human resources. The study was conducted in a course by Arasli et al. (2006), evaluating the role of nepotism among hotel staff in Northern Cyprus. They demonstrated that nepotism only benefits family and friends and has a negative impact on human resource management.

#### *Burnout and turnover*

According to Meyer and Allen (1997) and Esfahani et al. (2014), there is a strong correlation

between quitting, executing and effective engagement. Jackson et al. (1987); Leither (1991) and Serhi et al. (1999) unanimously stated that high levels of burnout lead to a decrease in employee engagement (Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005).

Muhammed and Hamdy (2005), also declared a low commitment to organization would result in turnover intention among employees who are suffering burnout. One of the major concerns in human resource management is the negative effects of turnover in customer service. Imbued with this, turnover is the cause of both the psychological suffering of the remaining staff or new employees. According to Kim and Stoner (2008), higher stress leads to higher burnout and higher burnout results to higher turnover intention among employees. Using social support had a negative effect on the turnover intention while it had no direct impact on burnout.

In a particular finding, Muhammad and Hamdy (2005) revealed that "burnout as a process of emotional exhaustion is the central dimension of the process which was found to be strong predictors of a wide range of behaviours and attitudes in the workplace, such as job satisfaction and life satisfaction, job performance, absenteeism, commitment and turn over intentions" (Burke and Green Glass, 1995; Lee & Ashforth, 1993). The result of the study coincides with the above results stating there are negative relationships between burnout and commitment to organization. As a result of burnout, FWC, nepotism, and customer aggression, more stress is expected to occur. Consequently, the second objective is:

### **B) Which stressor factors are substantial on the burnout and turnover intention**

Contributors are stemmed in the stress transition that results from customer aggression in the workplace or customer willingness to adapt. To find a solution, the management for human resources should have insights into what factors influence the intentions of employees to assume responsibili-

ties. The factors that need to be considered are interference with home and work responsibilities and disorder. These can be attributed to poor skills in management. It requires the right management skills to overcome the barrier.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In the competitive world of the tourism industry, travel agencies often deal with the customers face to face. Travel agencies' responsibilities towards customers and the expectations for high customer satisfaction are the reasons why employees can face overtime work and complain more. Karatepe and Baddar (2005), stated that "In addition to conflicts in the work-family interface, there are a number of various antecedents of JSTRESS (Job stress) such as role conflict, role ambiguity, self-efficacy, job demands, supervisor support, organizational politics and long work hours." The relationship between FWC, JSTRESS and turnover intention, which was briefly explained in the above studies, has shown higher FWC and JSTRESS caused higher turnover intention (Bhuiyan et al., 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Previous research underlined the results of the FWC, which are positively related to employees' quitting the jobs (Netemeyer et al., 1996; Karatepe and Baddar, 2005). A study carried out by Wang and ChangFu (2012), has revealed that FWC are positively correlated with emotional exhaustion (Muhammad & Hamdy, 2005). Considering previous studies, this study conducted qualitative method interviews with travel agency managers to measure the relationship between FWC, nepotism and customer aggression if any of these antecedents influenced the burnout and turnover intention among employees. Hypothesis 1 is proposed in line with the aforementioned literature:

H1: There is a positive correlation between FWC and employees' burnout and turnover in-

tention.

A field-based research on Cyprus' hotel industry identified nepotism in paralyzing human resource practices. A decrease in the level of employee satisfaction is shown. In the hotel industry of North Cyprus, however, job opportunities are limited, employees want to quit their jobs if their job satisfaction level is not increased. Another conclusion is that, nepotism among employees leads to low performance, depression, burnout and distrust. Arasli and Tumer's (2008) also found that increasing tension due to favoritism (Lambert et al., 2009) results to employees' unwillingness. According to the above studies, hypothesis 2 is posed.

H2: Nepotism has a negative effect on employees' burnout and turnover intention.

Yaratan and Uludag (2012), who assessed the effect of aggression on emotional exhaustion and professional efficacy (burnout) found a positive relationship between verbal aggressions and burnout.

Karatepe et al. (2010) stated the positive relation between verbal aggression and emotional exhaustion (Yaratan & Uludag, 2012). In an academic study conducted by Lee and Ashforth (1993); Dormann & Zapf (2004), they investigated the role of aggression on turnover. Besides, Karatepe et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study using a questionnaire in Northern Cyprus to evaluate frontline hotel employees; Van Dieendonck and Mevissen (2002) presented a study among trolley car drivers in the Netherlands; Grandey et al. (2004) also studied on American call center employees; Choi et al (2012) for Korean front-line hotel employees; Karatepe (2011) on full-time front-line employees in Dubai's five-star hotels - all unanimously declared having positive influence on emotional exhaustion by verbal customer aggression.

