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Toxin Handlers and Burnout Among Human Resource Managers: Does Emotion-Focused Coping Make a Difference?

Panteha FARMANESH¹

Abstract

Toxin handlers are a vital constituent for organizations as these individuals tend to absorb disruptive emotions and feelings of other members of staff. However, as they carry this burden, they are prone to emotional exhaustion, which can lead to burnout on personal levels. This is a matter of critical importance for HR managers as they are commonly the ones, who deal with such struggles within a company. This current research addresses the issue of burnout for toxin handlers in the tourism sector with the inclusion of coping strategies as a mediating factor by gathering data from a number of 180 HR managers within tourism and hospitality sector. A multi-group analysis and PLS-SEM approach was used to test the hypothesized model. It was found that female managers exhibited a difference to their male counterparts in handling toxin through emotion-focused coping strategies. Current results have shown that female managers in HR departments perform better in handling charged emotions of employees and provide solutions for their staff. This is while coping strategies can act as a mediating element for toxin handlers to defuse their exhaustion that is accumulated through constant interacting with negative emotions.

Keywords: human resources management, toxin handlers, gender, burnout, coping strategy, social exchange theory.

Introduction

In the context of the tourism and hospitality sector, changes are rapid and constant and this puts pressure and creates stress for employees, especially, those in the front-line as they are in regular interaction with customers. Thus, it is common among tourism employees that they develop negative emotions at their workplace. Management of these emotions are essential for organizations in this

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sector to maintain customer satisfaction as well as lowering turnover. Hence, the impact of toxin handlers becomes vital for this sector. Negative emotions that are accumulated at work can lead to severe and dire consequences for individuals as well as their organizations. This is while the subject calls for further research and empirical investigations to better grasp the notion of toxic emotions and their complex nature.

As toxin handlers are crucial entities for an organization, having them feel burnout in their jobs can be costly for the firm as they may resign from their jobs or have their functions drastically reduced (Tracy, 2009). With the progression and effective use of Emotional Intelligence (EI) it can be considered to be a potential danger. Peter Frost (2003) expressed the warnings relating to the fears of what he described as “toxic emotions” and more specifically the hazards that this creates for those managers who are emotionally engaged, which he suggests are “toxin handlers” (see also Glaso & Lokke, 2009). The impression suggests that managers who are “lucky” enough to enjoy high levels of EI and that are able to soak up or deflect it, to enable staff to be able to carry on with their jobs (Frost, 2003: 1).

However, these personalities can then themselves become susceptible from the lack of a support network within an organization and potentially the chance of a lack of acknowledgement. Therefore, as Frost (2003) notes, these types of people are potentially at much higher risk of personal burnout, unless they create a satisfactory coping mechanism or feel they have a suitable support network. Therefore, current research tends to investigate the mediating effect of emotion-focused coping strategies on the linkage between toxin handlers and burnout that is merged through their constant engagement with negative emotions. From academic perspective, current findings imply that emotions of managers in HR department is to be considered on a more profound manner to entail all dimensions of toxin handlers and provide solutions for managers to maintain their handling skills on a desired level. This includes addressing different elements that can aid toxin handlers in reducing possibility of burnout and/or other similar negative outcomes. It is vital to highlight, develop, and introduce means for coping with stress and negative emotions for practitioners as a core aspect of academic research. Hence, academicians can greatly and directly benefit HR managers in this context.

Literature review

Job (Personal) Burnout

Burnout has been defined as a physical, emotional and cognitive syndrome that entails frustration and is accumulated through continuous engagement with emotionally demanding events and occurrences (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996; Sunny’Hu, & Cheng, 2010). This phenomenon is noted to happen at times of contradictions between ones’ work input and output that was expected and is

