


Illegitimate tasks and their association with burnout in the educational context. Role of job identity

Las tareas ilegítimas y su relación con el *burnout* en el contexto educacional.
El rol de la identidad laboral

As tarefas ilegítimas e sua relação com o *burnout* no contexto educacional. O papel da identidade laboral

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Abstract: Illegitimate tasks are defined as tasks that employees perceive as unfair and unnecessary, which can cause work stress and affect work identity. These, in turn, increase burnout, especially in complex organizations. The present study suggests that work identity plays a mediating role in the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout, whereby the higher the perception of illegitimate tasks, the lower the employee's work identity and the higher the level of burnout. To assess this relationship, a group of 135 employees from a Chilean educational institution completed a series of questionnaires to assess each of the variables, including the BERN Illegitimate Tasks Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and the Workplace Identity Scale. The study used a longitudinal design, with data collected at two-time points (T1 and T2), with a six-week interval between them. Initially, analyses were conducted using data from T1 alone, and subsequently, analyses were performed using data from both time points (T1 and T2). Results indicate that illegitimate tasks have a greater direct effect on burnout than the effect mediated by work identity and that illegitimate tasks have a significant direct effect on burnout but not on reported burnout six weeks later. Illegitimate tasks have a direct effect on burnout, and work identity acts as a mediator in this relationship. The relevance of these variables must be recognized in organizational settings. Optimizing working conditions and strengthening work identity will benefit not only employees but also the organization.

Keywords: job stress; illegitimate tasks; burnout; work identity; mediation

Resumen: Las tareas ilegítimas se definen como las asignaciones que los empleados consideran injustas e innecesarias, las cuales pueden causar estrés laboral y afectar la identidad laboral, lo que aumenta los niveles de *burnout*, especialmente en organizaciones complejas. El presente estudio plantea que la identidad laboral ejerce un rol mediador en la relación entre las tareas ilegítimas y el *burnout*, por lo que, a mayor percepción de tareas ilegítimas, el empleado reportará menores niveles de identidad laboral y mayores niveles de *burnout*. Para evaluar esta relación, un grupo de 135 trabajadores de una institución educativa chilena contestó un cuestionario sociodemográfico y los instrumentos Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS) y Workplace Identity Scale (WIS). El estudio tiene un diseño longitudinal y los datos se obtuvieron en dos momentos (T1 y T2), separados entre sí por seis semanas. En primer lugar, se realizaron análisis considerando solo T1 y posteriormente se realizaron análisis considerando ambos tiempos de medición (T1 y T2).

Los resultados revelaron que las tareas ilegítimas tienen un efecto directo sobre el *burnout*, mayor que el efecto mediado por la identidad laboral, y que las tareas ilegítimas tendrían un efecto significativo directo sobre el *burnout*, pero no sobre el *burnout* reportado seis semanas después. Las tareas ilegítimas tienen un impacto directo en el agotamiento laboral y la identidad laboral actúa como un factor mediador en esta relación. Es esencial que, dentro del ámbito organizacional, se reconozca la relevancia de estas variables. Optimizar las condiciones de trabajo y reforzar la identidad laboral no solo beneficia a los empleados, sino que también a las organizaciones.

Palabras clave: estrés laboral; tareas ilegítimas; burnout; identidad laboral; mediación

Resumo: As tarefas ilegítimas são definidas como atribuições que os empregados consideram injustas e desnecessárias, as quais podem causar estresse laboral e afetar a identidade laboral, aumentando, por sua vez, os níveis de *burnout*, especialmente em organizações complexas. O presente estudo propõe que a identidade laboral desempenha um papel mediador na relação entre as tarefas ilegítimas e o *burnout*; portanto, quanto maior a percepção de tarefas ilegítimas, o empregado reportará menores níveis de identidade laboral e maiores níveis de *burnout*. Para avaliar essa relação, um grupo de 135 trabalhadores de uma instituição educacional chilena respondeu a um questionário sociodemográfico e aos instrumentos Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS), e Workplace Identity Scale (WIS). O estudo empregou um design longitudinal, com coletas de dados realizadas em dois momentos (T1 e T2), com um intervalo de seis semanas entre eles. Em primeiro lugar, foram realizadas análises considerando apenas os dados de T1 e, posteriormente, análises que incluíram ambos os períodos de medição (T1 e T2). Os resultados revelaram que as tarefas ilegítimas têm um efeito direto sobre o *burnout* maior do que o efeito mediado pela identidade laboral e que as tarefas ilegítimas teriam um efeito significativo direto sobre o *burnout*, mas não sobre o *burnout* reportado seis semanas depois. As tarefas ilegítimas têm um impacto direto no esgotamento laboral e a identidade laboral atua como um fator mediador nesta relação. É essencial que, dentro do âmbito organizacional, se reconheça a relevância destas variáveis. Otimizar as condições de trabalho e reforçar a identidade laboral não só beneficia aos empregados, mas também as organizações.

