

Original Scientific Paper

UDC: 159.944.4:640.45-051
338.486.3:640.45
005.966-055.2

DOI: 10.5937/menhottur2500013L

Received: 23 June 2025
Revised: 13 September 2025
Accepted: 25 September 2025
Published online: 2 October 2025

Understanding burnout in the HoReCa sector: The role of personal and work-related factors

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores what causes burnout among employees in the HoReCa sector, focusing on how factors like gender, age, education, type of employment, and work experience relate to the three key aspects of burnout measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory. **Methodology** – Data were collected through an anonymous online survey containing profile questions and items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The survey was shared by HoReCa managers in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in 1,234 completed responses between January and October 2024. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. **Findings** – The results indicate that factors such as age, type of employment, gender, education, and work experience all contribute to shaping burnout levels among employees in the HoReCa sector. However, age and employment type emerge as the most influential, while the effects of gender, education, and work experience appear to be more subtle. **Implications** – Burnout is a multifaceted condition, shaped by individual traits and specific work experiences. Tailored interventions, addressing the specific needs of employees based on their gender, age, education, type of employment and work experience, could help mitigate burnout and improve employee well-being and performance in the HoReCa sector.

Keywords: employee well-being, burnout, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, HoReCa

JEL classification: M12, J28

Razumevanje izgaranja na poslu u HoReCa sektoru: Uloga ličnih i radnih faktora

Sažetak

Svrha – Ovaj rad istražuje uzroke izgaranja na poslu među zaposlenima u HoReCa sektoru, sa posebnim fokusom na to kako pol, starost, nivo obrazovanja, tip zaposlenja i radno iskustvo utiču na tri ključna aspekta izgaranja prema Maslačevom inventaru izgaranja. **Metodologija** – Podaci su prikupljeni putem anonimnog onlajn upitnika koji je obuhvatio profilna pitanja i pitanja iz Maslačevog inventara izgaranja. Upitnik je plasiran pomoću menadžera u HoReCa sektoru u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, Crnoj Gori, Bosni i Hercegovini. U

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periodu od januara do oktobra 2024. godine ukupno je popunjeno 1234 upitnika. Prikupljeni odgovori su obrađeni i analizirani primenom softvera IBM SPSS, verzija 26.0. **Rezultati** – Pol, starost, obrazovanje, tip zaposlenja i radno iskustvo imaju uticaj na nivo izgaranja među zaposlenima u HoReCa sektoru. Starost i tip zaposlenja se izdvajaju kao faktori koji imaju izraženiji uticaj, dok pol, obrazovanje i radno iskustvo imaju nešto manji uticaj. **Implikacije** – Izgaranje na poslu je složen fenomen koji zavisi od individualnih karakteristika i specifičnih radnih iskustava. Prilagođene mere koje uzimaju u obzir specifične potrebe zaposlenih u odnosu na pol, starost, obrazovanje, tip zaposlenja i radno iskustvo mogu doprineti smanjenju izgaranja i unapređenju blagostanja i radnog učinka zaposlenih u HoReCa sektoru.

Ključne reči: blagostanje zaposlenih, izgaranje, depersonalizacija, lično dostignuće, HoReCa

JEL klasifikacija: M12, J28

1. Introduction

The HoReCa sector represents the heart of the hospitality industry, encompassing a wide range of business entities, from small, independent restaurants to large, international hotel chains (Babu et al., 2023). Employees in this sector frequently endure long working hours, including nights, weekends, and public holidays, while also managing demanding guests and facing management expectations for consistently excellent performance (Ahmad et al., 2021; Elbaz et al., 2020; Ghosh, 2022; Wallace & Coughlan, 2023). For those in direct contact with guests, the pressure to maintain a friendly and positive attitude even in stressful situations adds to the mental and emotional strain (Kim, 2008; Pienaar & Willemse, 2008). Consequently, burnout has become increasingly prevalent in the HoReCa sector, fueled by constant, unpredictable, and significant environmental changes that place considerable pressure on employees (Ayachit & Chitta, 2022; Babu et al., 2023; Baquero, 2023; Yin et al., 2022).