a form of reaction to anxiety/stress caused by the workplace. This is a serious issue for employees, while notably it is a matter of concern for managers of HR department, who tend to handle and manage negative emotions of staff and thus, are subject to burnout themselves (Sunny'Hu & Cheng, 2010; Kulik *et al.*, 2009). As the job of these toxin handlers is to interact with negative emotions, burnout is prone to be accumulated as stressors are transferred to HR managers. Similarly, it has been suggested that burnout occurs due to interpersonal interactions at work that require emotional engagements and cause stress (Sunny'Hu & Cheng, 2010). While some scholars have regarded burnout as a mono-dimensional matter (e.g. Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), others have suggested that it is a multidimensional factor consisting three distinctive dimensions that are namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1998; Sunny'Hu & Cheng, 2010). This seemingly is the common ground of scholars regarding burnout dimensions. Emotional exhaustion can be described as lowered energy and sense of lack of emotional base, due to high demands. Depersonalization can be referred to as a negative reaction to surroundings and individuals on the receiving point of care. Reduced personal accomplishment is defined as a notion of reduction in competency level of emotions for an individual with regard to work outcomes. The current research takes personal burnout of HR managers into account as these individuals are responsible to handle negative emotions of employees and are referred to as Toxin Emotion Handlers or Toxin Handlers (TH). In this regard, dimensions of burnout are transformed into a single construct using means of each dimension.

Toxin Handlers

Negative emotions are generated, when employees feel pain (emotionally) in relation to an event or occurrence at work, which can be influenced by a number of factors (e.g. bullying, drastic changes, and negative leadership) (Frost, 2003; Kulik *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, external factors can also cause toxic emotions (e.g. loss of a family member, or natural disasters) (Frost, 2003). Such events can lead to accumulation of negative emotions such as, sadness, depression, anger and/or exhaustion. In turn, possessing such emotions can have severe outcomes on performance as well as their state of health in the individuals (Frost & Robinson, 1999). This is where the role of toxin handlers becomes vital, as these individuals tend to aid employees to overcome negativity through specific skills. Empathy is a major element as toxin handlers can predict reactions, which can lead to toxic emotions (Frost, 2003; Kulik *et al.*, 2009). However, this task is a dire one, as toxin handlers are subject to interact with pain and distress, which in turn exposes them to these emotions. This can yield in negative outcomes in their quality of life as well as their state of health, both mentally and physically (Frost, 2004). Over time, toxin handlers may be frustrated, exhausted and emotionally drained,

which can lead to burnout (Kulik *et al.*, 2009; Tracy, 2009; Frost, 2003; Frost & Robinson, 1999).

When individuals utilize their own resources and competencies to handle threatening situations (emotionally), negative emotions appear (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012; Lazarus, 1991). As toxic emotions arise, functions and performance of cognitive processes are disrupted, which shift individuals' attention to these issues (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012). According to Parkinson (1995), negative emotions are momentary with high intensity and are due to certain situations. Such emotions have negative impact on behavior, mental health, and overall quality of life. Individuals with negative emotions tend to spend their energy on adjusting their feelings, which can further cause stress and deteriorate psychological state (Zellars *et al.*, 2004). This is while toxic emotions are merged through time and on a sustainable manner, in which individuals tend to handle or interact with negative emotions. It has been noted by Frost (2003; 2004) that toxic emotions are categorized into three distinctive groups.

Psychologically Recurring (PR), which is described as experiences that take a toll on individuals as issues remain unsolved or the individual senses those events can recur. This particular dimension tends to appear due to various reasons such as, possibility of negative emotions remaining for the individual due to lack of effective strategies to handle/manage events that are emotionally demanding. This feeling leads to a sense of prediction of events to be recurring (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012). Similarly, PR can occur as individuals cannot create a sense of meaning from events that are repeated. Hence, PR is regarded as toxic due to its weigh on individuals' emotions (Frost, 2003; 2004).

