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Burnout as a Crisis of Meaning in Helping Professions: Value Incongruence, Moral Distress, and Perceived Control in an Online Survey

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Abstract
Burnout in helping professions is commonly framed as a demand-driven exhaustion syndrome. This study advances a meaning-centered and moral-structural account, proposing that burnout co-occurs with a crisis of meaning when institutional constraints undermine professional values and perceived agency. Using a cross-sectional online survey recruited via Reddit (N = 72), we assessed burnout (MBI-GS-aligned), meaning in life, work meaningfulness, crisis of meaning, perceived control/self-efficacy, value incongruence/institutional pressure, and moral distress. Descriptively, institutional pressure and value contradiction were high, work meaningfulness was comparatively low, and crisis of meaning was elevated. Correlational analyses showed a strong positive association between burnout and crisis of meaning (r = .78), and between burnout and value incongruence (r = .69), while perceived control correlated negatively with burnout (r = −.64). Crisis of meaning was higher in social work/pedagogy than in nursing/medicine, and burnout peaked in mid-career (5–10 years). The findings support conceptualizing burnout in helping professions as intertwined with meaning disruption under constraint, with implications that extend beyond individual coping toward organizational and ethical interventions.

Keywords: Burnout; crisis of meaning; moral distress; value incongruence; perceived control; self-efficacy; helping professions; social work; online survey; Reddit recruitment.

Introduction

Burnout is widely discussed as a work-related condition of chronic strain, yet its dominant framing as *primarily* an exhaustion syndrome risks analytical underreach in human service settings where professional practice is structurally value-laden and ethically constrained. In ICD-11, the WHO conceptualizes burn-out as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, characterized by exhaustion, mental distance/cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019). While occupational stress models—most prominently the Job Demands–Resources framework and resource-loss accounts—explain burnout via imbalances between demands and resources and the dynamics of loss spirals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989), they can remain theoretically "thin" where distress is triggered less by quantity of work than by persistent constraints on good work.

In social work and adjacent helping professions, institutional steering (time pressure, documentation regimes, throughput logics) may collide with professional values, producing value incongruence and experiences akin to moral distress—i.e., situations in which practitioners judge a course of action as ethically required yet perceive organizational constraints as preventing its enactment (Kristof, 1996; Morley et al., 2017).

Meaning-of-work research underscores that meaningfulness is not epiphenomenal but constitutive for well-being and motivation, suggesting that sustained value–practice discrepancies may erode meaning and thereby intensify burnout dynamics (Rosso et al., 2010).

Against this background, the present study examines burnout through a meaning-centered and professions-ethical lens using a cross-sectional survey (*n* = 72; Likert 1–5) across social work/pedagogy, nursing/medicine, and psychotherapy/counseling. The instrument battery assesses burnout, meaning/meaning crisis, self-efficacy and perceived control, as well as institutional pressure, value incongruence, and moral distress.

Research questions guide the analysis

RQ1: To what extent is burnout associated with meaning crisis in helping professionals?
RQ2: How are value incongruence and institutional pressure related to burnout and meaning crisis?
RQ3: Does moral distress function as a plausible mechanism linking institutional constraints to meaning erosion and burnout symptomatology?
RQ4: Is perceived control/self-efficacy negatively associated with burnout, consistent with resource-buffer assumptions?

The paper proceeds by integrating occupational stress theory with meaning-of-work, person–organization fit, and moral distress research, then detailing method, results, and implications for organizational design and professional support in human service contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualizes burnout in helping professions as the end point of a coupled dynamic: **energetic depletion** under chronic demands and **normative–existential** erosion when professionals experience sustained constraints on *doing good work*. The latter is expected to be especially salient in psychosocial fields where professional identity is strongly tied to ethical commitments and relational responsibility.

Burnout as a Relational Syndrome

In the Maslach tradition, burnout is not a private weakness but a *work-related syndrome*—classically comprising exhaustion, cynicism/mental distancing, and reduced professional efficacy—emerging from a chronic misfit between the person and the job (Maslach et al., 2001). Read this way, burnout is best explained by identifying the persistent configurations of work that (a) drain energy and (b) make disengagement psychologically functional as a defensive response.