Burnout has profound consequences for both employees and organizations, affecting multiple aspects of well-being and performance (Lukić Nikolić & Garabinović, 2023; Prentice & Thaichon, 2019). It manifests through a range of physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms, such as fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure, and headaches (Nápoles, 2022). Employees suffering from burnout often show reduced energy, increased absenteeism, lower job performance, and diminished engagement, all of which contribute to higher turnover and reduced organizational effectiveness (Elbaz et al., 2020; Han et al., 2016; Lukić Nikolić & Mirković, 2023; Maslach, 1982; Wang, 2020). These outcomes are often compounded by emotional exhaustion, apathy, and feelings of powerlessness (Costin et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998), and in severe cases may extend into personal life, leading to social isolation, anger, substance abuse, and difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities (Adamopoulos & Syrou, 2023). Prior studies have shown that burnout is linked both to personal attributes such as age, gender, and marital status, and to organizational conditions including job-related stress, lack of social support, unfair performance evaluation, and inadequate compensation (Lukić Nikolić & Garabinović, 2023; Lukić Nikolić & Mirković, 2023; Ogresta et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to investigate the factors contributing to burnout among employees in the HoReCa sector, with a particular focus on the influence of gender, age, educational background, type of employment, and work experience. Burnout is examined using the three dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA).

This study contributes to the literature by addressing an underexplored context: the HoReCa sector in Southeastern Europe. While burnout has been extensively studied in Western and Asian hospitality industries, little is known about its drivers in post-transition economies characterized by seasonal employment, job insecurity, and intense work demands (Lukić Nikolić & Garabinović, 2023). By analyzing data from four countries in the region, this research fills a gap in understanding how demographic and employment-related characteristics shape burnout in a labor market with unique structural challenges. Finally, the significance of this research lies in its potential to support organizations in the HoReCa sector in designing more targeted interventions to mitigate burnout. Identifying how personal and work-related factors influence burnout provides evidence base for differentiated human resource strategies, while also underscoring the importance of fostering supportive work environments and prioritizing psychological well-being (Allam et al., 2023).

2. Background

Burnout was initially identified as a syndrome involving negative perceptions toward clients and oneself, often accompanied by physical and emotional strain (Freudenberger, 1974). It was described as an extreme form of unmanaged stress (Hamann, 1990). Over time, researchers began to define it as a depletion of the personal resources necessary to cope with job-related pressures (Brewer & Shapard, 2004), which can result in diminished motivation, lower levels of commitment, and reduced engagement among employees (Wang, 2020). Although originally associated with caregiving and service roles, the phenomenon began gaining recognition across a broader range of professions in the 1990s (Nápoles, 2022). However, research consistently indicates that burnout is most common and intense in occupations that require high levels of interpersonal interaction (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Occupational burnout is generally understood as a mental and emotional depletion resulting from prolonged interpersonal stress at work (Maslach et al., 2001). Key job-related and organizational factors contributing to burnout include poor working conditions, lack of job recognition (Freudenberger, 1977), work overload, limited autonomy, inadequate rewards, perceived unfairness, value conflicts (Maslach & Leiter, 1997), unclear job roles and goals, rigid organizational structures, ineffective communication (Maslach, 1982), restrictive procedures, poor leadership (Nápoles, 2022), and ambiguous job expectations with increasing responsibilities (Ali et al., 2022). As a result, burnout is defined as a work-related psychological syndrome triggered by prolonged, unmanaged stress in the workplace (Khammissa et al., 2022).

Maslach Burnout Inventory has become the most widely used and well-established instrument for evaluating burnout (Lubbadeh, 2020), using three main dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and a reduced sense of Personal Accomplishment (PA) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). EE refers to the experience of feeling emotionally drained and overwhelmed. DP involves a detached or negative response toward various aspects of one's job, where individuals distance themselves and intentionally disengage from others. A reduced sense of PA arises when individuals feel incompetent, with a diminished sense of effort and productivity in their work (Maslach et al., 2001).

Previous research suggests that gender significantly influences how employees experience and cope with workplace stress, with men and women potentially displaying different emotional responses and coping strategies. Social and cultural factors related to gender may influence the manifestation of burnout, leading to varying levels of EE, DP, and PA for men and women (Houkes et al., 2003; Lundberg & Frankenhaeuser, 1999; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Based on these findings, the first hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There are significant gender differences in burnout, with males and females differing in levels of EE, DP, and PA.

