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Psychological Distress and Work Demands: A Systematic Review of Overload, Cognitive Appraisal, and Self-Regulation as Mediators with Meaning in Life as Moderator

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Abstract: Psychological distress is an individual's negative response to prolonged workplace stressors, characterized by anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. This study aims to analyze the effect of work demand on psychological distress through mediation of overload, cognitive appraisal, and self-regulation, with meaning in life moderating each mediator-to-outcome pathway. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted on 40 reputable scientific articles from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and nationally SINTA-accredited journals, analyzed through thematic synthesis. Results indicate: (1) work demand significantly influences overload (H1); (2) work demand influences cognitive appraisal (H2); (3) work demand influences self-regulation (H3); (4) work demand directly influences psychological distress (H4); (5) overload (H5), cognitive appraisal (H6), and self-regulation (H7) each influence psychological distress; (6) work demand influences psychological distress through overload (H11), cognitive appraisal (H12), and self-regulation (H13); and (7) meaning in life moderates the effect of work demand on psychological distress through overload (H8), cognitive appraisal (H9), and self-regulation (H10). The proposed moderated mediation model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding psychological mechanisms of work demand on distress and offers directions for strengths-based workplace interventions.

Keywords: Cognitive Appraisal, Meaning in Life, Overload, Psychological Distress, Self-Regulation, Work Demand.

INTRODUCTION

Psychological distress has become an increasingly concerning global mental health issue, particularly in the modern era characterized by escalating work demands, rapid technological change, and post-pandemic workplace transformation (Simionescu et al., 2021). Data from the Indonesian Health Survey (Survei Kesehatan Indonesia/SKI 2023) confirms the urgency of this issue in the Indonesian context: the prevalence of depression among private

sector employees reached 10.8%, while government workers registered 11.4% (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023). The Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2024 report further indicates that 15–16% of Indonesian workers experience daily stress a figure that, while comparatively lower in ASEAN, nonetheless represents millions of affected individuals given Indonesia's workforce of 144.64 million (BPS, 2024). Table 1 presents the distribution of depression prevalence by occupational category in Indonesia.

Table 1. Prevalence of depression among Indonesian workers by occupational category (SKI 2023)

Occupational Category	Prevalence of Depression (%)	Source	Note
Unemployed	14.7	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	Highest risk group
Farmers/Fishermen	14.6	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	Physical demand dominant
Laborers/Drivers/Domestic Workers	13.5	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	High physical + time demand
Government Workers (PNS/TNI/BUMN)	11.4	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	Mental demand dominant
Private Sector Employees	10.8	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	Key population for this study
Self-employed	10.0	SKI 2023 (Kemenkes RI)	Autonomy as buffer
Indonesian Workers (daily stress)	15–16%	Gallup SOGW 2024	Cross-sector estimate

Source: Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2023); Gallup SOGW (2024)

Work demand encompassing the physical, mental, and temporal requirements employees must fulfill is one of the primary predictors of psychological distress (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory framework (Bakker et al., 2023), high work demand that exceeds available resources consistently predicts burnout, distress, and reduced work engagement. However, the mechanisms through which work demand translates into psychological distress are not uniform across individuals: overload accumulation, cognitive misappraisal of demands, and erosion of self-regulatory capacity each represent distinct pathways through which work demand produces distress outcomes. Meaning in life an individual's perception of purpose, significance, and coherence (Steger et al., 2006) functions as a boundary condition moderating the strength of each of these pathways.

Despite extensive research on individual relationships between these variables, three specific gaps motivate this review. First, overload, cognitive appraisal, and self-regulation have not been tested simultaneously as parallel mediators in the work demand-psychological distress pathway, making it impossible to compare their relative contributions. Second, meaning in life has been studied as a single-point moderator, whereas the model proposed here specifies its moderating function at three distinct pathway points (H8–H10), enabling differential moderation testing. Third, an integrated conceptual model combining parallel mediation and multi-point moderation within the Indonesian worker context remains absent from the literature. This systematic literature review aims to synthesize available empirical evidence to justify and specify this integrated model.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021), selected for its capacity to transparently synthesize existing empirical evidence and identify gaps justifying new conceptual models (Susanto et al., 2024).

