

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, STRESS, AND AGGRESSION ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

O IMPACTO DA EXAUSTÃO EMOCIONAL, DO ESTRESSE E DA AGRESSÃO NO DESEMPENHO ACADÊMICO DE ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS

EL IMPACTO DEL AGOTAMIENTO EMOCIONAL, EL ESTRÉS Y LA AGRESIÓN EN EL RENDIMIENTO ACADÉMICO DE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS



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How to reference this paper:

Jabbarov, R., Orujova, S., Nasibova, U., Aliyeva, L., & Verdiyeva, A. (2026). The impact of emotional exhaustion, stress, and aggression on academic achievement in university students. *Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional*, 30(esp1), e026017. <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v30iesp1.20906>



| Submitted: 05/01/2026

| Revisions required: 15/01/2026

| Approved: 20/02/2026

| Published: 30/03/2026

Editor: Prof. Dr. Sebastião de Souza Lemes
Deputy Executive Editor: Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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ABSTRACT: The study was devoted to studying the influence of aggression and stress factors on the perspective of emotional exhaustion in the development of academic achievement at the University. The study showed that the modern development of the educational environment, among indicators of increased academic and social pressures, usually increases the incidence of emotional exhaustion, which in turn leads to more frequent aggressive behavior and stress. The study revealed a moderate correlation between emotional exhaustion and aggression, which indicates that as the level of emotional exhaustion increases, students tend to show more aggressive behavior. The results obtained can help educational institutions to provide better emotional support to students and develop strategies to prevent aggressive behavior. Based on these results, it can be concluded that people who demonstrate a tendency to emotional restraint, isolation and social distance are more stressed and more prone to burnout. This fact must be taken into account.

KEYWORDS: Emotional exhaustion. Aggressiveness. Stress. Emotional health. Aggressive behavior.

RESUMO: O estudo foi dedicado à análise da influência da agressão e dos fatores de estresse na perspectiva da exaustão emocional no desenvolvimento do desempenho acadêmico no ensino superior. Os resultados indicaram que o desenvolvimento contemporâneo do ambiente educacional, marcado pelo aumento das pressões acadêmicas e sociais, tende a elevar a incidência de exaustão emocional, o que, por sua vez, contribui para a maior frequência de comportamentos agressivos e níveis de estresse. O estudo revelou uma correlação moderada entre exaustão emocional e agressão, indicando que, à medida que o nível de exaustão emocional aumenta, os estudantes tendem a apresentar comportamentos mais agressivos. Os resultados obtidos podem auxiliar as instituições de ensino na oferta de melhor suporte emocional aos estudantes e no desenvolvimento de estratégias para a prevenção de comportamentos agressivos. Com base nesses achados, conclui-se que indivíduos que demonstram tendência ao retraimento emocional, ao isolamento e ao distanciamento social apresentam maiores níveis de estresse e maior propensão ao esgotamento. Esse aspecto deve ser considerado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Exaustão emocional. Agressividade. Estresse. Saúde emocional. Comportamento agressivo.

RESUMEN: El estudio se dedicó al análisis de la influencia de la agresión y los factores de estrés en la perspectiva del agotamiento emocional en el desarrollo del rendimiento académico en la educación superior. Los resultados indicaron que el desarrollo contemporáneo del entorno educativo, caracterizado por el aumento de las presiones académicas y sociales, tiende a incrementar la incidencia del agotamiento emocional, lo que, a su vez, contribuye a una mayor frecuencia de comportamientos agresivos y niveles de estrés. El estudio reveló una correlación moderada entre el agotamiento emocional y la agresión, lo que indica que, a medida que aumenta el nivel de agotamiento emocional, los estudiantes tienden a mostrar comportamientos más agresivos. Los resultados obtenidos pueden ayudar a las instituciones educativas a proporcionar un mejor apoyo emocional a los estudiantes y a desarrollar estrategias para prevenir comportamientos agresivos. Con base en estos hallazgos, se concluye que las personas que muestran tendencia al retraimiento emocional, al aislamiento y al distanciamiento social presentan mayores niveles de estrés y una mayor propensión al agotamiento. Este aspecto debe ser considerado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Agotamiento emocional. Agresividad. Estrés. Salud emocional. Comportamiento agresivo.