Several studies suggest that personal characteristics, particularly age and the various life and career stages it represents, can significantly influence the experience of burnout. These stages can affect different dimensions of job stress, including emotional, attitudinal, and personal factors, all of which contribute to the development of burnout (Brewer & Shapard, 2004; Ramos et al., 2016). That leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: There are significant age-related differences in burnout, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different age ranges.

Other studies have examined the relationship between employees' level of education and their susceptibility to burnout. Some findings suggest that higher levels of education are linked to lower burnout rates, as more educated individuals often have better strategies for managing stress and greater opportunities to find a new job (Finkelstein et al., 2007; Rengering, 2016). That leads to the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: There are significant education-related differences in burnout, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different educational levels.

The HoReCa sector depends significantly on seasonal labor to accommodate heightened operational demands during peak periods (Walker et al., 2020). Research shows that employment type plays a significant role in influencing burnout levels (Üngüren et al., 2024). This difference is largely due to the precarious nature of temporary employment, which is often linked to lower job security, fewer social benefits, and higher job strain. These factors can deplete personal resources, making temporary employees more vulnerable to burnout (Ferreira & Gomes, 2022). Additionally, some studies have found that seasonal employees face high levels of stress and other related health issues (Krikonis et al., 2025). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: There are significant differences in burnout based on type of employment, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA between permanent and seasonal employees.

Studies have shown significant correlations between years of work experience and key dimensions of burnout, particularly EE and DP. This suggests that work experience may act as a mediating factor influencing these aspects of burnout (Duli, 2016). Certain studies also suggest a positive correlation between work experience and reduced DP, as well as increased PA (Hussein, 2018). Nevertheless, some studies indicate that work experience may not have a substantial effect on burnout (Knani & Fournier, 2013). Based on these mixed findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 5: There are significant differences in burnout based on working experience, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different levels of work experience.

3. Materials and methods

Research design. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine burnout among employees in the HoReCa sector. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic, employment-related, and burnout-related items.

Sampling and participants. The target population included HoReCa employees from four Southeastern European countries: Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These countries were selected due to their shared historical, economic, and sociopolitical

contexts. Although differing in development levels and political climate, they face similar challenges resulting from the post-Yugoslav transition (Lukić Nikolić & Labus, 2025).

The final sample consisted of 1,234 respondents, out of approximately 2,000 HoReCa employees invited to participate, yielding a response rate of 61.7%. This rate is considered acceptable within social science research, where response rates typically range from 30% to 70% (De Vaus, 2013). Participants represented diverse demographic and employment backgrounds, including gender, age, education, type of employment, years of professional experience, and country of current employment.

Data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section collected demographic and employment-related information. The second section included items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996), with participants rating how often they experienced specific statements on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day).

A pilot study was conducted with 35 HoReCa employees to assess clarity and comprehension of the instrument. Based on minor technical adjustments suggested by respondents, the questionnaire was refined. Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70. On average, participants required approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The final version of the questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms. Data were collected between January and October 2024. To ensure confidentiality, participation was completely anonymous. The survey was distributed via email to HoReCa managers, who were asked to complete the questionnaire and forward it to their employees.

Data analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Cronbach's alpha values demonstrated high internal consistency for all scales: 0.97 for Emotional Exhaustion (EE), 0.96 for Depersonalization (DP), and 0.98 for Personal Accomplishment (PA), all well above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (DeVellis, 2003). The normality of the data distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, supported by visual inspections (histograms, boxplots, and probability plots) and measures of skewness and kurtosis. Results indicated that the normality assumption was not met (EE, $p = 0.000$; DP, $p = 0.000$; PA, $p = 0.003$). Consequently, non-parametric statistical methods were employed for hypotheses testing, specifically the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test. All analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence interval. In addition, Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance across groups ($p > 0.05$).