So, hypothesis 3 is posited:

H3: Customer verbal aggression has positive

effect on employees burnout and turnover intention.

Maslach et al. (2001), proposed burnout scale entitled MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory) using exhaustion, cynicism and personal achievement reduction. Exhaustion is defined in this scale as a feeling of state that emotionally no energy is left. Cynicism is considered as depersonalization, which means keeping away from work. Demolishing the sense of professional effectiveness is defined as reduced personal accomplishment efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2009; Alarcon, 2011).

The outcome of Singh et al. (1996)'s study shows a negative burnout relationship to job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention. The negative effects of emotional exhaustion on performance among full-time frontline employees in Kish Island and Tehran, Iran were concluded in Karatepe's quantitative study (2011), thus, hypothesis 4 is proposed:

H4: Higher experience of burnout leads to lower organizational commitment.

Obviously, when employees are experiencing high-level exhaustion and burnout, they tend to leave work (Chauhan, 2009; Jackson, 1987; Pines et al., 1981). Hypothesis 5 is therefore posed:

H5: Higher experience of burnout leads to higher intention to leave.

## 2.1. Gap in the prevailing literature

There is a gap in the literature as delineated in the various studies undertaken by scholars on the subject of this field. The literature on investigating the influence of FWC, nepotism and aggression of customers among travel agency employees, are rare. Hotels, government organizations or private companies are the common case studies for this topic.

This research is expected to contribute by qua-

litatively investigating how and why the FWC, nepotism and customer aggression influenced burnout and turnover among travel agency employees in Iran and examining the relationship between them, either positively or negatively. In this way, the present study claims that employees who are unable to manage conflicts between family and work might face decreased interest and chronic work stress, e.g. work overload.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Data and procedure

This study employs semi-structured interviews and uses qualitative research method to gain in-depth information about burnout and turnover intention among travel agencies' employees. The advantage of using qualitative method is to provide flexibility and depth in the study. A collection of evidence demonstrated the construct validity. This study was an endeavor, having interviews with managers from 30 travel agencies, using expert sampling - a type of purposeful sampling technique considered appropriate where an expert knowledge needs to be gained from the population.

The above-mentioned technique is a subset of non-probability technique usually used in qualitative research method. It was assured that no information was misused and would be deleted after completion of the study. Interviewees were informed and they were given an explanation on the purpose of the study. In addition, their personal information was kept confidential. Employees of travel agencies selected by managers were between the ages of 25 and 45, all Iranians, 70% women and 30% men, and 50% had 4 to 12 years of experience.

Semi-structured interview measured the knowledge, as scholars undertook the survey. This

study uses the semi-structured interview to save time (interview with the respondents) and make meaningful data collection. There was also an order in the topics of the research. Further research can be carried out and applied to different countries.

### 4. Findings

The primary aim of this qualitative study was to offer a descriptive and realistic picture of the research subject, not to reach generalizable results through the numbers. The vision of the interviewees is illustrated without the findings being generalized. Each transcript has been thoroughly examined. Then the proper words and phrases were fitted with pre-set themes of this study. In order to interpret the findings, the important questions were designed.

- 1-What's your understanding of family work conflict concept?
- 2-What's the impact of FWC on employees' burnout?
- 3-What's the impact of FWC on output and efficiency?

**Table 1** | Manager's opinion: what's your understanding of the family work concept?

Opinion	Frequency
Unable to manage home and work	27
Disorder	15
Interfering home and work responsibilities	21
Stressor	18

Managers' responses have been analyzed and the results are shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, most managers said employees are unable to manage responsibilities at home and at work. This result made us notice what some prevailing scholars claimed that the lack of balance between home and work would lead to FWC.

**Table 2 |** The opinion of managers: what's the impact of FWC on burnout.

Opinion	Frequency
Lead to emotional exhaustion	25
Loss of creativity	11
Job stress	26
Low satisfaction	20

Table 2 shows that the effect of FWC on job stress is more visible. Employees who are inclined towards FWC might face more stress. Having said that, scholars declared the employees who have experienced FWC, they might experience more stress at work.

