- Need for Cognition and Burnout in healthcare: The mediating role of self-control, emotion
- regulation, and coping strategies
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Abstract

Burnout has emerged as a global health concern, with its prevalence notably increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This especially occurs among individuals working within 18 the field of healthcare. In order to contribute to the improvement of working conditions 19 and mental health, this study replicates a mediation model previously tested by Grass et al. (2018) among teaching students and by Zerna et al. (2022) among teachers. For this 21 purpose, multiple mediation models, using a sample of N = 642 healthcare workers were 22 examined. The incorporated predictor was Need for Cognition (an intrinsic motivation to 23 engage with cognitively demanding thoughts). Mediators were self-control, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. The burnout subdimensions reduced personal efficacy, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization each functioned individually as outcome variables. In addition to the mediation analyses, correlation analyses of these variables were also calculated. The results confirmed that adaptive coping strategies functioned preventively 29 across all burnout dimensions. Furthermore, reappraisal and maladaptive coping mediated 30 the relationship between NFC and some subdimensions of burnout. Healthcare workers 31 who tended towards higher NFC appeared to be protected from burnout development due 32 to various tested mediators. Regarding the daily work environment, initial evidence 33 suggests that efforts should be made to particularly promote adaptive coping strategies. 34 Future studies should further examine the link between NFC and burnout among 35 healthcare professionals.

37 Keywords: Need for Cognition, burnout, self-control, emotion regulation, coping

Word count: X

Need for Cognition and Burnout in healthcare: The mediating role of self-control, emotion regulation, and coping strategies

Burnout is a psychological, work-related stress syndrome and a global health concern (Maslach, 2003; Parandeh et al., 2022). It correlates with depression (Bianchi et al., 2015), increased alcohol abuse (Oreskovich et al., 2012), and a heightened risk of suicidal thoughts (Shanafelt et al., 2011). As a response to excessive work stress (Maslach, 1998), burnout affects not only individuals but also their workplace (West et al., 2018), leading to decreased productivity (Dewa et al., 2017), reduced job satisfaction, and intentions to leave the profession (Shanafelt et al., 2009).

Occupational stress is a growing problem, especially among healthcare workers (Rink et al., 2023). Challenges like time constraints, lack of control, and competing demands are significant job strains (Lyndon, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated burnout rates (Galanis et al., 2021; Prasad et al., 2021), as healthcare workers faced higher health risks, increased workloads, inadequate equipment, and limited resources. These strains impacted not only the workers but also the quality of patient care, leading to lower patient satisfaction and increased medical errors (West et al., 2018).

The rising number of burnout cases underscores its significance in today's society.

Despite extensive research, the exact causes and antecedents of burnout are not fully

understood. This study investigates the relationship between burnout, its underlying

mechanisms, and protective factors, extending previous research on factors mediating the

role of cognitive motivation in burnout (Grass et al., 2018; Zerna et al., 2022) from aspiring

and experienced teachers to healthcare professionals. The following section explains the

mediation model and its variables.

Theoretical Framework

63 ..

The present study

- 65 ...
- 66 Correlational Research Questions and Hypotheses. RQ1: Is there a
- 67 relationship between Need for Cognition (NFC), self-control, adaptive and maladaptive
- 68 coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as
- the burnout dimension reduced personal efficacy (rPE)?
- H1a: There will be a moderate positive relationship between NFC and self-control.
- H1b: There will be a small positive relationship between NFC and reappraisal and no relationship between NFC and suppression.
- H1c: There will be a moderate positive relationship between NFC and adaptive coping and a small negative relationship between NFC and maladaptive coping.
- H1d: There will be a medium negative relationship between NFC and rPE.
- H1e: There will be a large negative relationship between self-control and rPE.
- H1f: There will be a medium negative relationship between reappraisal and rPE and a no relationship between suppression and rPE.
- H1g: There will be a large negative relationship between adaptive coping and rPE and a large positive relationship between maladaptive coping and rPE.
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between NFC, self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as the burnout dimension emotional exhaustion?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between NFC, self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as the burnout dimension depersonalization?

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- Mediational Research Questions and Hypotheses. RQ4: To what extent do self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, as well as the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression mediate the relationship between NFC and the burnout dimension rPE?
- H4a: The relationship between NFC and rPE will not be mediated by self-control.