Embedded in the premise of social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), and theoretical foundation of organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1990), the current research assumes that toxin handler is a behavior that goes beyond the norms of job requirements (extra-role behavior). SET entails symbolic exchanges that incorporate benefits and/or obligations, which in turn leads to an improved state of relationship among members of a group. Notably, interactions are recurring within a group, which can further enhance linkages within a group as positive emotions can be shaped (Lawler, Thye & Yoon, 2000). Hence, while through toxin handlers, an organization can move towards a more positive atmosphere, and since this behavior requires high commitment and involvement with the organization, it is assumed that accumulation of such interactions can lead to burnout in a direct manner. While in SET concept, there are benefits or obligations returned upon reciprocation, toxin handlers are not directly on the receiving end. However, it has been suggested that such behaviors are prone to be rewarded in time (Ryan, 2001). This is related to the aforementioned fact that such behaviors are considered to be extra-role. Toxin handlers are less likely to be reciprocated from staff to have their negative emotions defused. However, as handlers of toxin in a company, it is assumed that they have the capability of handling such emotions. Thus, hypotheses of current research are shaped upon this assumption.

Hypothesis 1a: Psychologically recurring has a direct impact on managers' personal burnout.

Disconnecting is the second dimension of toxin handlers defined by Frost (2003), which can be described as a sense of disengagement. This is towards job, staff, colleagues or networks that are linked to the emotional state. It is to be noted that disconnecting differs from negative emotions and is linked to isolation or avoidance of a certain group. This is while negative emotions can influence disconnecting through reduced cognitive resources, which leads to avoiding interactions with others. As a result, this toxic matter lowers sense of belongingness and pushes individuals towards isolating from the network. In turn, performance at work can be significantly reduced (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012). From another perspective, as negative emotions are not addressed by other members of the group (in this case, managers and their need of releasing negative emotions gathered by handling toxin), individuals may feel being unheard, which further makes it difficult for others to properly respond, and thus, avoidance becomes the escape route (Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Parkinson, 1995).

Hypothesis 1b: Disconnecting directly influences personal burnout of managers in tourism sector.

The third dimension for TH is draining, which is a state of reduced energy (both mentally and physically) and is linked to negative experiences that individuals perceive with regard to events. For the case of current research, HR managers tend to handle toxin in their firms, and as these toxin handlers are not properly addressed regarding their need of setting free from these negative accumulations of emotions. It is expected that their state of health is deprived over time, which can lead to burnout. This is while according to Lazarus (1991) negative emotions can be a good preparation for managers to take initiatives. However, in time, their mental and physical state can be diminished as regular interaction with toxin has an impact on their overall psychological health. This can lead to sense of exhaustion and frustration, which further can lead to burnout, especially since TH tend to suppress their feelings in this regard (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012). Hence, draining is a toxic state that deteriorates emotional competencies of toxin handlers.

Hypothesis 1c: Draining has a direct impact on personal burnout of managers in HR department, who handle toxic emotions of employees.

The aforementioned dimensions are regarded as 'toxic' as they require individuals to push their limits of psychological and emotional state, lower their belongingness, and call for additional effort to maintain a balance and devotion towards the issues that are brought to their concern, which further negatively impact their performance work-wise.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

Coping strategies (CS) are regarded as an appraisal that are not primary and reflect a skewness towards changing linkage between an individual and his/her surrounding (Lazarus, 1991; Sunny'Hu & Cheng, 2010). Coping strategies are noted to be endeavors of individuals regarding reduction of stress, facing emotionally demanding scenarios at workplace. These strategies allow individuals to analyze and assess approaches, which positively face negative emotions or stressors at work (Lee & Lee, 2001). According to Folkman and Lazarus (1984), there are two main groups of coping mechanisms that are namely, problem-focused and emotion-focused. While the former tends to define the issue and directly tend to resolve matters, the latter leans towards mitigation of responses that are emotional and address the problem at hand (e.g. avoidance, and pursuit of support). Coping entails cognitive and behavioral aspects that aid individuals in managing stressors that are beyond their emotional competencies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984 as cited by Sunny'Hu & Cheng, 2010). In this regard, emotion-focused CS are noted to be five-dimensional that are briefly explained and are namely, releasing pent-up emotions (when expressing emotions if difficult for an individual, it is more likely that they find it hard from others) (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2004; Burnard, 1987); Distracting oneself (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004); Managing hostile feelings (that is the ability to remain calm without passive or aggressive behavior, while being assertive and kind) (Harrington, 2012); mediating (practice of controlling emotions and remaining calm) (Harrington, 2012); and using systematic relaxation procedures (Bhojani & Kurucz, 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that emotion-focused CS can be a mediating element for the linkage between TH and Personal Burnout (PB).