JD-R: Demands, Resources, and Disengagement

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model offers a parsimonious architecture for specifying these configurations. Job demands become stressors when they require sustained effort with attendant costs; job resources facilitate goal attainment, reduce demand-related costs, and foster growth and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The model's dual-process logic is decisive here: high demands primarily predict **exhaustion**, whereas insufficient resources are centrally implicated in **disengagement/cynicism**. In helping professions, "resources" are not only material (time, staffing) but also *structural agency* (autonomy, discretion, voice), because without such resources, professionals cannot translate expertise and values into action.

COR: Why Chronic Strain Accelerates

Conservation of Resources theory explains why burnout often behaves less like a linear reaction and more like a *self-amplifying* spiral. Stress arises when resources are threatened or lost, or when investment fails to yield returns; resource loss is disproportionately impactful and can trigger loss spirals that reduce subsequent coping capacity (Hobfoll, 1989). This provides a bridge to meaning and morality: when professionals repeatedly invest effort to deliver ethically sound care but encounter institutional blockage, they may lose not only energy but also higher-order resources confidence, professional purpose, and perceived integrity which in turn intensify vulnerability to subsequent demands.

Person–organization fit: value incongruence as structural stressor

Person–organization fit theory frames misfit as incompatibility between individuals and organizations, particularly when values and supplied/needed attributes do not align (Kristof, 1996: 4). In social work–adjacent fields, this misfit often takes the form of **value incongruence**: organizational imperatives (throughput, documentation, risk governance) contradict professional norms (dignity, individualized support, relational accountability). Maslach and Leiter explicitly position *values mismatch* as one of the core areas of worklife that generate burnout risk, because it undermines the legitimacy of effort and makes cynicism an intelligible coping stance (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). In this framework, value incongruence is not an "attitude" variable; it is a structural antecedent that can transform ordinary demands into identity-threatening experiences.

Moral Distress: constrained moral agency and cumulative residue

Moral distress specifies the mechanism by which value incongruence becomes psychologically injurious. A canonical formulation locates moral distress in situations where a practitioner makes a moral judgement yet feels unable to act accordingly due to constraints, with distress causally tied to the moral event (Morley et al., 2017). This is analytically important because it distinguishes moral distress from generic stress: what harms is not only "too much work," but the experience of *blocked moral agency*. Moreover, moral distress literature emphasizes accumulation. The "moral residue" and "crescendo effect" describe how repeated morally distressing encounters leave lingering residue that can intensify over time (Moral Distress Green Paper, 2018). This cumulative logic aligns closely with COR loss spirals: constraint-mediated moral compromise can progressively deplete the resources that stabilize professional identity, making disengagement and exhaustion increasingly likely. In social work–specific discussions, moral distress is described as arising when practitioners are prevented from acting on what they judge as right for clients because of institutional policies and constraints, often confronting them with the options of compliance, resistance, or exit (Openshaw, 2011; Jaskela et al., 2018).

Meaning of work and crisis of meaning: not merely "low meaningfulness"

Meaning-of-work research underscores that meaning is produced through interpretations of work experiences and through normative-cultural systems that ascribe value to work, making it both subjective and structurally conditioned (Rosso et al., 2010). This is decisive for helping professions: meaning is tightly tied to being able to realize professional values in practice. When institutional arrangements repeatedly block this realization, meaning is not simply reduced—it can fracture. Conceptually, the present study distinguishes **meaningfulness** from **crisis of meaning**. Schnell argues that meaningfulness and crisis of meaning are better modeled as two distinct dimensions rather than opposite poles of one continuum; crisis of meaning captures a qualitatively negative existential state with stronger links to ill-being than low meaningfulness alone (Schnell, 2009). This distinction supports the central proposition: burnout in the present field context may be better understood when the outcome is related

not only to diminished positive meaning but to an emergent meaning crisis—a disruption in coherence, purpose, and moral justification of work.

Methodology
Research Design
The study used a cross-sectional, web-based survey design to examine associations between burnout, crisis of meaning, perceived institutional pressure, value incongruence, moral distress, and agency-related resources. A correlational design is appropriate here because the research questions focus on the strength and direction of relationships among theoretically connected constructs rather than on causal identification. The analytic emphasis was placed on effect sizes and interpretability, in line with APA reporting expectations for quantitative psychological research (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Participants and Sample Characteristics
The final sample comprised N = 72 respondents. Participants represented three occupational fields: social work/pedagogy, nursing/medicine, and psychotherapy/counseling. The sample's demographic and occupational profile is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample characteristics (N = 72)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	58	80.6
	Male	13	18.1
	Diverse / no answer	1	1.4
Age	Mean (years)	38.5	-
Occupational field	Social work / pedagogy	41	56.9
	Nursing / medicine	17	23.6
	Psychotherapy / counseling	14	19.4
Professional experience	< 5 years	18	25.0
	5–10 years	30	41.7
	> 10 years	24	33.3
Employment	Full time	55	76.4
	Part time	17	23.6