Palavras-chave: estresse laboral; tarefas ilegítimas; burnout; identidade laboral; mediação

The present study involves the integral participation of the human being, who pits into action all his capacities, which generate several consequences beyond biological and physiological dimensions. Whereas a static charge is supported through gestures and postures, it also uses his physical strength and activates his psychic and mental dimensions. Since these actions are frequent, they can lead to negative consequences, such as work stress (Elfering et al., 2008; Elfering et al., 2009; Neffa, 2003).

Stress, particularly work-related stress, corresponds to a problem that has acquired great relevance in recent decades due to its negative consequences on health and productivity (Osorio & Cárdenas-Niño, 2017). Although stress has been difficult to conceptualize since the causes are complex and multifactorial, there is a large body of evidence about its persistence in people (Monroe, 2008). Stress is particularly important to address within the workplace since it has implications on the health of employees, their relationships with employers, and the productivity of both companies and institutions (Osorio & Cárdenas-Niño, 2017).

Among the causes identified as triggers of work stress, work overload, loss or lack of control, inadequate working conditions, and illegitimate tasks can be mentioned (Semmer et al., 2015). The concept involves two dimensions: tasks considered unfair, not part of the role, and unnecessary tasks seen as non-essential or a waste of time. Violating the expectations of the role not only contributes to emotional exhaustion but also affects the perception of work identity of the employees. This is considered a sense of belonging and value within the work environment (Ma & Peng, 2019; Pindek et al., 2018; Semmer et al., 2015).

The perception of illegitimate tasks is a critical factor in developing burnout, a syndrome that involves symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a decrease in the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model by Semmer et al. (2007). This concept relates illegitimate tasks to stress due to the offense perceived when assuming inappropriate roles. Stress results from the frustration of objectives that affect self-esteem, which is considered a basic human need (Semmer et al., 2019).

In this context, illegitimate have a double impact: they erode work identity and increase burnout, suggesting a direct association between these variables (Semmer et al., 2015). Several studies have indicated that the assignment of illegitimate tasks not only negatively affects the work identity of the employees but also significantly increases burnout levels. This creates a feedback loop between these variables (Bakker et al., 2004; Ding & Kuvaas, 2023; Pindek et al., 2018; Semmer et al., 2019).

Moncayo-Rizzo et al. (2024) recently investigated the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout in health personnel through a cross-sectional design. Their outcomes confirm the significant

correlation between both variables and emphasize the importance of longitudinal studies that may identify the association's direction.

It should be noted that burnout indicators are not only high in health institutions in Chile. Educational institutions have indicated alarming levels of burnout, especially in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the workload and pressure on education personnel (Educarchile, 2020). On the other hand, professionals in the educational field reported a significant increase in the hours dedicated to work and, consequently, the levels of work stress (Elige Educar, 2020). This phenomenon can be partially explained by the perception of illegitimate tasks assigned to employees, who were forced to assume responsibilities outside their primary tasks, thus increasing the disconnection from their work identity (Faupeel et al., 2016).

Therefore, it becomes essential to understand how illegitimate tasks affect the well-being of professionals in Chilean educational institutions, being focused on their association with work identity and burnout. Thus, the present study aims to contribute with empirical evidence for the development of organizational interventions to promote a healthier work environment, reduce burnout levels, and strengthen employees' work identity.

The present study is framed in the search for working conditions that promote a better quality of life for the employees, specifically with well-being based on the empowerment of individual and organizational resources and on the reduction of the negative impact of illegitimate tasks on burnout (Alatalo et al., 2018; Di Fabio, 2017). Thus, factors that threaten the work identity can be mitigated, indicating appreciation and recognition of employees and their contributions. Avoiding threats and providing affirmation about the employees' status implies respecting people's dignity (Semmer et al., 2007). This is related to organizational justice (Meier & Semmer, 2018).