In the light of what was mentioned above, the following hypotheses are merged:

Hypothesis2: Toxin Handlers and their characteristics (PR – H2a, disconnecting – H2b, and draining – H2c) are directly linked to emotion-focused coping strategies.

Hypothesis3: emotion-focused CS is directly linked to personal burnout, which considering H2, it acts as a mediator for the linkage between TH and PB.

The current research further analyzes the aspect of gender difference with regard to the theoretical model that is presented below. Multi-Group Analysis is used to test path differences between male and female managers of HR in tourism sector of Turkey.

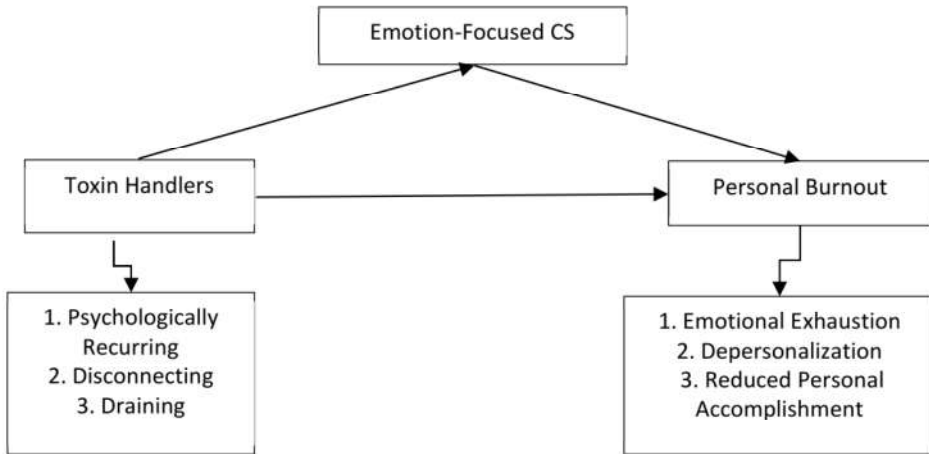


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Methodology

The current study aims to investigate the crucial notion of burnout among toxin handlers through mediating effect of coping strategy. In this regard, personal burnout measurement is derived from the work of Hsin-Hui ‘Sunny’ & Chien-Wei, (2010), from which two distinctive dimensions of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion are noted. Furthermore, for measuring emotion-focused coping strategy and its dimensions (releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, managing hostile feelings, mediating, and using systematic relaxation procedures) have been extracted from the early work of Folkman & Lazarus (1987) and edited to fit the scope of current research. Using scales measured in Kiefer and Barclay’s (2012) study, toxin handlers and its characteristics has been measured that are namely, psychologically recurring, disconnecting and draining. Gender is defined as a traditional view of male and female. Notably, these measurements were designed on a 5-item Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree).

The data for this research has been collected from a number of tourism sector companies, including tour agencies, travel companies, and hotels located in Turkey. In this regard, companies were selected based on the fact that they have an active HR department, where handling emotional issues of staff have been implied as a matter of importance and staff bring issues to the HR on a regular basis regarding their work and other matters that are related. Managers of HR have been addressed and thus, relevant permissions were granted from company directors to conduct research in their firms. Additionally, participation in the research was completely voluntary and HR managers were informed of means and purposes of the research.

Furthermore, as the process of conduct of this research was clashed with the pandemic of Covid-19, the number of available participants were reduced, which further affected the methodology and approach towards the issue at hand. It is noteworthy that the questionnaire did not include any personal information (name, income, or beliefs) to further encourage honest answers.