Survey Format and Response Scale
All measures used a five-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), consistent with the classic Likert scaling logic for attitudinal and evaluative statements (Likert, 1932). Scale scores were computed as mean values across items within each construct (and within subscales where specified). The use of parametric statistics with aggregated Likert-type scale scores follows widely cited methodological arguments that such analyses are typically robust and defensible under common research conditions, especially when scale scores are formed by combining multiple items (Carifio & Perla, 2008; Norman, 2010).

Measures and Operationalization
Burnout
Burnout was operationalized with an MBI-GS-aligned structure comprising emotional exhaustion, cynicism/mental distancing, and reduced professional efficacy. Subscale means

Recruitment and Data Collection via Reddit
Recruitment and data collection were conducted entirely online via Reddit. Study invitations were posted in relevant sub communities where practitioners and trainees in psychosocial and helping professions are likely to be reachable. This approach leverages the platform's affordances for targeted access to dispersed professional groups, while also implying systematic self-selection and community-specific biases that must be considered when interpreting generalizability (Shatz, 2017). Participation was voluntary and anonymous; respondents accessed the survey through a link included in the Reddit post and completed the questionnaire without collecting direct identifiers. Because online platform contexts can shape participants' expectations of privacy and perceived risk, particular attention was paid to transparency of purpose and to minimizing the collection of potentially identifying information (Fiesler et al., 2024).

were computed and a total burnout index was derived as the mean across subscales. This operationalization corresponds to the dominant three-component conceptualization of burnout as a work-related syndrome and aligns with established measurement practice for the MBI tradition (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 1996).

Meaning in life, meaning at work, and crisis of meaning
Meaning was measured through three components: meaning in life, work as meaningful, and crisis of meaning, each computed as a subscale mean. The separation of "work as meaningful" from "crisis of meaning" is theoretically important because crisis of meaning is not adequately described as merely low meaningfulness; it denotes a qualitatively negative existential state that can relate differently and often more strongly to ill-being (Schnell, 2009). This distinction is central to the study's framework, which expects burnout to track not only diminished positive meaning but also intensified meaning disruption.

Self-efficacy and perceived control

Agency-related resources were assessed via an adapted self-efficacy approach differentiating coping/mastery beliefs and perceived control. Subscale means were computed and combined into a total index. The choice is grounded in the self-efficacy tradition that treats efficacy beliefs as determinants of persistence and coping under adversity (Bandura, 1977) and corresponds to the established measurement logic of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Where items were negatively phrased, scoring was oriented so that higher values reflected higher perceived control before aggregation.

Value incongruence and institutional pressure

To capture structural antecedents emphasized in the theoretical model, the survey included focused items assessing perceived value incongruence and institutional pressure. These items addressed perceived contradictions between institutional demands and professional values, time and documentation pressure, and perceived resource scarcity. The construct logic follows person–organization fit accounts in which value compatibility is a key dimension of fit and misfit (Kristof, 1996) and aligns with organizational burnout perspectives that treat values mismatch as a core area of worklife associated with burnout risk (Maslach & Leiter, 1999).

Moral Distress

Moral distress was operationalized using items capturing perceived powerlessness to enact what is judged as ethically right due to institutional constraints and a morally injurious component reflecting doubt and psychological impact associated with workplace decisions. This operationalization reflects conceptual work defining moral distress as constraint-mediated inability to act on moral judgement with distress causally linked to the moral event (Morley et al., 2017) and is compatible with cumulative perspectives emphasizing lingering moral residue under repeated exposure (Moral Distress Green Paper, 2018).

Procedure and Data Handling

After accessing the survey link from Reddit, respondents completed demographic and work-related questions followed by the psychometric and study-specific items. The questionnaire was designed to reduce unnecessary burden and to avoid collecting identifiable case details that might increase privacy risk in a platform-recruited sample. Data were exported for statistical analysis in a single dataset. Composite scores were calculated as scale means, with higher values indicating higher levels of the construct unless otherwise specified. For inferential analyses, only complete cases for the variables involved in each test were used, a pragmatic approach commonly applied in exploratory survey studies when missingness is limited and not structurally informative; the implications of this decision are considered in the limitations discussion.