 However, higher NFC will be associated with more self-control, whereby self-control will not be associated with rPE.
- H4b: The relationship between NFC and rPE will be partly mediated by reappraisal,
 whereby a higher NFC is associated with higher reappraisal, which, in turn is
 associated with lower rPE.
 - H4c: The relationship between NFC and rPE will not be mediated by suppression.
- H4d: The relationship between NFC and rPE will be partly mediated by adaptive coping, whereby a higher NFC is associated with more adaptive coping, which, in turn is associated with lower rPE.
- H4e: The relationship between NFC and rPE will be partly mediated by maladaptive coping. A higher NFC is associated with less maladaptive coping, and, in turn, less maladaptive coping is associated with lower rPE.
- RQ5: To what extent do self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, as
 well as the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression mediate the
 relationship between NFC and the burnout dimensions emotional exhaustion?
- RQ6: To what extent do self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, as well as the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression mediate the relationship between NFC and the burnout dimensions depersonalization?

110 Methods

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study (cf. Simmons et al., 2012).

3 Study design

The preregistration of the current study is available at https://osf.io/d6y9k. Data 114 acquisition took place at two separate assessment occasions in the context of academic 115 thesis projects (Kadur, 2018; Ziessler, 2019). For the 2018 investigation (ref. 116 V-259-15-AS-NFC-28032018), the Ethics Committee of Chemnitz University of Technology 117 found no ethical relevance, so no full application was required. For the 2019 study (ref. 118 V-336-15-AS-Ressourcen-16052019), a full application was submitted and positively 119 reviewed, with no ethical concerns raised. To recruit participants, recruitment letters were 120 sent to clinics, residential and retirement homes, institutes for higher education, and other 121 health facilities across several German cities in the federal states of Saxony and Hesse. 122 Additionally, multiple calls for participants were made on social media platforms, such as 123 Facebook and WhatsApp, and recruitment letters were emailed to friends and 124 acquaintances working in the field of healthcare. Eligibility requirements for the study 125 included a minimum age of 18 years, proficiency in the German language, and current 126 employment in a healthcare profession. Data were assessed via anonymous, cross-sectional 127 online surveys using the Enterprise Feedback Suite Survey platform (EFS, Questback, 128 2017). Participants were informed about the study's objectives, duration, and data security. Further, they were given the opportunity to participate in a cash raffle, where ≤ 25 were handed out to two participants for every 100 individuals who took part in the study. 131 As additional reimbursement, participants were offered to receive the study results on 132 request as well as information on the personal and work-related risk factors of burnout. 133 Before the subjects reported demographic information and completed the questionnaires,

participants declared their consent for data security and study participation. At the end of the survey, a control item was included to ensure that participants indicated whether they answered the questions sincerely. Finally, those interested in the raffle could provide their email address which was recorded separately from the scientific data.

139 Participants

After the exclusion of participants because of incorrect scale labeling, missing consent 140 to be interviewed, double participation, not having answered the questions seriously, not 141 working in healthcare workers or not being educated to do so, or having taken less than the 142 average time to complete the questionnaires (see pregistration https://osf.io/d6y9k, section 143 Data exclusion for details), the usable subsamples comprised $n_{2018} = 431$, and $n_{2019} = 229$ 144 participants. The resulting total sample therefore consisted of N = 642 (547 female, 94) 145 male, 1 diverse; age range 18 to 78 years, M = 38.3, SD = 12.0 years). The majority of 146 participants worked as nurses (46.3%), while 2.8% held management positions in 147 healthcare. Others were employed as social workers (9.8%), psychotherapists (8.4%), and 148 other therapeutic professions such as occupational therapist or healthcare volunteers. 149 Detailed demographic data are provided in Supplementary Table S1. In both studies, the sample sizes were constrained by the number of participants that could be recruited during the limited timeframe of the respective thesis projects. Post-hoc power analysis of achieved 152 power ... 153

154 Material

All questionnaires used were administered in German language. The reliabilities

(MacDonald's ω and Cronbach's α) of the inventories used can be found in Table 1. The

burnout dimensions reduced personal efficiency, emotional exhaustion, and

depersonalization were assessed using the German version of the 22-item Maslach Burnout

Inventory (MBI-D, Büssing & Perrar, 1992). Items such as "I feel burned out by my job."

were rated on a scale from 1 (does not occur at all) to 6 (occurs very often/strongly). The internal consistencies of the MBI-D showed good to excellent reliabilities, MacDonald's omega = .92 (.89).

For clearer classification of each subdimension's individual expressions, Dreher et al.

(2019) provided specific values, where high burnout expression is classified at rPE values >

24, EE values > 22, and DE values > 8.

NFC was assessed with the 16-item short version of the German NFC scale (NCS, Bless et al., 1994) with items like "I like it when my life is full of tricky tasks that I have to solve." These items were rated on a seven-point rating scale ranging from +3 (very accurate) to -3 (completely inaccurate). The scale demonstrated an excellent internal consistency of MacDonald's ω .