Participants were given the survey on an online format (email) and the data was collected in a period of one month during March and April of 2020. While a total of 212 emails were sent to respondents, 10 were not replied, 15 were found to be incomplete and 17 had response errors (i.e. unmatched answers, recall, unanswered questions and/or outlier answers). With 84.9% response rate, and overall collected data of 180, PLS-SEM is deemed appropriate for the conduct of this research as it provides advantages regarding relatively smaller sample sizes (Hair *et al.*, 2017). SmartPLS v3.25 was used to analyze the gathered data. This is due to the fact that this software entails Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) feature (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). While the original questionnaire was developed in English, it was translated into Turkish using a professional translator, and translated back to English through a second translator to ensure that words are accurately translated and reflect the original meaning of the questions (Mullen, 1995). A pilot test including 20 participants was conducted in January 2020, to check the questionnaire in terms of understandability and quality of content.

Results and discussion

In addition to analyzing the aforementioned hypotheses of this study, difference between male and female managers was tested through MGA. Hence, as it was mentioned earlier, SmartPLS was used to allow the researcher to use MGA function.

From total of 180 respondents, 96 were female and 84 were male managers. Additionally, all respondents had over 3 years of experience in their field and/or company. Furthermore, 54% of respondents had a higher education degree (masters or PhD), while residual 46% had a degree of undergraduate or lower. *Table 1* shows mean, standard deviation, factor loading, kurtosis and skewness for the data and items being measured. As it can be seen, the values of kurtosis and skewness are between -1 and 1, which follows the threshold for normal distribution (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, Kurtosis, Skewness, and Factor Loading

	Mean	S.D.	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness	Factor Loading
Toxin Handlers Cronbach's Alpha = 0.821, CR = 0.875, AVE = 0.682					
TH1 (I lose interest in interacting with others)	3.65	0.98	0.487	0.138	0.734
TH2	3.45	1.01	-0.514	-0.361	0.702
TH3	3.51	1.02	0.549	0.412	0.794
TH4	3.39	0.97	0.168	-0.338	0.812
TH5	3.48	1.12	0.025	-0.011	0.809
TH6	3.62	1.03	0.371	0.452	0.834
Personal Burnout Cronbach's Alpha = 0.830, CR = 0.841, AVE = 0.607					
PB1 (I worry that his job is hardening me emotion-wise)	3.01	0.99	0.457	0.164	0.749
PB2	3.13	1.11	0.465	0.380	0.720
PB3	2.89	1.03	0.437	0.367	0.812
PB4	3.32	1.21	0.509	0.371	0.698
PB5	3.41	1.19	0.501	0.357	0.704
Coping Strategy (emotion-based) Cronbach's Alpha = 0.842, CR = 0.803, AVE = 0.613					
CS1 (I use meditation methods to ease my emotions)	3.03	0.97	0.508	0.546	0.764
CS2	3.13	1.01	0.484	0.460	0.739
CS3	3.44	1.11	0.381	0.419	0.719
CS4	3.40	1.18	0.379	0.392	0.798
CS5	3.21	1.02	0.368	0.378	0.770

Table 2 shows that the values of factor loading are all above the threshold of 0.7 and AVE values are higher than the cutoff point of 0.5, which supports convergent validity. Additionally, alpha and CR are above the recommended degree of 0.7, which shows that the data is reliable (Hair *et al.*, 2017). In Table 3, discriminant validity is shown through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) which is lower than 0.90 and AVE's square root value is greater than the correlation with other parameters (Fornell & Larcker, 1981):

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion			Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	
	TH	PB	CS	TH	PB
Toxin Handlers (TH)	0.801				
Personal Burnout (PB)	0.568	<i>0.812</i>		0.759	
Coping Strategy (CS)	0.548	0.687	<i>0.781</i>	0.816	0.761

Note: *Italic font*= square-root of AVE

The notion of Common Method Bias (CMB) can cause deflation/inflation for linkages that are under observation (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). A single factor (*post hoc* Harman) was used to check variance of the data with regard to a single construct (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010), which was found to be 43.8% that is lower than cutoff point of 50%. Thus, it can be said that CMB is not found on a significant level in the collected data (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). In addition, table below shows the value of variance inflation factor (VIF), which are lower than 3.3, and can be interpreted in a manner that collinearity is relatively low and does not pose an issue (James *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, CMB does not exist in the current research (Kock, 2015). The results of PLS-SEM are presented in the *Table 3*, which provides support for hypotheses that were previously noted. Referring to values of t-statistics and β coefficients, it can be seen that all components of toxin handlers directly impact personal burnout and that coping strategies have a direct linkage with both dependent and independent constructs, enacting a mediating effect.