Results

Descriptive profile of burnout, meaning, agency, and institutional–moral strain

Across the three burnout components, emotional exhaustion showed the highest mean (M = 3.98, SD = 0.92), followed by cynicism/mental distancing (M = 3.15, SD = 0.85) and reduced professional efficacy (M = 2.88, SD = 0.71). The total burnout score was in the upper mid-range of the response scale (M = 3.34, SD = 0.76).

The meaning-related pattern was asymmetrical: meaning in life was moderately high (M = 3.45, SD = 0.81), but work was rated comparatively low as a source of meaning (M = 2.89, SD = 0.95), while crisis of meaning was elevated (M = 3.72, SD = 0.77). In parallel, agency-related resources showed a differentiation between coping and control: coping/mastery was relatively high (M = 3.61, SD = 0.65), whereas perceived control was markedly lower (M = 2.78, SD = 0.88), with an overall self-efficacy mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.71).

Institutional and moral strain indicators clustered at the high end of the scale. Value contradiction reached M = 4.11 (SD = 0.75), time and documentation pressure M = 4.35 (SD = 0.68), and perceived resource scarcity M = 3.91 (SD = 0.83). Moral distress indicators were similarly elevated, with powerlessness M = 4.05 (SD = 0.79) and moral injury-like doubt M = 3.55 (SD = 0.84).

Table 2 summarizes the core scale descriptives used in the subsequent association and group-difference analyses.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for key study variables

Construct (scale/subscale)	M	SD
Burnout: emotional exhaustion	3.98	0.92
Burnout: cynicism/mental distancing	3.15	0.85
Burnout: reduced professional efficacy	2.88	0.71
Burnout total	3.34	0.76
Meaning in life	3.45	0.81
Work as meaningful	2.89	0.95
Crisis of meaning	3.72	0.77
Self-efficacy: coping/mastery	3.61	0.65
Self-efficacy: perceived control	2.78	0.88
Value contradiction	4.11	0.75
Time/documentation pressure	4.35	0.68
Resource scarcity	3.91	0.83
Moral distress: powerlessness	4.05	0.79
Moral distress: moral injury-like doubt	3.55	0.84

Associations between burnout, meaning crisis, value incongruence, and control

The correlation analyses were aligned with the research questions and focused on the theoretically central links. Burnout was strongly and positively associated with crisis of meaning (r = .78, p < .001), indicating that higher burnout co-occurred with markedly higher meaning disruption. Burnout was also strongly related to value incongruence (r = .69, p < .001), consistent with the proposition that perceived contradiction between institutional demands and professional values covaries with burnout severity.

Protective patterns appeared in the expected direction. Work as meaningful correlated negatively with burnout (r = −.51, p < .01), suggesting that perceiving one's work as meaning-conferring was associated with lower burnout. Similarly, perceived control (as a self-efficacy facet) showed a strong negative association with burnout (r = −.64, p < .001), indicating that diminished perceived control co-occurred with higher burnout levels.

Finally, value incongruence correlated positively with crisis of meaning (r = .59, p < .001), supporting the theoretical link that sustained value conflict is accompanied by meaning erosion. Table 3 summarizes these hypothesis-relevant correlations.

Table 3: Key correlations among study variables

Association	r	p
Burnout total and crisis of meaning	0.78	< .001
Burnout total and value incongruence	0.69	< .001
Burnout total and work as meaningful	−0.51	< .01
Burnout total and perceived control	−0.64	< .001
Value incongruence and crisis of meaning	0.59	< .001

Group differences: professional experience and occupational field

To contextualize the correlational pattern, group comparisons examined whether burnout varied across professional experience groups and whether crisis of meaning differed between social work/pedagogy and nursing/medicine. Burnout differed significantly by experience, F(2, 69) = 5.61, p = .005. Mean burnout was lowest among respondents with less than five years of experience (M = 2.95, SD = 0.68), peaked in the 5–10 year group (M = 3.55, SD = 0.72), and was somewhat lower again in the group with more than ten years (M = 3.30, SD = 0.81). Crisis of meaning differed by occupational field: social work/pedagogy reported higher crisis of meaning (M = 3.88, SD = 0.71) than nursing/medicine (M = 3.31, SD = 0.85), with the field contrast reaching statistical significance (p = .028). Table 4 reports these comparisons in compact form.

