



EAWOP CONGRESS

The Future is Now: the changing world of work
Katowice, Poland

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

HOST CITY:  **KATOWICE**
dla odmiany

Poster P122

A mixed-method investigation of workload and job satisfaction among air traffic controllers: the key roles of work-family interface and resilience

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Research goals. The travel restrictions introduced by European countries to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus have severely affected international air traffic demand (ICAO, 2021). Italian airlines have witnessed alterations in air traffic volumes, resulting in substantial changes in workload. Nevertheless, little is known about the psychological challenges that Italian air traffic controllers (ATCOs) faced during the pandemic. This research aimed to examine whether workload would be directly and indirectly (through work-family conflict) related to job satisfaction among ATCOs and whether this relationship could be conditional on resilience levels.

Theoretical background. Workload is one of the main causes of stress among ATCOs (Triyanti et al., 2020) and has adverse effects on work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction (Jou et al., 2013). Job dissatisfaction can threaten ATCOs' productivity (Qureshi et al., 2019) and team cooperation (Kuang et al., 2020), which may increase the risk of compromising the efficiency and safety of air traffic management (Kuang et al., 2020). Thus, it is crucial to analyse how and when workload can be negatively related to job satisfaction.

Design. A total of 168 ATCOs operating throughout the Italian territory completed questionnaires that measured workload, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, resilience, and Covid-19-related exposure. Descriptive statistics and moderated mediation analyses were performed. To deepen the quantitative results, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis.

Results. When ATCOs perceived a high workload, they were more likely to develop work-family conflict. As a result, they became less satisfied with their work. Resilience buffered this relationship, suggesting that ATCOs with high and moderate resilience levels were at lower risk of experiencing job dissatisfaction related to work-family conflict under heavy workload conditions than those with low resilience. Six core themes were identified from the interviews: the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; double-edged job characteristics; job-related risks stressors; protective resources; work-life interface; and consequences.

Limitations. The cross-sectional study merely relied on self-report measurements.

Research/Practical Implications. By addressing the call for more research on the workload-job satisfaction link (Inegbedion et al., 2020), this study suggests the need for flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies to allow ATCOs better managing workload and balancing work and family demands. Additionally, given the protective role of resilience, organizations could provide ATCOs with psychological resilience training. These programs could be integrated with courses on coping skills on how to balance work and personal life (e.g., time management strategies) and on how to set boundaries between these two domains (e.g., cognitive-emotional segmentation strategies).

Relevance to the Congress Theme. This study deepens the topic of wellbeing by revealing how and when workload is related to job satisfaction among ATCOs.