Table 3. Results of PLS-SEM Analysis

		Coefficient	t-statistics	VIF	
H1a	Psychologically recurring -> B	0.521	7.331	1.026	Support
H1b	Disconnecting -> PB	0.439	4.081	1.339	Support
H1c	Draining -> PB	0.516	6.312	2.122	Support
H2a	Psychologically recurring -> CS	0.503	5.677	2.011	Support
H2b	Disconnecting -> CS	0.490	5.891	1.427	Support
H2c	Draining -> CS	0.486	6.489	2.312	Support
H3	CS -> PB	0.506	8.909	1.478	Support

Table 4. Bootstrapping Results of Mediation

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Emotion-Focused CS -> Personal Burnout	0.299	0.298	0.105	2.846	0.005
Emotion-Focused CS -> Toxin Handlers	0.932	0.932	0.013	12.889	0.023
Toxin Handlers -> Personal Burnout	0.7	0.7	0.102	6.832	0.053

Referring to Table 4, it can be seen that the mediation effect has taken place in its full terms. Since the indirect effect is significant and the direct effect shows insignificance, it can be deduced that the mediation effect has taken place. Figure below shows path coefficients of constructs with regards to bootstrapping (consistent), Cronbach’s alpha, and loadings of the model variables.

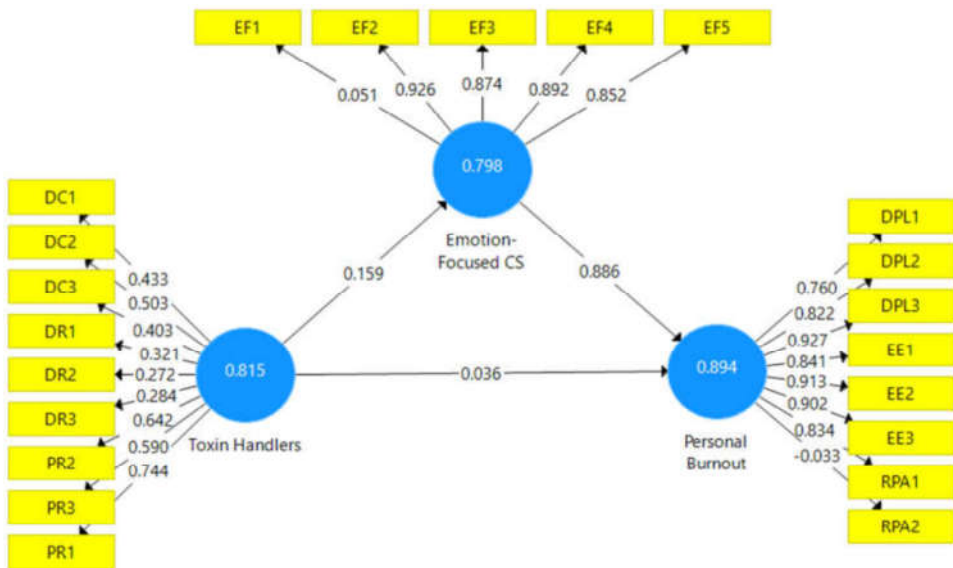


Figure 2. Reliability, and Validity

Regarding PLS-MGA, it has been recommended by Hair *et al.* (2017) that significant difference is 0.05 through a 2-tailed test. This is to be not lesser than 0.025 nor larger than 0.975. It can be seen from the table below that significant path differences are observed between male and female managers with regard to the toxin handler and personal burnout mechanism as well as coping strategies. It is deduced that female managers are more able to handle negative emotions

that are linked to burnout and caused by handling toxic emotions of staff. Further discussion is made upon this matter in the final section of this research.