4. Results

Table 1 provides an overview of the key demographic and employment-related information for the respondents. The sample consists of 1,234 respondents. The gender distribution indicates a greater proportion of males (54.1%) compared to females (45.9%). Regarding education, the majority of respondents have completed secondary school (61.8%), followed by college education (21.8%), university education (14.5%), and a small portion with primary school education (1.9%). In terms of age, the largest group of respondents falls within the 30 to 50 age range (62.6%), with 23.6% being up to 30 years old and 13.8% being above 50. Geographically, respondents are primarily from Croatia (42.1%), followed by Serbia (25.1%), Montenegro (17.1%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (15.7%). Regarding working experience, most respondents have more than 10 years of experience (46.8%), with 21.5% having 6 to 10 years of experience, 20.6% having 1 to 5 years, and 11.1% having less than 1 year of experience. The majority of respondents are employed permanently (73.3%), while 26.7% are employed seasonally.

Table 1: Key information about the respondents

Characteristic	Answers	N	%
Gender	Male	667	54.1
	Female	567	45.9
Education	Primary school	24	1.9
	Secondary School	762	61.8
	College	269	21.8
	University	179	14.5
Age	Up to 30	291	23.6
	From 30 to 50	773	62.6
	Above 50	170	13.8
Country	Croatia	519	42.1
	Serbia	310	25.1
	Montenegro	211	17.1
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	194	15.7
Working experience	Less than 1 year	137	11.1
	From 1 to 5 years	254	20.6
	From 6 to 10 years	265	21.5
	More than 10 years	578	46.8
Employment type	Permanently	905	73.3
	Seasonal	329	26.7

Source: Authors' research

Table 2 presents the results regarding Maslach Burnout Inventory. According to the mean scores, levels of EE (M = 16.71) and PA (M = 13.75) are classified as low, while DP (M = 7.06) falls within the moderate range among the respondents.

Table 2: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results

Scale	M	SD	Value	Category
EE	16.71	17.53	≤17	Low intensity
			18-29	Moderate intensity
			≥30	High intensity
DP	7.06	9.49	≤5	Low intensity
			6-11	Moderate intensity
			≥12	High intensity
PA	13.75	14.68	≤33	Low intensity
			34-39	Moderate intensity
			≥40	High intensity

Source: Authors' research

The Maslach Burnout Inventory results, analyzed by gender and presented in Table 3, reveal notable differences in burnout dimensions. For EE, males reported a mean score of 2.82, while females had a slightly higher mean of 2.90. Median values were 2.33 for males and 2.00 for females, with no statistically significant difference between genders ($z = -0.520$, $p = 0.603$). In the DP dimension, males had a mean score of 2.46 compared to 2.35 for females, a difference that was statistically significant ($z = -2.345$, $p = 0.019$), indicating higher DP levels among men. Regarding PA, males scored a mean of 3.64, and females 3.46; median values were 4.00 for males and 3.50 for females. No significant gender difference was found

for PA ($z = -1.127$, $p = 0.260$). These findings indicate that EE ($p = 0.603$) and PA ($p = 0.260$) do not differ significantly between males and females, whereas DP ($p = 0.019$) does, partially supporting **Hypothesis 1**. One possible explanation is that, in the observed countries, men are often primarily responsible for the family's financial security due to historical and cultural factors (Lukić Nikolić & Mirković, 2023). Under stress, men may withdraw and have difficulty expressing emotions, while placing strong emphasis on high earnings, career advancement, and challenging work. Social norms encouraging emotional detachment and goal orientation may further increase men's susceptibility to DP (Houkes et al., 2011).

Table 3: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results regarding gender (Mann-Whitney U test)

Scale	Answers	N	M	Md	U	z	p
EE	Male	667	2.82	2.33	185867.000	-0.520	0.603
	Female	567	2.90	2.00			
DP	Male	667	2.46	1.60	175003.000	-2.345	0.019*
	Female	567	2.35	1.20			
PA	Male	667	3.64	4.00	182255.500	-1.127	0.260
	Female	567	3.46	3.50			