The variables investigated in this study are framed in the concept of illegitimate tasks, burnout, and work identity, critical aspects that organizations should integrate to improve work and organizational well-being. These are key aspects that organizations should integrate to improve organizational and work well-being. Given the relevance of illegitimate tasks in the advent of burnout and the role that work identity could play in this association, the following research questions should be addressed: What is the association between the assignment of illegitimate tasks and burnout? Does the work identity act as a mediator in this association?

Based on previous literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: illegitimate tasks are positively related to burnout.

Hypothesis 2: illegitimate tasks are negatively related to work identity.

Hypothesis 3: Work identity is negatively related to burnout.

Hypothesis 4: Work identity partially mediates the association between illegitimate tasks

Materials and methods

Design

An explanatory observational study was conducted (Ato et al., 2013). Additionally, a longitudinal regression-type mediation model was used in two stages, incorporating the autoregression model for control variables (MacKinnon, 2008), with the illegitimate tasks' variable as an independent variable, burnout as a dependent variable, and work identity as a mediating variable. All variables were all evaluated in two stages, and separated by a period of six weeks (Kottwitz et al., 2021; MacKinnon, 2008).

Participants

Participants included active employees from Chilean primary and secondary educational institutions with different roles and work areas and at least one year of seniority. The sample size was calculated through the G*Power software, considering an effect size of 0-25 (Cohen's *d*), a statistical power of .80. and an alpha probability of .05 (5%). Thus, a minimal sample of 63 participants was established. A total of 137 people participated in the first measurement, and 135 provided complete responses (98.5%). Of the 135 participants, 101 agreed to participate in the second data collection (T2), though only 79 participants of the initial sample provided complete data. This represents a response rate of 58.5%. Only employees with at least one year of work experience within the institution and with a workload equal to or greater than 30 hours, no additional paid job, or were exercising replacement functions were included. Sample description:

- First measurement: 100 women (73 %) and 35 men (27 %), with a mean age of 44 years ($SD = 10.24$), of Chilean nationality. Work positions included 51.18 % teachers, 10.69 % school authorities, and 14.17 % supporting professionals. Average weekly workload: 39.74 hours ($SD = 8.92$).
- Second measurement: 56 women (71 %) and 23 men (29 %), mean age 42.72 years ($SD = 10.70$), all Chileans. Positions: 51 % teachers, 18 % support professionals, and 20.5 % school authorities. In working hours, 88.5 % have between 30 and 40 hours per week, whereas 11.5 % have a working day of 20 to 30 hours per week.

Instruments

Illegitimate tasks: These tasks correspond to actions that exceed what is reasonably expected of an employee, offending their professional identity and leading to adverse consequences, especially when the tasks are unreasonable or non-aligned with the work purpose (Semmer et al., 2007). For its evaluation, the Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS; Jacobshagen, 2006) instrument was used, adapted to the Spanish language by Valdivieso-Portilla et al. (2019). This instrument has subscales focused on unnecessary and irrational tasks. In addition, the instrument is composed of eight questions related to justice and role on a five-point response Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very frequently*), demonstrated robust reliability with Cronbach's alphas of .86 overall, .85 for unnecessary tasks, and .84 for irrational tasks (Valdivieso-Portilla et al., 2021).

Burnout: This concept, recognized as work syndrome, includes symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, encompasses, cynicism, and a decrease in the perception of personal achievements, with exhaustion as the primary manifestation (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). For its measurement, the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was used in its version adapted to Spanish (Salanova et al., 2000). The instrument has 15 items, distributed in the exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy version, with a seven-response Likert-type scale (from 0 = *never* to 6 = *every day*). This tool presents reliabilities with Cronbach's Alpha of .85 for exhaustion, .78 for cynicism (increasing to .84 after item 13 was removed), and .73 for professional efficacy.

Work identity: Work identity refers to how individuals interpret and value their work role, which is essential due to its association with well-being, self-esteem, and personal attainment (Gini, 1998; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This variable was evaluated through the Workplace Identity Scale (WIS; Sulphrey, 2020), which encompasses work centrality, individual and collective identity, and organization. The instrument is based on the proposals by Clarke et al. (2013) and Fagermoen (1997), which have 18 items in five dimensions. These questions are answered on a 5-item Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*), with a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .87 (Sulphrey, 2020).