**Table 3 |** Managers opinion: what's the impact of FWC on employee's performance?

Opinion	Frequency
Depersonalization	17
Job dissatisfaction	20
Leaving the job	26
Occupational commitment	15

The positive effect of FWC on leaving the job is shown in Table 3. The aim and objective of this research was to include the question to this study. The questions below have been asked to managers about nepotism.

- 1-What is your concept of nepotism?
- 2-What is the effect of nepotism on employee burnout?
- 3-What is the outcome of nepotism?

**Table 4 |** Managers opinion: what's your understanding of nepotism concept

Opinion	Frequency
Illegality	28
Prejudice	20
Friendship and relationship	15
Mistrust	16
Venality	11

According to Table 4, nepotism as an illegal action in human resource management, was illustrated by the congruence among most managers.

**Table 5 |** Managers' opinion: what's the effect of nepotism to employee burnout

Opinion	Frequency
Loss incentive	25
Job stress	27
Low satisfaction	18
Emotionally exhausted	13

The positive relationship between FWC and Job stress was established, before table 2 was posed. Nepotism causes job stress and low performance, according to the findings. As shown in this table, work stress is affected by nepotism.

**Table 6 |** Managers opinion: what's the effect of nepotism on output and efficiency?

Opinion	Frequency
Depersonalization	15
Job dissatisfaction	17
Leaving the job	20
Occupational commitment	10
Low performance	23

According to Table 6, while nepotism caused employees to be placed under stress at work, the managers claimed, it also had a significant impact on low performance and quitting the job. They uttered nepotism caused negative moods that affect them and then leave the job.

Managers were asked to answer the following questions to determine the impact of customer aggression on employees' burnout.

1. What's the effect of customer aggression on employees' burnout?
2. What's the effect of customers aggression on output and efficiency?

Table 7 demonstrates that customer aggression resulting to emotional exhaustion among employees. When posing the question to managers who were asked about employees' psychological response against customer aggression, they pointed out to emotional exhaustion as the result of

customer aggression. Table 7 shows that customer aggression among employees leads to emotional exhaustion. When managers were asked about the psychological response of employees against customer aggression, they pointed out 'emotionally exhausted' as a result of customer aggression.

To determine the influencers that may affect the reaction of employees, it was decided to include them. In this regard, a positive relationship is found in table 8 between customer aggression and leaving the job.

**Table 7** | What's the effect of customer aggression on employee's burnout

Opinion	Frequency
Emotionally exhausted	26
Loss impetus	18
Job stress	6
Low satisfaction	9

**Table 8** | The effect of customer aggression on output and efficiency.

Opinion	Frequency
Low performance	20
Leaving the job	28
Occupational commitment	8
Depersonalization	13

## 5. Conclusion and implications

As a predominant factor, FWC was extracted from data analyzes that had a high effect on the burnout and turnover intentions among employees. FWC has a negative impact on employee understanding. FWC's fully achieved results are incapable of managing between home and work, disorder and stressor. This is a salient point because employees who have had difficulty managing between home and work, changed their behavior due to job stress. Results showed a positive correlation between stress at work and leaving the job. In reference to most managers, when employees face

the conflict, they prefer to leave their job.

The understanding of nepotism by managers is defined as an action of illegality. Nepotism results to: depersonalization, job dissatisfaction, job loss, lack of commitment to work and low performance. Based from the findings, most employees have experienced stress and they have not been influenced in their work with nepotism. The other salient finding was that the result of customer aggression is emotional exhaustion and low performance.

In conclusion, the outcome revealed a lack of management. Ultimately, this study suggests that managers should take steps to avoid problems such as loss of employee incentives, stress at work, quitting the job, and so on, by training employees to improve interpersonal skills and how to respect customer loyalty, creating a working environment where employees can take advantage of their families' friendly benefits. And avoiding any workplace favoritism and friendship to prevent the failure of the organization. Managers should undoubtedly meet ethical standards and should also reward the performance of employees.

## 6. Limitations and recommendation for future study

The present study was constrained on the performance of employees based on the perception of FWC, nepotism and customer aggression by managers. The future study may focus on the effect of the performance of managers on the burnout and turnover among employees. Furthermore, it is constrained by the fact that 30 managers in Northern Iran are not representatives of the majority of travel agency managers thus, the findings cannot be generalized. Future studies can be undertaken in other Asian or Middle East countries to evaluate results and identify other psychological factors that affect burnout. Given the time limit in conducting the study, it was not feasible to ap-

ply a longitudinal approach in finding out how the FWC, nepotism and customer aggression influence on employees' behavior.

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