Source: Authors' research

The Maslach Burnout Inventory results, analyzed by age group and presented in Table 4, reveal significant differences across all three burnout dimensions. For EE, individuals up to 30 years reported a mean score of 3.26, notably higher than those aged 30–50 (2.84) and above 50 (2.25), with differences statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Similarly, in DP, the youngest group scored 2.80, compared to 2.37 for the 30–50 group and 1.93 for those above 50, again showing significant differences ($p = 0.000$). Regarding PA, younger individuals reported the highest mean score (3.96), followed by 3.50 for ages 30–50 and 3.13 for those above 50, with all differences statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Overall, younger respondents experience higher EE and DP but also report greater PA compared to older age groups. These findings support **Hypothesis 2**, confirming age-related differences in burnout across all three dimensions. Younger employees appear more susceptible to EE and DP, which may be linked to job insecurity and limited support from experienced colleagues (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Wielers et al., 2022). Additionally, less work experience can increase pressure to perform and meet expectations, further contributing to burnout (Lukić Nikolić & Mirković, 2023). Conversely, the higher PA among younger employees likely reflects their eagerness to learn, develop new skills, and gain professional experience, which enhances their sense of accomplishment (Vagni et al., 2020).

Table 4: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results regarding age (Kruskal-Wallis H test)

Scale	Answers	N	M	Md	H	df	p
EE	Up to 30	291	3.26	2.56	25.777	2	0.000*
	From 30 to 50	773	2.84	2.22			
	Above 50	170	2.25	1.67			
DP	Up to 30	291	2.80	1.80	26.753	2	0.000*
	From 30 to 50	773	2.37	1.60			
	Above 50	170	1.93	1.00			
PA	Up to 30	291	3.96	4.13	16.896	2	0.000*
	From 30 to 50	773	3.50	3.88			
	Above 50	170	3.13	1.19			

Source: Authors' research

The Maslach Burnout Inventory results, analyzed by education level and presented in Table 5, reveal significant differences in EE but not in DP or PA. For EE, individuals with primary education reported the highest mean score (4.02), followed by secondary education (2.98), university education (2.64), and college education (2.55), with differences statistically significant ($p = 0.007$). In contrast, DP showed a gradual decrease from primary (3.17) to secondary (2.52), university (2.25), and college (2.16) education, but differences were not statistically significant ($p = 0.082$). For PA, the highest mean was observed among university-educated respondents (3.98), followed by primary (3.79), college (3.54), and secondary education (3.46), with no significant differences across groups ($p = 0.069$). These findings partially support **Hypothesis 3**. Educational level appears to influence EE, with lower-educated individuals experiencing higher exhaustion, while DP and PA are not significantly affected. Higher education may equip employees in the HoReCa sector with better problem-solving skills, access to relevant information, and adaptability to changing circumstances. Additionally, higher educational attainment often leads to more stable employment and improved financial security, which can mitigate stress and anxiety related to job instability (Krikonis et al., 2025).

Table 5: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results regarding education (Kruskal-Wallis H test)

Scale	Answers	N	M	Md	H	df	p
EE	Primary school	24	4.02	3.89	12.055	3	0.007*
	Secondary School	762	2.98	2.33			
	College	269	2.55	1.89			
	University	179	2.64	2.22			
DP	Primary school	24	3.17	1.40	6.704	3	0.082
	Secondary School	762	2.52	1.60			
	College	269	2.16	1.20			
	University	179	2.25	1.60			
PA	Primary school	24	3.79	3.13	7.100	3	0.069
	Secondary School	762	3.46	3.50			
	College	269	3.54	4.00			
	University	179	3.98	4.63			

Source: Authors' research

The Maslach Burnout Inventory results, analyzed by employment type and presented in Table 6, reveal significant differences across all three burnout dimensions. Seasonal employees reported higher EE ($M = 3.60$) than permanent employees ($M = 2.59$), with the difference statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Similarly, DP was higher among seasonal employees ($M = 2.94$) compared to permanent employees ($M = 2.22$, $p = 0.000$). Seasonal employees also reported greater PA ($M = 4.13$) than permanent employees ($M = 3.35$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that seasonal employees experience higher levels of EE, DP, and PA. These findings fully support **Hypothesis 4**, confirming that employment type influences burnout. Seasonal employees often work during peak periods characterized by long hours, high guest demand, and elevated stress, which contributes to higher EE and DP. The limited time to form strong workplace relationships may further increase DP. Despite these challenges, seasonal employees frequently report higher PA, particularly early in their tenure, due to their enthusiasm, drive to perform, and the immediate recognition they receive for their efforts. In contrast, permanent employees may experience less frequent feedback, leading to more routine work experience and comparatively lower PA.

