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# **The Mediating Role of Work Engagement and Burnout in the Relationship between Job Characteristics and Psychological Distress among Lawyers**

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## **Abstract**

Research to date has found that lawyers are disproportionately affected by psychological distress when compared to the general population and other occupations. In this study, the Job Demands-Resources Model was used to examine which job characteristics are associated with psychological distress among lawyers, and to confirm the mediating roles of burnout and work engagement. Graduates, solicitors and partners (N = 94) from a large New Zealand law firm completed a survey on job characteristics, burnout (work-related exhaustion), work engagement, and psychological distress. Regression analyses showed that both job demands and job resources were important influences for burnout, with work-family conflict, low role clarity, and work-role fit identified as predictors. Job resources were more influential for work engagement, with work-role fit and positive challenge identified as predictors, along with the position level of the lawyer. The dual impact of work-role fit on burnout and work engagement was an unexpected finding, and highlights the potential benefit of this variable for mental health. This study also found support for the strain and motivational pathways of the Job Demands-Resources Model. Work engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and psychological distress, and burnout mediated the relationship between job demands and psychological distress. Both burnout and work engagement were significant predictors of psychological distress. This study provides support for a dual focus on reducing job demands related to burnout, and increasing the availability of job resources that influence work engagement, to reduce psychological distress among lawyers.

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