Data sources and search strategy

Literature searches were conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Emerald, and nationally SINTA-indexed journals using keywords: work demand, psychological distress, overload, cognitive appraisal, self-regulation, meaning in life, and their combinations, assisted by Publish or Perish and Google Scholar. Searches were conducted in English and Indonesian.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles were included if they were: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles; (2) published between 2015–2025, except foundational theoretical works; (3) addressing at least two model variables; and (4) using adult worker samples. Articles were excluded if they were theses, dissertations, conference proceedings, written in languages other than English or Indonesian, or irrelevant to model constructs.

Study selection and synthesis

An initial search yielded 312 records. After duplicate removal ($n = 47$) and title/abstract screening ($n = 265$), full-text assessment against inclusion criteria ($n = 89$) resulted in 40 included studies. Exclusions included: population mismatch ($n = 21$), irrelevant variables ($n = 18$), and inadequate methodology ($n = 10$). Analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis: data reduction, synthesis matrix presentation, and interpretive conclusion drawing (Nurhidayah et al., 2024; Zulfikar et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Variable descriptions

Psychological distress

Psychological distress is a condition of psychological pressure characterized by anxiety, depression, and emotional tension as a response to stressors exceeding an individual's coping capacity (Simionescu et al., 2021). Its primary dimensions include: anxiety excessive worry that disrupts concentration; depression loss of motivation affecting productivity; and emotional stress mental exhaustion from prolonged pressure (Daly & Robinson, 2021). Research consistently associates psychological distress with negative work outcomes including absenteeism, performance decline, and turnover intention (Breslau et al., 2021; Knapstad et al., 2021; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022; Ryu & Fan, 2023). SKI 2023 data showing 10.8% depression prevalence among private sector employees underscores the public health and organizational significance of this construct in the Indonesian context (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023).

Meaning in life

Meaning in life refers to an individual's perception of the degree to which their life has purpose, significance, and coherence (Steger et al., 2006). Its dimensions include: life purpose a clear sense of direction; meaningfulness the perception that activities contribute something valuable; and life coherence the ability to interpret experiences in a structured manner (Trzebiński et al., 2020). King and Hicks (2021) in their Annual Review of Psychology confirmed that meaning in life consistently moderates the relationship between adversity and mental health outcomes. Najmi et al. (2025) in a recent systematic review confirmed that higher meaning in life is consistently associated with lower psychological distress among healthcare workers. Arhamar and Ismail (2025) in the Indonesian context further confirm that meaning in life functions as an existential anchor that strengthens resilience when individuals face demanding life and work conditions.

Overload

Overload occurs when work volume or complexity exceeds an individual's physical and mental capacity (Daly & Robinson, 2021). Quantitative overload concerns excessive task volume within limited time; qualitative overload concerns task difficulty exceeding individual competence. Both types generate time pressure as a core stressor mechanism. Rasool et al. (2022) confirmed that work overload is a key predictor of burnout and distress, while Rotenstein et al. (2023) in a multicenter study found overload to be the strongest predictor of burnout among work demand variables. Sandmeier et al. (2022) found that high time pressure specifically predicts anxiety and performance decline, while Shahrzadi et al. (2024) confirmed that information overload in particular generates psychological strain through cognitive resource depletion. Pluta and Rudawska (2021) additionally found that high overload reduces knowledge sharing, reflecting the broader organizational cost of unmanaged work demand.