Table 5. Results of Multi-Group Analysis

	Male		Female		Path Difference	p-value
	Path Coefficient	p-value	Path Coefficient	p-value		
Psychologically recurring -> PB	0.542	0.001	0.584	0.000	-0.042	0.977
Disconnecting -> PB	0.367	0.013	0.369	0.021	-0.002	0.433
Draining -> PB	0.349	0.040	0.541	0.033	-0.192	0.994
Psychologically recurring -> CS	0.471	0.031	0.480	0.028	-0.009	0.546
Disconnecting -> CS	0.512	0.026	0.533	0.001	-0.021	0.521
Draining -> CS	0.530	0.018	0.643	0.011	-0.113	0.982
CS -> PB	0.501	0.007	0.593	0.009	-0.092	0.980

Conclusion

It can be seen from the table above that p-value exceeds the threshold of 0.975 in two cases that are draining and PB with 0.994, and draining and CS with 0.982. Additionally, path difference in these two cases is significantly different, which can be said that draining is the most impactful dimension in the current model. However, psychologically recurring and CS to PB linkage have also shown a clear difference that is higher for female managers than male. While female managers have shown a difference with their male counterparts in every aspect of current constructs, the aforementioned aspects are vividly different. Thus, draining is noted to be the most influential factor in predicting burnout, followed by coping strategies and psychological recurring. Therefore, it can be said that female managers have a higher degree of coping with negative emotions that are accumulated from recurrence, drainage and can lead to personal burnout. It is noteworthy that female managers have noted a higher rate regarding having meditation, distracting oneself, and handling hostile feelings, which further allows them to have a lower rate of burnout.

While hypothesized model was supported through PLS-SEM, female managers have shown a higher rate of handling toxic emotions that leads to burnout through MGA. This has several implications both in terms of managerial aspect and academia. Current findings develop measurement models of toxic emotions and particularly, toxic handlers with regard to burnout through empirical evidence. As it was found that some elements are more significantly linked to personal burnout

(PR, draining and CS), it can be argued that there are latent factors that can influence the process of burnout for individuals, especially HR managers, who handle toxin in their organizations. Particularly, burnout is the outcome of accumulation of toxic emotions through time. While effectiveness of HR department and managers is crucial for managing toxin within the company, provision of a proper environment for these toxin handlers is an absolute necessity to maintain their health and quality of life and further allow them to release their absorbed negative emotions at work. It is important to note that managers, who participated in this research, indicated their sense of burnout and coping strategies on a self-report basis. Therefore, it can be said that these individuals have a certain degree of awareness regarding these emotions.

Considering the premises of multiple role theory as well as job demands-resource theory (Kahn *et al.*, 1964 as cited by Metz *et al.*, 2012), managers, especially in HR department, are prone to have issues as their roles become more than a mere manager. Particularly, when HR managers carry out toxin handler role, the resource (i.e. time) that they spend on this matter is an extra-role from their managerial position. Additionally, they may feel overload or conflicting responsibilities, which can in turn hinder their performance, and/or their overall wellbeing. This is a significant matter that can lead to personal burnout, which is addressed in the current research. Thus, the current research contributes to the literature of the subject by examining the linkage between handling toxin in a company and personal burnout occurrence for the handler. Additionally, the literature has not shown evidence regarding the mediating effect of coping strategies that managers can imply in their routine to reduce negative accumulated emotions. In this sense, it can be said that a number of managers are more able to handle toxin accumulation and thus, increase their ability to encourage positive emotions at workplace. The aforementioned statement is in consensus with the existing literature of the subject (e.g. Metz *et al.*, 2012; Frost, 2007). This can be seen more clearly for the case of female managers as the results have shown that they are better equipped to handle toxin in their firms. Important to note that these skills can be acquired, which implies that managers can learn coping strategies that is suitable to their personality, and can enhance their performance level. Taking multiple role theory into consideration, HR managers, especially in tourism sector are subject to burnout, if their roles clash. Hence, coping strategies can significantly reduce their tensions. However, role enrichment theory can pose a contradictory perspective as it states that engaging in 'multiple roles may have positive effects on health rather than depletion (Rothbard, 2001; Metz *et al.*, 2012).