INTRODUCTION

Modern research shows that emotional burnout, stress, and aggressiveness are common occupational syndromes that have a destructive impact on a professional's personality. Standard organizational methods are ineffective in combating them and provide little protection against their recurrence. It should be noted that university education represents the initial stage of a future specialist's development. During this period, essential knowledge, skills, and abilities are acquired, professionally significant personal traits are developed, and a sustainable attitude toward future work is formed (Jabbarov, 2020; Aliyeva et al., 2021; Jabbarov et al., 2023).

Identifying the factors that cause emotional burnout during professional education will make it possible to create an effective and timely prevention system that protects both future specialists and employers from negative outcomes associated with reduced motivation, negative attitudes toward others, and behavioral disorders in the workplace.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' psychological personality traits and their levels of emotional burnout, stress, and aggressiveness. According to our hypothesis, there is a correlation between the level of emotional burnout and such traits as aggressiveness, intrinsic motivation, and openness to experience. A direct relationship is also expected between the syndrome and negative emotionality, as well as between emotional burnout and external motivation among students.

The research on the interaction between emotional exhaustion and aggressiveness in students aims to investigate the impact of increasing psychological stress on young people in the modern educational environment. High academic expectations in the education system lead to emotional tension, stress, and instances of burnout among students. Emotional exhaustion, recognized as a state where individuals struggle to manage their emotions and energy due to prolonged stress, results in reduced motivation, weakened academic performance, and the emergence of psychological and social problems.

Burnout, as a consequence of academic and social stress, negatively impacts relationships and performance in the educational environment. Aggressive behaviors may serve as both a symptom and a component of burnout, as individuals often exhibit more aggressive reactions to address their emotional needs, thereby exacerbating social issues (Jabbarov et al. 2023).

The works of Maslach and Leiter indicate that emotional exhaustion reduces students' motivation and causes serious problems in their social relationships and academic performance. When young people face academic and social pressures, emotional exhaustion can diminish their motivation and academic performance (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Several studies have shown that emotional exhaustion manifests itself in both physical and psychological symptoms. Fatigue, headaches, loss of appetite, and general apathy are common symptoms observed in students' daily lives (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Studies have shown that emotional fatigue can increase irritability and aggressive behavior because fatigued individuals are less able to cope with emotional demands. This type of response can cause serious problems in students' social relationships (Vasilenko et al., 2014).

A review of the psychological literature suggests that emotional exhaustion negatively impacts students' social support and relationships. It can also negatively impact academic performance, as students who experience burnout may become socially isolated (Bianchi & Philips, 2016). Emphasizing the link between aggressive behavior and burnout, many researchers have noted that aggression can lead to psychological and emotional exhaustion over time. They argue that aggression exacerbates conflicts and increases stress levels (Baron & Neuman, 1996). Many researchers have confirmed that stress and emotional exhaustion in the workplace lead to increased aggression. They show that prolonged stress and exhaustion exacerbate interpersonal conflicts, worsen work performance, and worsen social relationships (Taris et.al, 2001).

Research into the broader organizational and psychological effects of burnout has revealed its links to motivation, job satisfaction, and workplace performance (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Research into the relationship between burnout and personal life, and its impact on personal relationships, quality of life, and psychological well-being, has shown that burnout can have serious consequences not only in the workplace but also in personal life (Pines, 2004).

Stress management and mindfulness approaches have been shown to be effective in reducing emotional exhaustion and stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). These researchers have explored various aspects of emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior, proposing important theoretical frameworks and practical interventions in the field. Their work contributes to a deeper understanding of burnout and aggression and facilitates the management of these problems in education and the workplace (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

The relationship between aggression and emotional exhaustion is complex and often bidirectional. Emotional exhaustion, characterized by feelings of exhaustion and overload, can lead to increased irritability and aggressive behavior. When individuals are emotionally exhausted, their resources for coping with stress are reduced, making them more prone to aggressive responses to stressors. Understanding this relationship highlights the importance of

stress management and the need to strengthen healthy coping mechanisms to break the cycle of aggression and emotional exhaustion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “emotional exhaustion” was introduced into scientific circulation in 1974 by the American psychiatrist Freudenberger (1974) to characterize the psychological state of healthy people who are in close and intense contact with clients and patients in an emotionally charged environment while providing professional care (Freudenberger, 1974). From the time this phenomenon was described until the 1980s, discussions continued about the need to classify it as a separate syndrome. Some authors objected to the term “exhaustion”, calling it “ambiguous” and pointing to numerous overlaps with related concepts.