Cognitive Appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is the individual's evaluative process of work situations as threatening, challenging, or irrelevant to well-being (Conte et al., 2022). Threat appraisal triggers anxiety and avoidance responses; challenge appraisal activates engagement and growth motivation. Yeo and Ong (2024) in a meta-analysis found medium to large effect sizes ($r = .35-.52$) for appraisal style and psychological well-being, confirming its central role in the stress-distress pathway. Ma et al. (2021) demonstrated that the same objective stressor produces markedly different distress outcomes depending on appraisal orientation. Nguyen et al. (2025) confirmed this pattern among frontline nurses, and Simões et al. (2021) demonstrated that cognitive appraisal mediates the work-family conflict to burnout pathway providing a direct structural precedent for the mediating role proposed in the current model.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve goals (Inzlicht et al., 2021), encompassing emotional control, behavioral regulation, and self-monitoring and planning (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Radović et al. (2024) in a longitudinal study confirmed that self-regulation functions as a protective factor against workplace psychological distress, maintaining work capacity even under sustained high demand. Butler (2023) demonstrated that adequate self-regulatory capacity enables efficient cognitive resource allocation under demanding conditions. Hartini et al. (2025) in the Indonesian context found that emotion regulation a core component of self-regulation is the key mechanism through which working students cope with work stress, underscoring the relevance of this variable in Indonesian organizational populations. Meyer and Turner (2023) further confirmed that self-regulation is teachable and improvable through structured instructional and organizational interventions.

Work demand

Work demand encompasses all physical, mental, and temporal requirements employees must fulfill (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Within JD-R Theory (Bakker et al., 2023), work demand exceeding available resources consistently predicts burnout, distress, and reduced engagement. Collie (2023) confirmed that high work demand predicts somatic and emotional exhaustion, while Harju et al. (2021) showed that uncompensated demand reduces work engagement over time. Zeshan et al. (2023) specifically found that work demand weakens self-regulation capacity, providing direct empirical support for the H3 pathway. Ikhlas et al. (2025) in the Indonesian context confirmed that job demands predict psychological distress through burnout, reinforcing the relevance of this pathway among Indonesian workers.

Relevant prior research

Table 2. Summary of relevant prior research findings

No	Author (Year)	Research Findings	Similarity	Difference	Hypothesis
1	Pratama et al. (2024)	Social support and work demand influence overload among Millennial and Gen Z employees	Work demand and overload variables	Social support as additional independent variable	H1
2	Prawira et al. (2022)	Job satisfaction and work demand influence cognitive appraisal and work engagement	Work demand and cognitive appraisal variables	Job satisfaction and work engagement variables	H2
3	Zeshan et al. (2023)	Work demand influences employee burnout and self-regulation	Work demand and self-regulation variables	Employee burnout as additional outcome	H3
4	Mulvi & Emilisa (2024)	Work demand and work-life balance influence psychological distress	Work demand and psychological distress	Work-life balance as additional independent variable	H4
5	Sanistyawati et al. (2025)	Work-family conflict and overload influence psychological distress and occupational well-being	Overload and psychological distress	WFC and occupational well-being variables	H5
6	Gunawan & Oriza (2022)	Cognitive appraisal and psychological flexibility influence psychological distress	Cognitive appraisal and psychological distress	Psychological flexibility as additional variable	H6
7	Bagheri Sheykhangafshe et al. (2021)	Resilience, emotion regulation, and self-regulation influence psychological distress	Self-regulation and psychological distress	Resilience and emotion regulation variables	H7
8	Utama & Sholahuddin (2025)	Mental workload and job stress influence employee creativity via psychological distress	Work demand and psychological distress as mediator	Creativity as outcome, leadership trust as variable	H11–H13 (indirect mediation)
9	Srihadiningrat & Mauludin (2025)	Meaningful work moderates and mediates job demands on work engagement	Meaning in life as moderator of work demand pathway	Work engagement as outcome (vs psychological distress)	H8–H10
10	Tamonob & Yulianti (2025)	Work overload influences job embeddedness with social support as moderator	Overload and moderation mechanism	Social support as moderator (vs meaning in life)	H11