Table 6: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results regarding employment type (Kruskal-Wallis H test)

Scale	Answers	N	M	Md	U	z	p
EE	Permanently	905	2.59	2.00	106108.500	-7.772	0.000*
	Seasonal	329	3.60	3.11			
DP	Permanently	905	2.22	1.20	111862.000	-6.942	0.000*
	Seasonal	329	2.94	2.20			
PA	Permanently	905	3.35	3.00	118742.500	-5.596	0.000*
	Seasonal	329	4.13	4.38			

Source: Authors' research

The Maslach Burnout Inventory results, analyzed by years of work experience and presented in Table 7, reveal differences across the three burnout dimensions. EE showed no significant variation across experience levels ($p = 0.375$), with mean scores ranging from 3.03 for employees with less than 1 year of experience to 2.76 for those with more than 10 years. DP also did not differ significantly between groups ($p = 0.259$), with means ranging from 2.36 to 2.56 across experience categories. In contrast, PA differed significantly ($p = 0.001$), with employees with less than 1 year of experience reporting the highest mean score (4.12), followed by 3.76 for 1–5 years, 3.27 for 6–10 years, and 3.46 for those with more than 10 years. This indicates that less experienced employees perceive higher levels of PA compared to their more experienced counterparts. These findings partially support **Hypothesis 5**. While EE and DP are not significantly affected by work experience, PA is higher among less experienced employees. This may reflect their greater enthusiasm, higher expectations, and optimism regarding work achievements. Additionally, fewer responsibilities and lower exposure to stressors associated with longer tenure may contribute to a stronger sense of accomplishment among less experienced employees.

Table 7: Maslach Burnout Inventory – Results regarding working experience (Kruskal-Wallis H test)

Scale	Answers	N	M	Md	H	df	p
EE	Less than 1 year	137	3.03	2.33	3.107	3	0.375
	From 1 to 5 years	254	3.02	2.28			
	From 6 to 10 years	265	2.82	2.22			
	More than 10 years	578	2.76	2.00			
DP	Less than 1 year	137	2.45	1.80	4.019	3	0.259
	From 1 to 5 years	254	2.56	1.70			
	From 6 to 10 years	265	2.36	1.40			
	More than 10 years	578	2.36	1.40			
PA	Less than 1 year	137	4.12	5.00	16.779	3	0.001*
	From 1 to 5 years	254	3.76	4.00			
	From 6 to 10 years	265	3.27	3.00			
	More than 10 years	578	3.46	3.69			

Source: Authors' research

5. Discussion

The findings of this study (presented in Table 2) indicate that employees in the HoReCa sector are not experiencing extreme levels of burnout overall. However, the presence of moderate DP, despite low EE and PA, is noteworthy. This suggests that employees may

adopt emotional distancing as a coping mechanism—an early warning sign of potential burnout escalation. If unaddressed, such detachment could undermine motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction, ultimately affecting service quality, guest experience, and organizational performance. These results highlight the importance of proactive interventions targeting DP, including supportive management practices, well-being programs, and strategies that strengthen employee engagement and connection to work.

Table 8 summarizes the results of the hypotheses examined in this research.

Table 8: Summary results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Test	p-values	Decision
Hypothesis 1: There are significant gender differences in burnout, with males and females differing in levels of EE, DP, and PA.	Mann-Whitney U test	EE (p= 0.603) DP (p= 0.019*) PA (p= 0.260)	Partially supported
Hypothesis 2: There are significant age-related differences in burnout, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different age ranges.	Kruskal-Wallis H test	EE (p= 0.000*) DP (p= 0.000*) PA (p= 0.000*)	Supported
Hypothesis 3: There are significant education-related differences in burnout, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different educational levels.	Kruskal-Wallis H test	EE (p= 0.007*) DP (p= 0.082) PA (p= 0.069)	Partially supported
Hypothesis 4: There are significant differences in burnout based on employment type, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA between permanent and seasonal employees.	Kruskal-Wallis H test	EE (p= 0.000*) DP (p= 0.000*) PA (p= 0.000*)	Supported
Hypothesis 5: There are significant differences in burnout based on working experience, with variations in levels of EE, DP, and PA across different levels of work tenure.	Kruskal-Wallis H test	EE (p= 0.375) DP (p= 0.259) PA (p= 0.001*)	Partially supported