Sociodemographic data: A sociodemographic and occupational questionnaire designed for this study collected essential information from the participants. The questionnaire included aspects such as age (categorized in ranks), sex, gender, educational level, position, and seniority in and within the organization, among other relevant descriptive data.

In the longitudinal mediation model, Burnout in T1 was considered a control variable to examine the connection between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T2).

Procedures

After obtaining approval from the Ethics, Bioethics, and Biosecurity Committee of the University of Concepción, the questionnaire was piloted using ten trials to confirm its comprehensibility. To achieve this, the set of instruments of the present study was applied. Once validated, data was collected in two sampling intervals, separated by six weeks, and through the Psytoolkit digital platform (Stoet, 2010, 2017), ensuring confidentiality standards.

It should be noted that the relevance for the privacy of every one of the participants was emphasized by providing detailed informed consent. The implementation was promoted via email. On the other hand, the analytical procedure initially addressed a mediation analysis with the first dataset, followed by a longitudinal analysis based on both sampling sets.

Data analytics strategy

Data were obtained through the PsyToolkit platform. From which they were downloaded for their processing and subsequent analysis. Only complete questionnaires were considered for analysis. Additionally, the psychometric properties of the instruments were evaluated through Cronbach's alpha

model (Bujang et al., 2018) and the confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) of the polychoric type (Freiberg-Hoffmann et al., 2013). Three models were compared in the CFA in T1 and evaluated through indices such as RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TL1. The diagonally weighted least squares method was used in these cases, and it is suitable for ordinal data (Flora & Curran, 2004; Li, 2016).

On the other hand, Spearman's correlation was used to analyze the association between illegitimate tasks, burnout, and work identity. A mediation hypothesis was tested for T1 (sectional analysis) and Burnout in T2 (longitudinal analysis), controlling for Burnout in T1. Previous studies indicate that sex and age can be relevant in perceiving illegitimate tasks (Kottwitz et al., 2021). Therefore, both variables were included as control variables in the present study. Analyses were done with R version 4,2,3 software through the Rstudio extension (R Core Team, 2020).

Results

Instrument reliability and validity analysis

Table 1 presents the reliability coefficients of the scales used in both measurement times (T1 and T2). As observed, all scales have high-reliability indexes, exceeding the value of .70, which is considered acceptable according to Bujang et al. (2018).

Table 1
Reliability coefficients of the scales belonging to the T1 and T2 study

	α^{T1}	α^{T2}
Illegitimate tasks	.88	.89
Burnout	.91	.89
Work identity	.91	.92

A total of three models were evaluated in CFA. One of one factor, one of two factors, and the final model, with three factors (Illegitimate Tasks, Burnout, and Work Identity), the latter presenting better adjustment. The model was adjusted by using the WLSMV model, which is suitable for ordinal data, with indexes such as RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TL1, the results of which are summarized in Table 2. All variables were analyzed separately in T1 and T2 to ensure an accurate longitudinal evaluation.

Table 2
Summary of the results of confirmatory factor analysis, with diagonally weighted least squares (WLSMV) estimator

Model	X ²	RMSEA	CI [90%]	SRMR	CFI	TLI
3 factors	907.09	.042	.031-.050	.096	.883	.877
2 factors	1039.29	.055	.047-.063	.113	.794	.783
factor	1338.56	.060	.053-.067	.126	.745	.732

Note. X²: Chi-square; RMSEA: Mean root square error of approximation (RMSEA); SRMR: Residual standardized middle square root; CFI: Comparative index adjustment; TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index.

Correlation analysis between model variables

Correlation values (Spearman's rho) between the study variables are summarized in Table 3. Positive and significant correlations between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout ($\rho = .68, p < .001$) are observed, as well as between the same variables in T2 ($\rho = .58, p < .001$). In addition, there is a significant and negative correlation between work identity (T1) with illegitimate tasks (T1) ($\rho = -.49, p < .001$) and burnout in T1 ($\rho = -.65, p < .001$) y T2 ($\rho = -.49, p < .001$).

Minimum and maximum values for the variables show wide ranges, highlighting the variability of the responses for illegitimate tasks (T1). The range varies from 1.00 to 5.000, and the work identity (T1) has a similar range from 1.00 to 5.00. Burnout in T1 and T2 presents a complete range from 0.00 to 6.00. On the other hand, no correlations were obtained for the control variables, such as sex and illegitimate tasks, work identity, and burnout (in T1 and T2). The control variable showed a weak and significantly negative correlation with burnout in T1 and T2 and a weak and positive correlation with work identity in T1 ($\rho = .22, p < .049$). Age was not significantly correlated with illegitimate tasks.