Self-control was measured by the 13-item short form of the Self-Control Scale (SCS-K-D, Bertrams & Dickhäuser, 2009). Here, a five-point Likert scale from 1 (completely inaccurate) to 5 (completely accurate) was used to answer questions like "I am good at resisting temptations." This scale showed an acceptable internal consistency of MacDonald's $\omega > .79$.

Further, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ-D, Abler & Kessler, 2009), which included 10 items, was used to assess reappraisal and suppression. Reappraisal was measured by items like "When I get into a stressful situation, I change my thoughts about the situation, so it calms me down." Suppression was determined by items such as "I keep my feelings to myself." Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (absolutely true). The subscale that assessed reappraisal contained six items and achieved good reliability (MacDonald's $\omega > .86$). The four-item suppression subscale of the ERQ-D also reached good reliability with MacDonald's $\omega > .81$.

Finally (and differing from the material used by Grass et al. (2018)), the 20-item

Stress and Coping Inventory (SCI, Satow, 2012) was used to measure adaptive as well as

maladaptive coping strategies. Adaptive coping was assessed by the subscales "positive 186 thinking", "active stress management", "social support", and "holding on to faith". These 187 subscales, consisting of 16 items such as "When stress and pressure arise, I directly address 188 the causes," altogether demonstrated an internal consistency of MacDonald's Omega $\omega =$ 189 .85. Maladaptive coping was measured with the "increased alcohol and cigarette 190 consumption" subscale, containing items like "When I am under too much stress, I smoke a 191 cigarette." The items were rated from 1 (does not apply) to 4 (applies exactly). This 192 subscale had a questionable internal consistency of MacDonald's Omega $\omega = .63$. 193

194 Procedure

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6 Statistical analyses

We used R (Version 4.5.1; R Core Team, 2024) and the R-packages BayesFactor

(Version 0.9.12.4.7; Morey & Rouder, 2024), coda (Version 0.19.4.1; Plummer et al., 2006),

here (Version 1.0.1; Müller, 2020), lavaan (Version 0.6.19; Rosseel, 2012), Matrix (Version 1.7.3; Bates et al., 2024), mediation (Version 4.5.1; Tingley et al., 2012), papaja (Version 0.1.3; Aust & Barth, 2024), psych (Version 2.5.3; Revelle, 2024), pwr (Version 1.3.0;

Champely, 2020), readr (Version 2.1.5; Wickham et al., 2024), RStudio (Posit team, 2024)

and tinylabels (Version 0.2.5; Barth, 2023) for all our analyses.

Robust tests were used to account for deviation from univariate and multivariate normality of the variables of interest, i.e. the MBI subscales, NFC, self-control, emotion regulation strategies, and coping styles; Shapiro-Wilk and Mardia tests, all p > .001).

Therefore, Spearman correlations were calculated in order to address the research questions (RQ) regarding the bivariate relationships between Need for Cognition (NFC), self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal

and suppression with the burnout dimensions reduced personal efficacy (rPE; RQ1), 210 emotional exhaustion (EE; RQ2), and depersonalization (DE; RQ3). Statistical significance 211 were evaluated based on whether the 95% CI of the correlations did not include zero, which 212 with our sample size was the case for all $|r_s \geq .077|$. Effect size classification followed 213 empirically derived thresholds (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016), i.e., $r_s \geq .10$, .20, and .30 denote 214 small, medium, and large correlations. To address the research questions on possible 215 mediation effects, i.e., whether self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, as 216 well as emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression mediate the relationship 217 between NFC and the burnout dimensions rPE (RQ4), EE (RQ5), and DE (RQ6), multiple 218 mediation models were tested using lavaan with robust Maximum Likelihood estimation of 219 standard errors. 220

221 Results

Table 1 one provides the bivariate Spearman correlation coefficients between the variables of interest. In the following, the results of the correlation analyses for research questions 1-3 are reported.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 addressed possible relationships between Need for Cognition (NFC), self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as the burnout dimension reduced personal efficacy.