For example, as Muftakhova (2009) noted, symptoms similar to exhaustion were present in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and dysthymia (Muftakhova, 2009). At the same time, scientists, recognizing the existence of emotional exhaustion, began to try to identify and define the components of the syndrome. One of the first concepts of emotional exhaustion belonged to Maslach. He defined the syndrome of “emotional exhaustion” as “a person’s inability to adapt to the workplace due to insufficient interpersonal relationships and excessive workload” and presented a classification of its symptoms (Maslach, 1982).

According to this model, there are three groups of manifestations: physical, behavioral and psychological. When describing the syndrome of emotional exhaustion, K. Maslach focused on a number of the most classic manifestations: symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and dehumanization, which are observed with a negation of the self-image as an individual and a professional, and a decrease in professional skills (Maslach, 2000).

The identified symptoms have been repeatedly noted by other researchers, which led to the recognition of emotional exhaustion as a separate psychological phenomenon in the scientific community. According to a number of researchers, emotional exhaustion presents itself as a psychological defense mechanism developed by an individual in the form of a complete or partial exclusion of emotions in response to certain psychotraumatic influences (Boyko, 1999).

All the determinants of burnout identified to date can be divided into the following groups: personal factors (locus of control, level of reactivity, authoritarianism, neuroticism, level of empathy, gender, age, etc.), organizational factors (features of the organization of activities) and

role factors (internal conflicts associated with activities). All these facts were identified in the studies of socio-economic workers, since for a long time there was a tendency to identify the concepts of professional and emotional burnout (Boyko, 1999).

Recent studies expand the range of available data on this issue. In particular, the study of student burnout is of particular interest. The high prevalence of emotional burnout syndrome among young students suggests that this phenomenon most often arises as a result of a difficult life situation, prolonged academic stress, dissatisfaction with family relationships, or the expectation of significant changes in life (Dyatlov, 2020).

Researcher Sergeeva (2020) notes the role of emotional symptoms in the manifestation of the syndrome studied in students, including apathy, pessimism, feelings of helplessness, irritability, anxiety, guilt, and uncontrolled sharp emotional reactions (Sergeeva, 2020).

Researchers show that the manifestations of burnout in students include social (reduction in the depth of the social circle and relationships, a tendency to self-isolation, unwillingness to work in a group, conflict) and behavioral (irregularities in daily work, decreased selectivity in food, neglect of discipline, acquisition of bad habits, procrastination, lack of motivation) elements (Sergeeva, 2011).

Maltseva (2020) draws attention to the decrease in intellectual potential in students with emotional burnout, which is expressed in the loss of interest in learning, increased rigidity, the transition to reproductive thinking, a decrease in memory and creativity, and a decrease in the need for self-development (Maltseva, 2020). An important sign of student burnout is destructive changes in the characteristics of the value-semantic sphere. In particular, who studied medical students, Savelyeva identified in their presence a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness, disappointment in the profession and a reassessment of the choice of educational profile (Savelyeva, 2022).

As a result of burnout, students' self-perception is also distorted. This distorted self-perception manifests itself in low self-esteem, negative internal "self-identity" and a low level of personal aspiration. Along with all this, there is mixed data on the relationship between the syndrome of emotional exhaustion and the level of training of young specialists. As Vokhrina (2022) noted, those with a university degree more often score high on the symptom of "depersonalization" and low on the scale of "emotional exhaustion". It is assumed that such results may be associated with an exaggerated level of aspiration in people with higher education (Vokhrina, 2022).

Along with the study of burnout in students, due attention should be paid to methods of preventing and treating emotional exhaustion. Many researchers have suggested that introducing new experiences into the life of students, they note the possibility of overcoming emotional exhaustion by communicating with loved ones and “emotionally charged” people, finding hobbies, relaxing, thinking, and developing communication skills, emotional intelligence, self-organization, and emotional coping skills (Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2008).