Table 3

Average values (*M*), standard deviation (*DE*), minimum, maximum, and correlations between the central variables of the study

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sex									
2. Age						-.004			
3. Illegitimate tasks (T1)	2.75	.87	1.00	5.00	.041	-.152			
4. Work identity (T1)	2.83	.63	1.00	5.00	.105	.222*	-.493***		
5. Burnout (T1)	1.70	1.03	0.00	6.00	-.039	-.276*	-.677***	-.653***	
6. Burnout (T2)	1.55	.93	0.00	6.00	-.083	-.236*	-.575***	-.493***	.801***

Notes. (a) 1 = Woman, 2 = Man. (b) 1 = Up to 35 years, 2 = 36–45 years, 3 = 46–55 years, 4= 56–65 years, 5=Over 65 years. Spearman's correlation analysis (two tails, $\alpha = .05$) * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. The minimum and maximum values represent the range of responses in the variables studied.

Mediation variables

The mediation variables showed an indirect effect of mediation of the illegitimate tasks on burnout, less than the direct effect exerted by the illegitimate tasks on burnout. Results of the effects between study variables are summarized in Table 6, considering both measurement times. Figure 1 and Table 4 refer to an analysis in which only T1 was considered, whereas Figure 2 and Table 5 indicate the longitudinal analysis of the study.

Table 4

Results of the analysis of mediation of work identity (T1) between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T1)

	95 % Confidence interval			
	Estimated	Minimum value	Maximum value	<i>p</i>
Average effect of the causal mediation	0.527	0.26	0.86	<.001
Average direct effect	1.000	0.696	1.31	<.001
Total effect	1.527	1.22	1.84	<.001
Mediation proportion	0.345	0.19	0.53	<.001

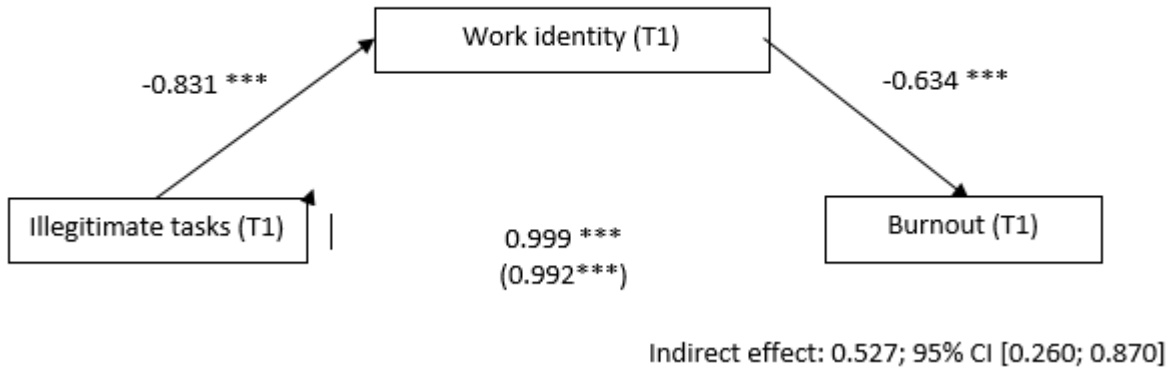
Note. $N = 79$ and 10000 simulations.

When analyzing the mediation model of work identity (T1) in the association between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T1), considering the variables sex (female/male) and the age categories such as control variables, it was observed that illegitimate tasks were positively associated with burnout. On the other hand, work identity was negatively associated (illegitimate tasks: .994 $p < .001$; work identity: -.597 $p < .001$).

Sex showed a very weak negative association, whereas age showed a greater negative association, although none was significant (sex: -.461 $p = .85$; age: -1.714 $p = .125$) (see Table 6), with the statistical adjustment values of this model: RMSEA = .00; RSMR = .00; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00.

Figure 1

Indirect effect of work identity (T1) on the association between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T1)



Note. $N = 79$. Sample size with bootstrapping = 10,000. In parentheses, the direct effect of integrating the control variables: Sex and Age. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two tails).