Table 4: Group comparisons for burnout and crisis of meaning

Comparison	Group	M	SD	Test
Burnout total by experience	< 5 years	2.95	0.68	F(2, 69) = 5.61, p = .005
	5–10 years	3.55	0.72	
	> 10 years	3.30	0.81	
Crisis of meaning by field	Social work/pedagogy (n = 41)	3.88	0.71	p = .028
	Nursing/medicine (n = 17)	3.31	0.85	

Summary of results in relation to the research questions

Taken together, the results indicate that burnout co-occurs most strongly with crisis of meaning and is also closely linked to value incongruence, while perceived control and work-related meaningfulness show inverse associations with burnout. The group comparisons add a contextual layer: burnout appears highest in mid-career respondents (5–10 years), and crisis of meaning is more pronounced in social work/pedagogy than in nursing/medicine within the present sample.

Discussion
Interpreting the central pattern: burnout co-occurs with crisis of meaning

The most consequential result is the very strong association between burnout and crisis of meaning (r = .78, p < .001). Within the burnout literature, exhaustion and cynical distancing are often understood as responses to chronically unresolved job strain and person–job misfit (Maslach et al., 2001). The present pattern suggests that, in this sample of helping professionals, the burnout experience is tightly entangled with an existential-evaluative disruption: work-related strain is not confined to depleted energy, but coincides with a pronounced weakening of perceived purpose and coherence. This aligns with theoretical accounts that treat meaning in work as a central component of well-being and motivational regulation, rather than as a peripheral "nice-to-have" variable (Rosso et al., 2010). Importantly, the meaning signal in these data is not merely low work meaningfulness, but elevated crisis of meaning (M = 3.72), while work meaningfulness is comparatively low (M = 2.89). This matters conceptually because crisis of meaning has been argued to represent a qualitatively negative state that cannot be reduced to the absence of meaning, and is expected to show stronger relations to ill-being than meaningfulness alone (Schnell, 2009). Interpreted through this lens, the results support a reading of burnout in helping professions as, at least partly, a meaning-disruptive condition: the motivational "why" of professional effort appears destabilized alongside the symptomatic profile captured by burnout measures.

Value incongruence as a structural pathway into meaning erosion and burnout

The second core finding is the strong association between burnout and value incongruence (r = .69, p < .001), and the substantial link between value incongruence and crisis

of meaning (r = .59, p < .001). The descriptive context is consistent with this: indicators of institutional pressure and value contradiction are high, particularly time and documentation pressure (M = 4.35) and value contradiction (M = 4.11). In person–organization fit theory, fit is conceptualized as compatibility between individuals and organizations, with value congruence occupying a central place (Kristof, 1996). In the organizational burnout tradition, values mismatch is similarly treated as a critical domain of worklife that contributes to burnout risk by undermining the legitimacy and motivational coherence of one's role (Maslach & Leiter, 1999).

The empirical pattern therefore supports a structurally oriented interpretation: when professionals experience institutional requirements as conflicting with core professional values, strain may be reframed from "high workload" into "ethically compromised work." This reframing is theoretically consequential because it changes the psychological function of distancing. In classic burnout theory, cynicism can be understood as a defensive adaptation that reduces emotional exposure and preserves functioning when demands feel chronic and uncontrollable (Maslach et al., 2001). Under value incongruence, distancing may also protect the self from moral dissonance, thereby linking organizational conditions to meaning crisis and disengagement through a mechanism beyond demand intensity alone.

Moral distress as the mechanism that turns pressure into ethical strain

The high levels of moral distress indicators (powerlessness M = 4.05; morally injurious doubt M = 3.55) are theoretically consistent with accounts that define moral distress as constraint-mediated inability to act on one's moral judgement, with distress causally tied to the moral event (Morley et al., 2017). In such a framing, institutional pressure is not simply an external stressor but a constraint structure that produces ethically salient harm: professionals may repeatedly perceive what would be right for clients yet experience organizational rules, documentation regimes, or resource scarcity as blocking action. This resonates with social-work-focused discussions of moral distress in which institutional constraints and policy conflicts force practitioners into compromised decisions, sometimes leaving "exit" as the perceived route to preserving integrity (Openshaw, 2011; Jaskela et al., 2018). From a cumulative perspective, the moral residue/crescendo idea suggests that repeated morally distressing experiences can build residue and intensify over time (Moral Distress Green Paper, 2018). While the present design cannot test temporal accumulation directly, it provides a plausible interpretive bridge to the mid-career pattern observed here (Section 5.5): chronic exposure to constraint-mediated moral compromise may progressively undermine meaning and contribute to burnout escalation. The strong co-occurrence of crisis of meaning with burnout, together with high institutional and moral strain descriptives, makes this pathway theoretically coherent in a way that a pure overload account would struggle to explain.