There was a large positive relationship between NFC and self-control (H1a), $r_s = .56$, 95% CI [.51, .61], p < .001. Concerning habitually used emotion regulation strategies (H1b), there was no relation with NFC, neither for reappraisal, $r_s = .06$, 95% CI [-.02, .14], p = .128, nor for suppression, $r_s = -.01$, 95% CI [-.08, .07], p = .877. Regarding coping

(H1c), there was a small positive relation with adaptive coping, $r_s = .15, 95\%$ CI [.07, .22], 234 p < .001, and a large negative relation with maladaptive coping, $r_s = -.30$, 95% CI [-.37, 235 -.23], p < .001. The burnout dimension reduced personal efficiency showed a small negative 236 relationship with NFC, $r_s = -.19$, 95% CI [-.26, -.11], p < .001 (H1d), a small negative 237 relationship with self-control, $r_s =$ -.18, 95% CI [-.25, -.10], p < .001 (H1e), a medium 238 negative relationship with the habitual use of the emotion regulation strategy reappraisal, 239 $r_s =$ -.29, 95% CI [-.36, -.21], p < .001 and a small positive relationship with suppression, 240 $r_s = .12, 95\%$ CI [.05, .20], p = .002 (H1f). Finally, there was a large negative relationship with adaptive coping, $r_s = -.42$, 95% CI [-.48, -.35], p < .001 and a small positive 242 relationship with maladaptive coping, $r_s = .11, 95\%$ CI [.03, .18], p = .007 (H1g).

Research Question 2

Concerning the question whether there were relationships between NFC, self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as the burnout dimension emotional exhaustion, we observed small to large intercorrelations

RQ3: Is there a relationship between NFC, self-control, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and suppression, as well as the burnout dimension depersonalization?

252 Discussion

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Spearman correlations and internal consistencies of the questionnaire scores (outliers included)

	1	2	3	4	52	9	2	8	6	10	11	12
1. MBI	.92 (.89)											
2. MBI RPE	69.	.82 (.76)										
3. MBI EE	68.	.43	.94 (.90)									
4. MBI DE	89.	.38	.41	(87.) 68.								
5. NFC	19	19	18	07	.91 (.85)							
6. SCS	16	18	14	08	.56	.79 (.72)						
7. ERQ	90	14	05	.01	.04	00.	.82 (.70)					
8. ERQ R	23	29	15	18	90.	90.	.73	.86 (.80)				
9. ERQ S	.20	.12	.13	.26	01	90	.62	02	.81 (.75)			
10. SCI	36	36	29	22	.05	01	.18	.35	16	.81 (.75)		
11. SCI A	45	42	37	28	.15	60.	.17	.36	19	.93	.85 (.79)	
12. SCI MA	.22	.11	.22	.15	30	28	.03	02	.07	.23	11	.63 (.48)
Mean	58.05	18.24	28.71	11.10	0.89	39.81	40.73	27.72	13.00	54.15	43.76	10.39
SD	13.93	4.45	8.58	4.46	16.37	7.54	8.14	6.27	5.14	6.32	6.23	2.10
Min	27.00	8.00	9.00	5.00	-36.00	21.00	10.00	00.9	4.00	34.00	23.00	7.00
Max	108.00	36.00	54.00	26.00	45.00	65.00	65.00	42.00	28.00	71.00	61.00	19.00
\mathbf{Skew}	0.42	0.59	0.20	99.0	0.55	0.42	-0.17	-0.28	0.29	-0.20	-0.12	0.26
Kurtosis	-0.07	0.78	-0.40	-0.28	-0.55	-0.21	0.72	0.46	-0.51	0.46	0.42	0.10

Table 1 continued

	1	7	3	3 4 5	ಬ	6 8 2 9	1-	∞	6	10	10 11 12	12
Note. $N=642$. The 95% CI does not include zero for $ r_s \ge .077$. The diagonal provides MacDonald's ω and	342. The	95% CI	does not	include	zero for	$ r_s \geq 0.$	77. The	diagona]	l provide	s MacDo	onald's ω	an
Cronbach's α (in brackets). MBI = Maslach Burnout Inventory; MBI RPE = Reduced Personal Efficacy	χ (in brace	kets). M	M = M	faslach B	urnout	Inventory	r; MBI F	RE = R	educed I	ersonal	Efficacy	
subscale; MBI EE $=$ Emotional Exhaustion subscale; MBI DE $=$ Depersonalisation subscale; NFC $=$ Need for	3I EE = .	Emotion	al Exhaı	ustion su	ibscale; l	MBI DE	= Depei	rsonalisat	tion subs	cale; NF	C = Nee	d f
Cognition Scale; SCS =	sale; SCS	= Self C	Sontrol 5	scale; EF	Q = Er	Self Control Scale; $ERQ = Emotion$ Regulation Questionnaire; ERQ $R = Reappraisal$	egulation	a Questic	onnaire;]	ERQ R	= Reappr	ais
subscale; ERQ S = Suppression subscale; SCI = Stress and Coping Inventory; SCI A = Adaptive coping	S = S	uppressio	n subsc	ale; SCI	= Stress	s and Cop	oing Inv	entory; S	CIA =	Adaptiv	e coping	
subscales; $SCIMA = M$	$\Im MA =$	Maladar	otive cop	aladaptive coping subscale	scale							