Table 5

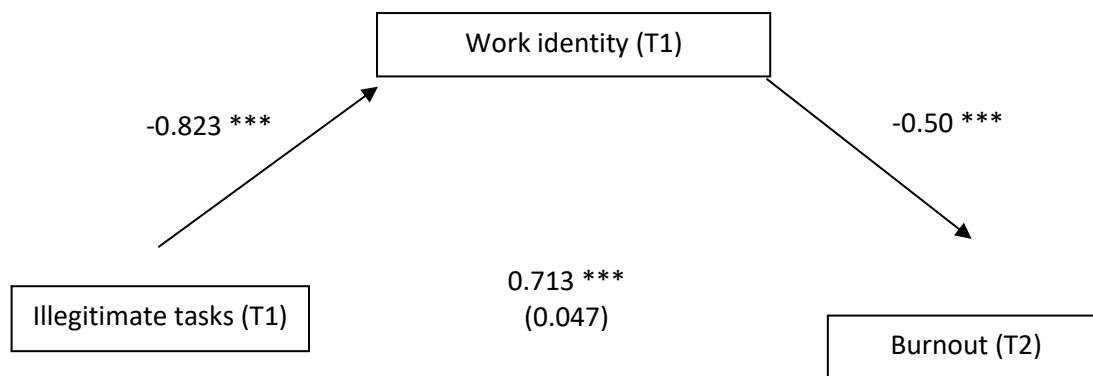
Results of the analysis of mediation of work identity (T1) between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T2)

	95 % Confidence intervals			
	Estimated	Minimum value	Maximum value	p
Average effect of causal mediation	0.42	0.17	0.74	< .001
Average direct effect	0.71	0.32	1.10	< .001
Total effect	1.13	0.72	1.54	< .001
Mediation proportion	0.37	0.17	0.64	< .001

Note. $N = 79$ y 10000 simulations.

Figure 2

Indirect effect of work identity (T1) on the association between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T2)



Note. $N = 79$, Sample size with bootstrapping = 10,000. In parentheses, the direct effect of integrating the control variables: Burnout (T1), Sex, and Age. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two tails).

Table 6*Effect of illegitimate tasks (T1) on Burnout (T1), considering the variables work identity (T1), sex, and age*

Regression	Coefficient	Standard error	Z value	p	95 % CI	
Burnout (T1) ~ Illegitimate tasks(T1)	0.992	0.173	5.713	< .001	0.658	1.355
Burnout (T1) ~ Work identity (T1)	-0.597	0.109	-5.496	< .001	-0.793	0.363
Burnout (T1) ~ Sex	-0.461	2.565	-0.18	.857	-5.402	4.2
Burnout (T1) ~ Age	-1.714	1.117	-1.553	.125	-4.074	0.371

Note. $N = 79$ y 1000 simulations; CI: confidence intervals.

The evaluation of the longitudinal mediation model, considering the effect of work identity (T1) on the association between illegitimate tasks (T1) and burnout (T2), considering the variables sex, age, and burnout (T1) as control variables only showed a significant increase of burnout (T1) (.66 $p < .001$). On the other hand, illegitimate tasks (T1) and work identity (T1) with the control variable sex and age were found to be non-significant (see Table 7). The statistical values of adjustment were as follows: RMSEA = .00; RSMR = .00; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00.

Table 7*Effect of illegitimate tasks (T1) on Burnout (T2) considering the variables Work identity (T1), Burnout (T1), sex, and age*

	Coefficient	Standard error	Z value	p	95 % CI	
Burnout (T2) ~ Illegitimate tasks(T1)	0.047	0.228	0.206	.837	-0.379	0.473
Burnout (T2) ~ Work identity (T1)	-0.091	0.121	-0.747	.455	-0.315	0.134
Burnout (T2) ~ Burnout (T1)	0.66	0.106	6.199	< .001	0.465	0.854
Burnout (T2) ~ Sex	0.737	2.666	0.276	.782	-4.368	5.841
Burnout (T2) ~ Age	0.007	1.026	0.007	.995	-1.837	1.851

Note. $N = 79$ y 1000 simulations; CI: Confidence intervals.

In summary, the analysis considering only T1 confirms the mediating role of work identity in the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout (Table 4). However, the mediating effect of work identity in the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout (Table 4), though the mediating effect between illegitimate tasks in T1 and burnout in T2 (longitudinal analysis) was not significant (Table 7).