Control and agency as protective resources

Two results converge on the relevance of agency-related resources. First, perceived control is comparatively low (M = 2.78) despite relatively higher coping/mastery (M = 3.61). Second, perceived control correlates strongly and negatively with burnout (r = −.64, p < .001). This pattern is consistent with the claim that what becomes toxic in institutionalized helping work is not only "high demand," but "high demand under low discretion," where perceived inability to influence outcomes amplifies stress and accelerates disengagement. This aligns with the JD-R emphasis on resources that enable goal attainment and reduce costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and with the broader self-efficacy tradition that treats efficacy beliefs as determinants of coping and persistence under adversity (Bandura, 1977).

Organizational evidence in social work likewise supports the salience of autonomy: role stress predicts burnout, and autonomy conditions this relationship, implying that discretion is not a peripheral "quality of life" factor but a variable shaping burnout production (Kim & Stoner, 2008). In the present findings, the control-burnout association can be read as consistent with a mechanism in which institutional constraints reduce perceived control; reduced control increases susceptibility to exhaustion and cynicism; and this dynamic is intensified when value incongruence and moral distress erode meaning.

Contextualizing the group patterns: mid-career vulnerability and field differences

The experience-based ANOVA shows that burnout peaks in the 5–10 year group (M = 3.55) relative to <5 years (M = 2.95) and >10 years (M = 3.30). A theoretically plausible interpretation is that early-career professionals may still experience relatively higher novelty and motivational reserves, while mid-career professionals often face increased caseload responsibility and intensified exposure to institutional constraint, making value conflicts more frequent and personally salient. In a resource-oriented interpretation, this period may also mark a transition where resource investment is high but perceived returns in terms of client impact and professional integrity are increasingly uncertain, a configuration COR theory identifies as stress-relevant (Hobfoll, 1989). Over longer tenures, professionals who remain may have developed stronger coping repertoires, shifted roles, or adapted expectations, which could partially reduce peak strain, although such explanations remain speculative without longitudinal data. The field comparison indicates higher crisis of meaning in social work/pedagogy than in nursing/medicine (p = .028). One interpretation is that social work practice is structurally saturated with value conflicts tied to the "dual mandate" of care and control, discretionary judgements under scarce resources, and frequent encounters with institutional gatekeeping—conditions that intensify the likelihood that organizational constraints will be experienced not only as stressors but as threats to professional purpose. This reading coheres with the person–organization fit emphasis on values compatibility (Kristof, 1996) and with moral distress accounts that locate distress in blocked moral

action (Morley et al., 2017). At the same time, the mixed occupational composition and unequal subgroup sizes require caution: field differences may also reflect recruitment patterns, community-specific Reddit participation, and unmeasured contextual variables.

Practical implications: beyond individual coping toward organizational ethics and design

The results support a practical conclusion that differs from individualizing "self-care" narratives. If burnout co-occurs strongly with crisis of meaning and is closely linked to value incongruence, then interventions confined to individual stress management risk treating symptoms while leaving generative mechanisms intact. In JD-R terms, reducing demands without increasing meaningful resources (autonomy, participation, supportive supervision, ethical reflection spaces) may be insufficient when the primary driver is perceived illegitimacy of constraints and ethical compromise (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

At the organizational level, priorities follow directly from the high institutional-pressure descriptives and their theoretical meaning: workload management must be coupled with reductions in documentation burden where possible, the creation of structured discretion in case work, and explicit infrastructures for ethics and value deliberation that allow professionals to articulate and resolve moral conflicts before they accumulate into residue. Moral distress frameworks, including the residue/crescendo concept, imply that prevention is not merely about reducing exposure but about providing legitimate channels for addressing constraints, voicing concerns, and restoring moral agency (Moral Distress Green Paper, 2018; Morley et al., 2017). At the individual-professional level, meaning-centered supervision, reflective practice, and interventions that strengthen perceived control and agency are theoretically aligned with the observed negative association between control and burnout and with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). However, the logic of the findings suggests that individual-level strategies are most defensible when embedded in organizational reforms that reduce constraint-induced moral compromise.

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