Source: Authors' research

Age and employment type emerged as the most influential predictors of burnout. Younger and seasonal employees reported higher EE and DP, while in some cases also demonstrating higher PA. This pattern underscores the multidimensional nature of burnout, where EE, DP, and PA are shaped by distinct individual and work-related factors. Gender, education, and work experience had more subtle, context-dependent effects but still contributed to variation, reflecting the complex interplay between personal traits, job demands, and social expectations.

When compared with prior research, these results both support and extend existing frameworks. Higher burnout among younger employees aligns with studies linking job insecurity, limited experience, and high-performance pressures to occupational burnout (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Wielers et al., 2022). The observed gender differences in DP – but not in EE or PA – partially contradict research suggesting women are generally more prone to emotional strain (Houkes et al., 2011), indicating that regional and cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles in Southeastern Europe, may shape burnout manifestations. Additionally, the protective role of education in reducing EE corroborates previous findings

that knowledge and problem-solving skills can buffer against occupational stress (Krikonis et al., 2025).

The results can be interpreted through established burnout frameworks. According to Maslach's model, burnout arises from chronic workplace stress, with EE, DP, and PA representing distinct but interrelated components. The findings from this research support this conceptualization, as the three dimensions did not always move in parallel. Younger and seasonal employees exhibited high EE and DP alongside elevated PA, suggesting that employees can maintain a sense of effectiveness even under stress and emotional detachment. The multidimensionality of burnout also explains why EE, DP, and PA behave differently across subgroups. EE and DP are closely tied to stress exposure and job demands, particularly for younger and seasonal employees, whereas PA is influenced by perceived competence, achievement, and feedback, which can remain high even under stress. This highlights that universal approaches to burnout prevention may be insufficient, and interventions should be tailored to employee subgroups based on age, employment type, education, and work experience.

6. Conclusion

The findings of a research involving 1,234 employees from the HoReCa sector in four Southeastern European countries (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina) from January to October 2024 highlight that demographic and employment-related factors such as gender, age, education, employment type, and work experience play significant roles in shaping burnout levels. This implies that burnout is a multifaceted condition, shaped by individual traits and specific work experiences.

This study has several implications for both theory and practice. The theoretical implications of this study show that understanding burnout requires considering personal traits and work conditions. Since burnout is influenced by many factors, the research suggests using broader theories that combine psychological, organizational, and cultural views to better explain how it develops in different work environments. From a practical standpoint, these results suggest that one-size-fits-all approaches to employee well-being are insufficient. Human resource strategies should be differentiated to reflect the particular needs of distinct employee groups. For instance, research results indicate that younger and seasonal workers reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion, highlighting the importance of providing stronger emotional support, mentoring, and greater job security for these groups. Conversely, employees with longer work experience demonstrated patterns consistent with reduced personal accomplishment, underscoring the need for career development opportunities, recognition programs, and mentorship roles to sustain engagement and motivation. Beyond the immediate regional context, the findings hold broader relevance for countries with comparable labor market dynamics and hospitality industry structures, such as those in Southern and Eastern Europe or other transition economies where seasonal employment, limited job security, and high work intensity are common. In such environments, similar demographic and employment-related risk factors for burnout are likely to emerge, making targeted and responsive human resource interventions equally important.

A key limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be affected by participants giving socially desirable answers or misjudging their own burnout levels. Future research could improve accuracy by including more objective measures, like supervisor evaluations or physical signs of stress. Another limitation is that the study focused only on HoReCa employees from four Southeastern European countries, which may not reflect burnout patterns in other industries or regions. To make the findings more widely applicable,

future research should include a more diverse range of sectors and locations to explore industry-specific burnout trends.

CRediT author statement

Pero Labus: Software, Methodology, Conceptualization, Investigation, Supervision. **Jelena Lukić Nikolić:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis.

Declaration of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors did not use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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