Current model is tested through relatively modern tools, which imply a development in terms of approaching the phenomenon of toxic emotions that have become a topic of interest in recent years (Kiefer & Barclay, 2012; Bhojani & Kurucz, 2020). Managers in HR department of tourism sector have a critical role in terms of managing negative emotions of staff. However, current findings show that it is imperative that firms imply a system that entails addressing this engagement

of HR managers with such emotions to allow them to release summed toxin, which yields in a positive reinforcement and enables them to maintain their function level at work. As draining has been found to be more significant, companies are to set a framework for HR managers to help them recover from this feeling.

Constant management of negative emotions of employees drains psychological and physical abilities of toxin handlers. Therefore, not only their coping strategies on individual level is a mediator according to current findings, but further companies can provide practices and/or incentives to further boost their coping capabilities. As Rynes (2004) has suggested, the role of HR managers is evolving continuously, and thus, it is important to comprehend methods and approaches for them with regard to managing professional challenges. Organizational support can be an influential matter for provision of an environment for HR managers, where they can reduce their accumulated toxin. However, as Frost (2003; 2004) noted, if employees' negative emotions are left unattended, the company can suffer from consequences. This is while through attending staff's emotional charges, toxin handlers are subject to emotional risks. Formalization of this notion within firms can be a pathway toward protecting toxin handlers from exhaustion and draining, while providing support and care for employees in times of need. As female managers have exhibited a higher competency level regarding managing toxin and coping strategies, perhaps recruiting or training female managers can be a gateway for companies to better implement toxin handling in their firms.

Managerial implications

With regards to the findings of current research, there are a number of implications that can be used in both theoretical and practical aspects (academia and business). Accordingly, managers can foster negative emotions of employees better through implying coping strategies that are focused on emotional perspective. This allows managers to be able to handle their own toxic emotions that has been gathered over time, which subsequently implies that their function as handlers of toxin becomes more effective. Consequently, as staff are cared for and managers have means for eliminating/reducing negativity, workflow and organizational processes can be conducted more smoothly. Hence, making the workplace a place, where all individuals can thrive and ensure that their feelings are protected and tended to. Furthermore, businesses can consider having more female recruits in positions of toxin handling as female managers have shown to be more capable of handling their own negatively accumulated emotions. Thus, making them a better fit for such positions. Coping strategies cannot be neglected in this regard as managers have shown significant results in terms of lowered burnout through implied mechanisms that allow them to cope with stresses that are delivered to them from handling others' negative emotions. From academic perspective, current findings imply that emotions of managers in HR department is to be considered on a more profound manner to entail all dimensions of toxin handlers and provide solutions

for managers to maintain their handling skills on a desired level. This includes addressing different elements that can aid toxin handlers in reducing possibility of burnout and/or other similar negative outcomes. It is vital to highlight, develop, and introduce means for coping with stress and negative emotions for practitioners as a core aspect of academic research. Hence, academicians can greatly and directly benefit HR managers in this context.

Limitations and Recommendations

As toxic emotions are accumulative in time, experiences regarding a single event cannot be measured directly through such models. Thus, future studies can focus on specific events such as the current global pandemic and strategies undertaken by HR managers (toxin handlers) to face this challenge. It was noted in the current research that there are latent variables, which affect the process of burnout, which can be regarded by future studies (e.g. HR effectiveness, organizational climate, managers' emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence). Furthermore, the sample size of current study was limited due to the clash of collection process with the pandemic, which future studies can expand the numbers of managers involved to create a more generalized result. In addition, as toxic emotions are gathered through time, a longitudinal research can address changes in different time settings and yield in a better understanding of how events affect managers with regard to their exhaustion.

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