Although emotional exhaustion, stress, and aggression are distinct psychological phenomena, they are closely related and play an important role in both the academic and social lives of students. Each factor has a significant impact at certain stages of a student’s life. Stressful environments often lead to aggressive behavior, which in turn leads to emotional exhaustion. As a result, students often display these behaviors, often without realizing it, in their social lives, personal relationships, and academic settings. The observation of a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior has shown that individuals experiencing exhaustion tend to exhibit more aggressive reactions, which can occur in both the workplace and academic settings (Maslach & Leiter, 1997)

Pines and Aronson (1988) found that individuals suffering from emotional exhaustion have weakened social relationships and increased aggressive behavior. Their study showed that feelings of exhaustion lead to aggression (Pines & Aronson (1988). Salmela-Aro (2009) investigated a positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior in young people. The results showed that students in stressful environments tended to display more aggressive reactions (Salmela-Aro, 2009).

Roth (2014) found a direct relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior in university students. The study found that higher levels of exhaustion were associated with increased aggressive behavior (Roth, 2014). Gonzalez (2010) investigated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggression in the workplace.

The results showed that higher levels of exhaustion led to more aggressive behavior (Gonzalez, 2010). Vigil-Colet and Tortosa (2006) noted that exhaustion in academic environments increased aggression. In particular, high academic workload and exam-related stress were found to increase aggressive behavior in students (Vigil-Colet & Tortosa, 2006).

Hakanen (2006) found that emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior in the workplace conducted a study showing a positive relationship between burnout and aggression. It was found that employees who experience burnout exhibit more aggressive reactions (Hakanen, 2006). Buchanan and Consedine (2019) found a cyclical relationship between

emotional exhaustion and aggression. Their findings showed that burnout increases aggression, which in turn deepens the level of burnout. Lee and Ashfort (1996) investigated the interaction between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior in organizational settings. According to their research, burnout increases aggressive behavior in the workplace.

Schaufeli (2009) described the relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior in detail. The results show that higher levels of burnout lead to increased aggressive behavior (Hakanen, 2006). Harris (2018) examined the relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior and confirmed that students who experience burnout are prone to aggression. The study highlighted the effectiveness of social support and intervention programs in attenuating this relationship (Harris, 2018).

García (2021) examined the relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressive behavior and noted a strong positive correlation between the two. The study found that higher levels of stress among students led to increased aggression (García, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Design

The primary design of the research was aimed at identifying the relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggressiveness, as well as determining the degree of their mutual interaction. For this purpose, two standardized psychometric tests were used to measure the levels of emotional exhaustion and aggressiveness.

Participants

Students from various disciplines were selected through random sampling. Participants included students from all academic years (I-IV), with a total of 120 students involved in the study. Among them, 60 (50%) were female and 60 (50%) were male. Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses and the purpose of the research, and their voluntary consent to participate was obtained.

Instruments

Several tools were used in the study. One of them was the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, which consists of 19 questions rated on a scale from 1 to 7. The total scores ranged from 0 to 42. Another tool was the *Buss Perry Aggression Test*, which includes 29 questions rated on a scale from 1 to 5.

Data Collection

The research was conducted in October 2024 among first-to-fourth-year students from various faculties of Odlar Yurdu University. After obtaining the necessary permissions from the educational institution through an official request, the instruments were administered. The collected data was then entered into the SPSS 22 statistical software for differential analysis to address the objectives of the research. The data was presented clearly, summarized in tables, and accompanied by the necessary analyses and explanations.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting this research, the existing ethics committee was actively involved. Additionally, the international ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence for participants were taken into account. Participants were informed that the research aimed to achieve beneficial results without any intention of harm. During the study, the physical and mental well-being of the participants was safeguarded. Anonymity was ensured, and the confidentiality of the collected data was maintained. Participants provided informed consent regarding the purpose of the research. The results of the study will be used solely for scientific purposes.

RESULTS

During the research, an initial analysis was conducted based on the scores determining academic achievement to evaluate the normal distribution.

Table 1.*Visualization of individuals' scores on a normal distribution curve*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
BPAQ	.057	120	.200*	.986	120	.200*
Emotional exhaustion	.060	120	.200*	.983	130	.200*

Note. The authors.

As shown in Table 1, the significance level (Sig) was indicated as 0.2. If the significance level $p > 0.05$, it can be concluded that the results are normally distributed. This can also be observed in the hyperbolic curve. Similarly, as depicted in the accompanying graphs, the scores obtained by individuals were either on or close to the normal distribution curve.

As can be seen in Table 2, the indicators were levels of Emotional Exhaustion-Kolmogorov-Smirnov: Sig.=0.200, Sig.=0.200 Shapiro-Wilk: Sig.=0.130 Sig.=0.1. This confirms the existence of a significant correlation.