Discussion

Illegitimate tasks, seen as unnecessary and irrational actions assigned to employees, correspond to a factor of work stress that threatens work identity and can increase burnout. This situation is especially relevant in complex organizations.

A longitudinal study was conducted in Chile, with 79 employees of an educational institution, using various questionnaires, including BERN illegitimate tasks and MBI. Despite the initial results (analysis in T1) indicating a direct effect of these tasks on burnout, longitudinal data could not explain a significant connection between illegitimate tasks and work identity. However, the relevance of burnout over time was highlighted. It becomes essential for organizations to recognize and address these work conditions to ensure healthier environments.

The results presented in the present study provide evidence that confirms various hypotheses raised.

Hypothesis 1: Illegitimate tasks are positively related to burnout. It was confirmed that illegitimate tasks, which employees consider unfair and unnecessary, are positively associated with burnout. These results were reflected in two moments (T1 and T2). Specifically, the more often employees are asked to perform these tasks, the greater their tendency toward emotional burnout (Ouyang et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 2: Illegitimate tasks are negatively related to work identity. There is a negative correlation between illegitimate tasks and work identity. People frequently face these tasks report less connection and identification with their work.

Hypothesis 3: Work identity is negatively related to burnout. A strong and positive work identity was shown to be inversely related to burnout. In other words, those with a clear work identity experience lower burnout and emotional exhaustion levels.

Hypothesis 4: Work identity partially mediates the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout. Work identity partially acts as a mediator in the connection between illegitimate tasks and burnout. However, illegitimate tasks have a more pronounced direct impact on burnout than the effect mediated by work identity.

Additionally, control variables such as sex and age were evaluated. Although gender did not affect the results, a significant but weak connection with age was found. Older employees tend to identify with their work and experience less burnout. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Demerouti et al., 2007; Leiter et al., 2012), suggesting that older employees may have more resources to manage stress and find purpose in their work.

Overall, these results provide evidence of the complex association between illegitimate tasks, work identity, and burnout. Illegitimate tasks seem to have a significant and direct impact on burnout, though they also have an indirect influence through work identity. This suggests that promoting a strong work identity could be beneficial in reducing the negative impact of illegitimate tasks on workplace well-being (Ouyang et al., 2022). However, managing illegitimate tasks should be part of strategies to decrease employee burnout. More research is needed to fully understand the mechanisms and conditions under which this association occurs.

Different longitudinal studies have found that illegitimate tasks are significantly linked to burnout, and both can have long-term consequences on work performance, working health, and overall well-being of the employees (Bakker et al., 2004; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; van den Broeck et al., 2010). For instance, van den Broeck et al. (2010) found that illegitimate tasks are classified as “hindering work demands”. This means those tasks hinder job performance and are related to emotional exhaustion. Likewise, the review by Halbesleben and Buckley (2004) found that burnout is related to a wide range of adverse outcomes, including reduced job performance, job satisfaction, and physical and mental health.

Conclusions

Based on a longitudinal design with two measurement times, the present study has explored the connection between illegitimate tasks, work identity, and burnout syndrome at different time points. Although the initial sample provided a solid and empirical basis, losing participants in T2 limited its capacity to validate longitudinal findings. In addition, the results cannot establish a conclusive causal relation between these variables. Whereas the cross-sectional analysis suggests a possible mediating role of work identity, the longitudinal results could not confirm this mediation. It is crucial to recognize the study's limitations, such as the focus on a single sector and potential doubts about the reliability of WIS.

These results confirm the association between illegitimate tasks and burnout, emphasizing the imperative of optimizing work protocols and consolidating a resilient work identity. Moreover, organizational entities must recalibrate their strategies, prioritizing the prevention of burnout through role restructuring, optimal resource allocation, and the implementation of work-life balance strategies.

Further research must address the comprehension of illegitimate tasks concerning organizational factors. This emphasis should mainly focus on Latin American contexts, such as the Chilean one. In addition, leadership dynamics and their potential influence on the assignment of illegitimate tasks demand more rigorous scrutiny, especially concerning specific leadership styles.

In summary, despite the existing literature on illegitimate tasks and their consequences, there is an evident gap in the Latin American context, including Chile. The insights obtained from the present study provide a framework for subsequent research, outlining methodological tactics for assessing burnout syndrome in work contexts. It is particularly relevant to highlight the applicability of these findings in the education sector, given the intrinsic psychological burden associated with this field.

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