Source: Compiled from various sources, 2025

H1: Effect of work demand on overload

Work demand has a positive and significant effect on overload. Pratama et al. (2024) confirmed this relationship among Millennial and Gen Z employees, finding that increases in quantitative and qualitative work demand directly predict overload accumulation. The JD-R mechanism is clear: when task volume, complexity, and time pressure exceed available capacity, individuals experience progressive resource depletion that manifests as overload

(Bakker et al., 2023). Physical demand management ergonomic design, humane shift scheduling, and adequate recovery time directly reduces quantitative overload. Mental demand management clear role specifications, task-competency matching, and cognitive support tools reduces qualitative overload. Time demand management realistic deadline setting, priority frameworks, and workload audits prevents the time pressure component of overload from accumulating into chronic distress.

The practical implication is that organizations must manage all three demand dimensions simultaneously rather than addressing them in isolation. Rasool et al. (2022) confirmed that when one dimension is mismanaged even while others are controlled, overload still emerges through the unmanaged pathway. For Indonesian organizations specifically, where high power-distance norms can suppress employees from reporting overload to supervisors, structural monitoring mechanisms such as workload dashboards and anonymous reporting systems are particularly important.

H2: Effect of work demand on cognitive appraisal

Work demand significantly influences cognitive appraisal patterns. Prawira et al. (2022) found that increasing work demand shifts appraisal orientation from challenge toward threat — a shift with well-documented consequences for motivation and psychological well-being. The mechanism is consistent with transactional stress theory: as demand intensity increases and perceived coping resources remain constant, individuals increasingly evaluate the demand as threatening rather than manageable. Conte et al. (2022) confirmed that organizational context strongly moderates this relationship: psychologically safe environments, transparent communication about task purpose, and adequate resource provision maintain challenge appraisal even at high demand levels.

Sandmeier et al. (2022) demonstrated that time pressure a core component of work demand specifically predicts threat appraisal, generating anxiety responses that compound the primary demand effect. Interventions targeting cognitive reframing, including CBT-based programs and growth mindset training, provide employees with tools to maintain challenge appraisal even when demand is high. Ma et al. (2021) confirmed that these appraisal orientation interventions produce measurable reductions in distress outcomes across multiple stressor categories, including the work demand contexts most relevant to this model.

H3: Effect of work demand on self-regulation

Zeshan et al. (2023) confirmed that high work demand significantly weakens self-regulation capacity, consistent with ego-depletion theory: self-regulatory resources are finite and depletable through continuous demands. When physical demands exhaust bodily energy, emotional control becomes more difficult. When mental demands consume cognitive bandwidth, self-monitoring and planning deteriorate. When time demands create urgency, behavioral regulation gives way to reactive rather than planned responses. Bakker and de Vries (2021) demonstrated that recovery time adequate rest between demanding periods is the primary organizational mechanism for restoring depleted self-regulatory capacity.

Hartini et al. (2025) in the Indonesian context confirmed that emotion regulation capacity is particularly vulnerable to depletion under high work demand among Indonesian workers, with effects compounded by collectivist norms that discourage emotional expression and help-seeking. Organizations investing in emotional intelligence training, mindfulness-based stress reduction programs, and work autonomy frameworks provide employees with both the skills and the structural space to maintain self-regulatory capacity even under demanding conditions (Radović et al., 2024).

H4: Direct effect of work demand on psychological distress

Beyond the mediated pathways, work demand has a direct positive effect on psychological distress. Mulvi and Emilisa (2024) in the Indonesian context confirmed this direct relationship, finding significant effects even after accounting for mediating variables. Simionescu et al. (2021) in a cross-European study identified work demand level as the strongest predictor of psychological distress compared to other demographic and organizational variables. This direct pathway reflects the cumulative biological and psychological stress load generated by sustained work demand exposure a mechanism that operates independently of cognitive evaluation or regulatory response.