Table 2.*Calculation of Normal Distribution (Based on Emotional Exhaustion Results)*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df
BPAQ	.062	119	.200*	.986	120
Emotional exhaustion	.058	200*	.200*	.983	120

Note. The authors.

Table 3.

Calculation of Normal Distribution (Based on Emotional Exhaustion Results)

Levels of emotional exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	1	.402**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120
	Pearson Correlation	1	.402**
BPAQ			

Note. The authors.

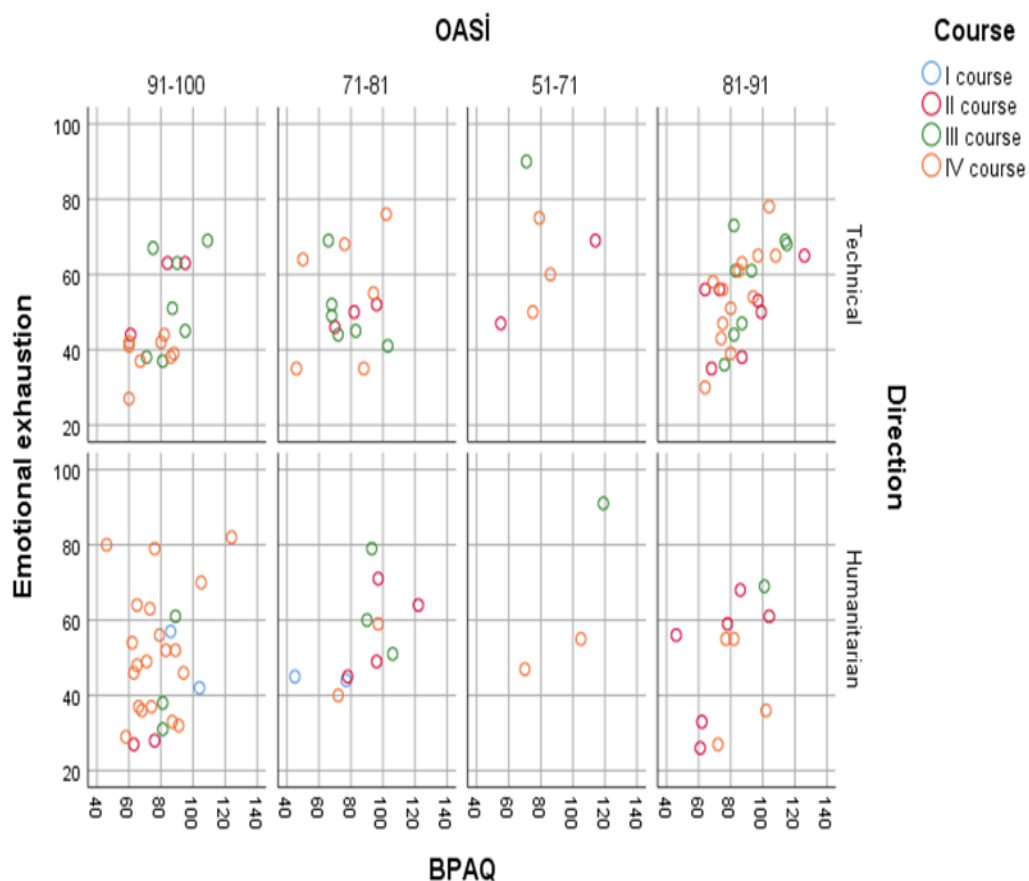
The study showed that there is a correlation between emotional exhaustion and aggression, and this relationship is significant. The Pearson correlation coefficient is in the range of $r = 0.402$ ($p = 0.001$), which indicates that there is a moderately strong positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and aggression. It is not completely strong, but the relationship is significant and noticeable. The study shows that if you want to test the significance of the correlation coefficient, you should look at the p-value. If the p-value is less than 0.05, this indicates that the result is statistically significant. This result indicates that there is a positive relationship between increased emotional exhaustion and increased levels of aggression.

Students in humanities faculties, however, show different patterns. For example, emotional exhaustion scores in the OASI ranges of 71-81 and 51-71 show greater variability, suggesting a wider range of burnout experiences within this group (Figure 1).