Ikhlas et al. (2025) in Indonesia confirmed that job demands predict psychological distress through burnout among factory workers, reinforcing the direct pathway's relevance in Indonesian manufacturing and industrial sectors. The existence of a significant direct effect (H4) alongside the mediated pathways (H11–H13) means that organizational interventions targeting only the mediators without also addressing the primary demand levels will produce incomplete improvements in distress outcomes.

H5: Effect of overload on psychological distress

Overload has a direct and significant effect on psychological distress. Sanistyawati et al. (2025) in the Indonesian context found that overload mediates the relationship between work-family demands and distress, while Rotenstein et al. (2023) confirmed that overload is the strongest predictor of burnout and distress among work demand variables. Shahrzadi et al. (2024) demonstrated that the time pressure dimension of overload specifically predicts anxiety and emotional exhaustion among healthcare workers a finding that generalizes to any sector where deadline pressure is a structural feature.

The overload-distress pathway operates through resource depletion: when physical, cognitive, and temporal resources are exhausted by accumulated workload, individuals lack the capacity to regulate their stress responses effectively, producing the anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion that define psychological distress. Chuang et al. (2022) confirmed this mechanism in intensive care unit settings, finding that overload-induced resource depletion predicts burnout independently of primary demand levels.

H6: Effect of cognitive appraisal on psychological distress

Cognitive appraisal significantly influences psychological distress through how individuals evaluate work demands. Gunawan and Oriza (2022) in the Indonesian context confirmed that maladaptive appraisal patterns particularly threat appraisal of uncontrollable situations significantly predict distress. Yeo and Ong (2024) in their meta-analysis found effect sizes of $r = .35-.52$ for appraisal style and well-being, making cognitive appraisal one of the strongest individual-level predictors of distress outcomes across occupational contexts.

The mechanism is well-specified by transactional stress theory: threat appraisal activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, producing cortisol and physiological arousal; sustained threat appraisal exhausts regulatory systems and generates the anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion that constitute psychological distress. Simões et al. (2021) confirmed that cognitive appraisal mediates the work-family conflict to burnout pathway, while Nguyen et al. (2025) found that challenge appraisal training significantly reduces distress among frontline healthcare workers providing direct intervention evidence for the H6 pathway's practical relevance.

H7: Effect of self-regulation on psychological distress

Self-regulation has a significant negative effect on psychological distress: higher self-regulatory capacity consistently associates with lower distress. Bagheri Sheykhgafshe et al. (2021) confirmed this relationship even after controlling for demographic variables and work

conditions, identifying self-regulation as a significant independent protective factor. Radović et al. (2024) in a longitudinal study found that self-regulation maintained work capacity and psychological well-being under sustained high demand, while Butler (2023) demonstrated that self-regulatory capacity enables efficient cognitive resource allocation that prevents overload from escalating into distress.

Hartini et al. (2025) in the Indonesian context found that emotion regulation the affective dimension of self-regulation is the primary coping mechanism through which Indonesian working students manage occupational stress. This finding suggests that self-regulation interventions adapted to Indonesian cultural norms particularly those addressing collectivist emotion expression norms and shame-avoidance tendencies may produce stronger protective effects against distress than culturally decontextualized programs (Inzlicht et al., 2021).

H8–H10: Meaning in life as moderator

Meaning in life moderates the relationship between work demand and psychological distress at three distinct pathway points. H8 specifies moderation on the overload-to-distress pathway: individuals with high meaning in life tend to interpret workload demands as contributions to something larger than task completion, reducing the subjective perception of overload even when objective demand remains constant (Najmi et al., 2025). Pluta and Rudawska (2021) confirmed that meaning in work moderates the relationship between overload and employee outcomes, with higher meaning levels attenuating the negative consequences of overload. Tamonob and Yulianti (2025) found that meaningful framing of work obligations moderates the overload-distress relationship in Indonesian healthcare settings.

H9 specifies moderation on the cognitive appraisal-to-distress pathway: meaning in life provides an interpretive framework that facilitates challenge rather than threat appraisal of work demands. Trzebiński et al. (2020) confirmed that meaning in life functions as a cognitive anchor that stabilizes appraisal orientation under stressful conditions, reducing threat appraisal frequency. King and Hicks (2021) established that purpose clarity enables individuals to contextualize stressors as part of a meaningful trajectory, directly attenuating the threat appraisal response. Srihadiningrat and Mauludin (2025) confirmed that meaningful work moderates the effect of job demands on engagement and well-being in Indonesian organizational settings.

H10 specifies moderation on the self-regulation-to-distress pathway: individuals with strong meaning in life maintain self-regulatory capacity more effectively under high demand conditions because their life purpose provides intrinsic motivational support for self-regulatory effort. Steger et al. (2006) established that presence of meaning predicts sustained goal-directed behavior, a core component of self-regulation. Arhamar and Ismail (2025) confirmed in the Indonesian context that meaning in life strengthens psychological resilience and regulatory capacity when individuals face demanding conditions. The combined H8–H10 findings suggest that meaning in life is not merely a single buffer between stress and distress, but a multi-point moderator whose effects operate through distinct psychological mechanisms at each pathway stage.

H11: Work demand → psychological distress through overload

The indirect pathway from work demand to psychological distress through overload is supported by converging evidence. Utama and Sholahuddin (2025) confirmed that mental workload produces psychological distress through intermediate mechanisms involving accumulated strain a conceptual parallel to the H11 pathway. Tamonob and Yulianti (2025) found that work overload generates emotional exhaustion that mediates the relationship

between demand and employee outcomes. The mediation mechanism follows a resource conservation logic: work demand depletes physical and cognitive resources through overload, and this depletion then produces the anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion that constitute psychological distress.

The practical implication is that organizations targeting this pathway through intervention must address workload volume and distribution at the structural level, not merely at the individual coping level. Demand audits, task redistribution policies, and flexible workload management systems address the H11 pathway by preventing the primary accumulation of overload before it produces distress (Rasool et al., 2022). This structural approach is particularly important in Indonesian organizational contexts where high power-distance norms can create reluctance to refuse additional task assignments.

H12: Work demand → psychological distress through cognitive appraisal

The indirect pathway from work demand to distress through cognitive appraisal is supported by evidence demonstrating appraisal as a mediating mechanism in stress-distress pathways. Ikhlas et al. (2025) confirmed that job demands produce negative psychological outcomes through cognitive and affective intermediate mechanisms. Ma et al. (2021) demonstrated that the appraisal orientation individuals apply to the same objective demand level produces markedly different distress outcomes confirming that cognitive appraisal is a genuine mechanism through which demand transmits to distress rather than merely a correlated variable.

The H12 mediation pathway has particularly strong intervention implications: because cognitive appraisal is modifiable through training, organizations can interrupt the demand-to-distress chain at the appraisal stage without necessarily reducing the primary demand level. CBT-based reframing programs, growth mindset training, and supervisor coaching in demand framing provide mechanisms to maintain challenge appraisal even as demand levels remain high a realistic intervention approach for organizations where demand reduction is structurally constrained (Conte et al., 2022).