Due to Course Level Differences, students across all academic years are distributed across different levels of emotional exhaustion and BPAQ scores, and do not show consistent trends based on academic level. However, further analysis could explore whether specific groups in higher academic years experience different levels of emotional exhaustion or aggression. In general, technical students in certain OASI ranges may experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Both emotional exhaustion and aggression vary widely across courses and fields of study. This analysis could guide future research to provide targeted support to different groups of students (Figure 1)

Figure 1.

This graph presents a complex view of the interaction between emotional exhaustion and aggression among students, as influenced by their field of study, OASI scores, and year of schooling



Note. The authors.

Table 4.*Data on the relationship between pairs of studied features using the rank correlation method*

Indicators	Aggression	Academic achievement	Stress Indicators	Relationship existence	Significance indicators*
Emotional exhaustion	High	High	High	The relationship is statistically significant and has a two-way nature	-0.618
Emotional exhaustion	Medium	Medium	Medium	The relationship is statistically significant and has a two-way nature	-0.364
Emotional exhaustion	Weak	Weak	Weak	The relationship is statistically significant and has a two-way nature	-0.073

Note. The authors. * $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$.

These results show that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between students' burnout and aggression, including stress. Such a pattern is also observed between emotional exhaustion and academic achievement. Given the relative stability of these aspects, it can be assumed that emotional exhaustion hinders the development of the student. Based on these results, it can be concluded that people who demonstrate a tendency to emotional restraint, isolation and social distance are more exposed to stress and are more prone to burnout. This may be due to the fact that they are forced to maintain numerous long-term social relationships during their studies, which can lead to stress that can turn into burnout.

DISCUSSION

As students experience greater emotional fatigue and stress, they may become more susceptible to aggressive reactions as a means of coping with emotional tension. A related study by Chen et al. (2020) investigated emotional exhaustion and aggression among healthcare students, such as nursing and medical students, who face intense academic pressures and emotional demands. The researchers found that emotional exhaustion was significantly associated with both direct and indirect aggression. Anger and hostility were more pronounced in students with higher levels of burnout.

Furthermore, the study emphasized that students with lower levels of social support and higher academic demands were more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors as a result of emotional exhaustion. Our findings align with these results, suggesting that students under intense academic pressure, such as healthcare students, are particularly vulnerable to aggressive reactions during periods of high emotional exhaustion. This research underscores the importance of social support as a buffering factor that can reduce aggression among students exposed to emotional strain.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the study aligns with several existing studies, it has certain limitations. These limitations primarily stem from the small number of participants involved in the selection process and the fact that the research was restricted to a single university. Naturally, the data was collected over a limited time period and involved a small sample size. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide perspectives for future research through larger sample sizes in quantitative analyses, thereby enhancing existing approaches in this field within specific national-ethnic settings and cultural contexts.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the interaction between emotional exhaustion and aggression. The findings revealed a statistically significant and moderately strong positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and aggression. This indicates that as emotional exhaustion increases, so does aggression. In other words, emotionally exhausted and stressed individuals are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors. Psychological implications: These findings suggest that emotional exhaustion can lead to aggression, or conversely, more aggressive behaviors can contribute to emotional exhaustion.

This highlights the importance of emotional support programs and stress management training in organizations and educational institutions. Psychological support and stress management programs can equip participants with better emotional regulation skills, thereby preventing aggression. Early detection and preventive measures of emotional exhaustion in work and educational environments can help reduce the incidence of aggression.

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CRedit Author Statement

- ☐ **Acknowledgments:** We express our gratitude to the participants for their sincere cooperation.
 - ☐ **Funding:** This article is self-funded.
 - ☐ **Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in conducting this review.
 - ☐ **Ethical approval:** Studies involving humans were reviewed in advance by an ethics committee, standards were met, and principles such as informed consent, risk-benefit assessment, and confidentiality were adhered to. The results of the studies were in accordance with regulations requiring the inclusion of confirmation information.
 - ☐ **Data and materials availability:** The data and materials used in this study may be obtained as necessary.
 - ☐ **Author contributions:** Conceptualization, R.J. and J.A.; methodology, R.J.; software, S.O.; validation, L.A., U.N. and R.J.; formal analysis, J.A.; research, S.O.; resources L.A.; data selection, U.N.; original draft preparation, R.J.; proofreading and editing, J.A.; visualization, L.A.; supervision, U.N.; project management, R.J.; securing funding, L.A. All authors read and approved the published version of the manuscript.
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Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Review, formatting, standardization, and Translation