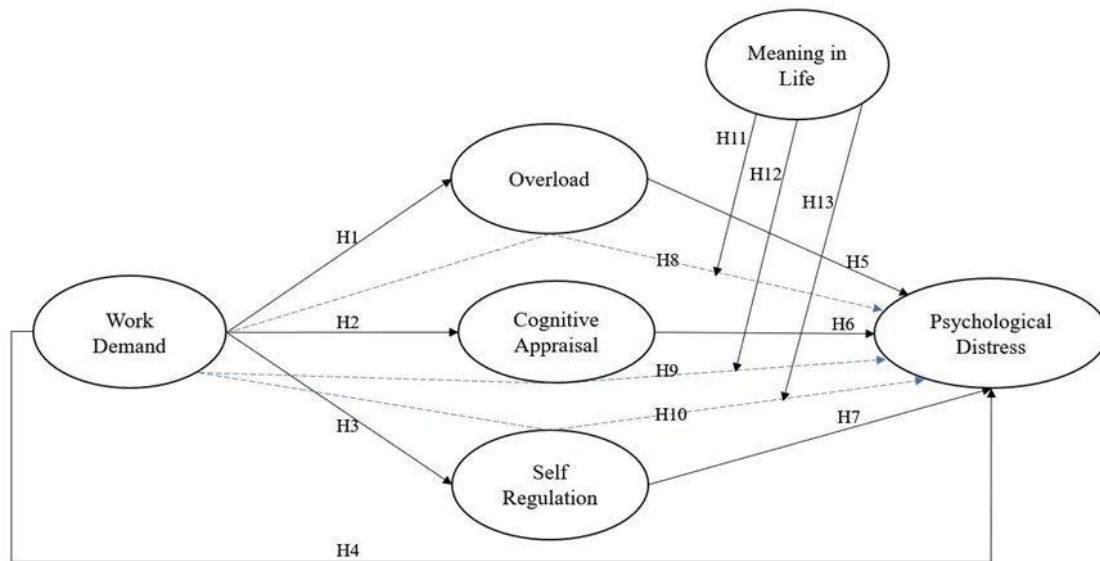
H13: Work demand → psychological distress through self-regulation

The indirect pathway from work demand to distress through self-regulation reflects the ego-depletion mechanism: sustained high demand erodes self-regulatory capacity, which then fails to buffer the conversion of demand exposure into distress. Zeshan et al. (2023) confirmed the H3 antecedent of this pathway (work demand weakens self-regulation), and the H7 evidence confirms the consequent (weakened self-regulation predicts distress). The complete H13 pathway thus rests on well-supported individual components. Hartini et al. (2025) provided a structurally analogous finding in the Indonesian context.

The H13 pathway suggests that self-regulation capacity functions as a buffer whose depletion amplifies the demand-distress relationship. Organizations can target this pathway by building self-regulatory capacity through training emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and planning skill development and by creating structural conditions that support regulatory recovery, including adequate rest periods, work autonomy, and reduced role ambiguity (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Srihadiningrat and Mauludin (2025) confirmed that meaningful work supports the regulatory capacity of employees under demanding conditions, providing a bridge to the moderation hypotheses.

Conceptual framework

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the proposed model



Notes: Solid arrows (→) represent direct effects (H1–H7). Dashed arrows represent indirect pathways (H11–H13). H8–H10 represent moderation by Meaning in Life on the Overload→PD, Cognitive Appraisal→PD, and Self-Regulation→PD pathways respectively. H4 represents the direct effect of Work Demand on Psychological Distress.

Source: Developed by authors, 2026

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesized 40 empirical studies and reached the following conclusions. Work demand significantly influences psychological distress both directly (H4) and through parallel mediation of overload (H11), cognitive appraisal (H12), and self-regulation (H13). Each mediator also independently influences psychological distress (H5–H7), and meaning in life moderates the strength of each mediator-to-outcome pathway (H8–H10). Together, these findings specify a comprehensive parallel mediation model that maps the distinct psychological mechanisms through which work demand produces distress, enabling pathway-specific intervention design.

The model's practical implication is that effective workplace psychological health interventions require a multi-level approach: structural demand management to prevent overload accumulation; cognitive reframing programs to maintain challenge appraisal under high demand; self-regulation development through emotional intelligence and mindfulness training; and explicit integration of meaning in life strengthening as a moderating resource. This multi-level approach is particularly important in the Indonesian collectivist organizational context, where cultural norms create specific vulnerabilities (high power-distance suppressing demand reporting) and specific strengths (relational meaning-making and community-based resilience) that differentiate the Indonesian demand-distress landscape from Western models. Future empirical research is recommended to test this model using structural equation modeling with moderation analysis (PROCESS macro, Hayes 2022) on a representative sample of Indonesian workers across sectors.

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