

## Quiet Quitting in Airport Ground Handling: The Role of General Work Stress and Work-Family Conflict

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### Abstract

Quiet quitting has become a critical concern in airport ground handling, where demanding working conditions and irregular schedules can erode employees' motivation. This study explores how general work stress is linked to quiet quitting tendencies among A-category ground handling personnel and examines whether work-family conflict explains this relationship. The conceptual model is informed by Conservation of Resources theory, the Job Demands-Resources model, and Role theory, which together suggest that persistent stress drains personal resources, disrupts work-family balance, and encourages psychological withdrawal from work. Data were gathered via an online questionnaire from 398 employees working for A-category ground handling companies operating at airports. Validated Turkish measures were used to assess general work stress, work-family conflict, and quiet quitting. Structural equation modelling and mediation analysis showed that general work stress is positively associated with both work-family conflict and quiet quitting. When work-family conflict is incorporated into the model, the direct association between general work stress and quiet quitting becomes non-significant, indicating a fully mediating effect. These findings underscore the importance of managing both stressors and work-family boundaries in order to curb quiet quitting in safety-critical airport ground handling operations.

**Keywords:** *General Work Stress, Work-Family Conflict, Quiet Quitting, Airport Ground Handling.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary working life, characterized by intense competition, digitalization, and rapid operational change, human resources are a central determinant of sustainable performance. In labor-intensive, 24/7 service settings, employees' commitment and discretionary effort shape service quality, safety culture, and operational continuity. Against this backdrop, the notion of quiet quitting (QQ) describes a pattern of covert withdrawal in which employees remain in their jobs but restrict their effort to the minimum required by their role and disengage from extra-role behaviors (Kim & Sohn, 2024; Serenko, 2024). Evidence from Türkiye suggests that QQ is more likely under conditions of high work stress, work-life imbalance, perceived injustice, and low organizational support and that it is associated with reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Çelik & Kaya, 2025; Deniz, 2024; Gün, 2024; Yılmaz, 2024). QQ, therefore, appears less a simple lack of motivation and more a structured reaction to chronic stressors.

General work stress (GWS) denotes a broad job-related stress construct that arises when employees perceive demands and uncertainties as a persistent source of cognitive, emotional, and physiological strain (De Bruin, 2006; Teleş, 2021). Higher levels of GWS are linked to burnout, psychological complaints, absenteeism, and turnover intentions, alongside lower job and life satisfaction (De Bruin, 2006; Lambert et al., 2018). In airport ground handling operations, heavy workload, intense time pressure, role ambiguity, and limited support frequently coexist, suggesting that GWS may be a key risk factor for QQ and may prompt employees to adopt a “doing the minimum” strategy rather than exiting the organization.

Following Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-family conflict (WFC) can be understood as a type of role conflict where expectations from work and family clash, so that investing time and energy in one role makes it harder to meet the requirements of the other. Meta-analytic findings indicate that higher WFC is linked to lower job and life satisfaction and diminished psychological well-being, as well as increased work stress, burnout, and intentions to leave (Amstad et al., 2011). In aviation, irregular shifts, unpredictable working hours, and long rotations increase WFC among pilots, cabin crew, and ground handling staff and undermine job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Adiller, 2011; Koçak et al., 2019; Zorlu & Gündüz, 2024). These findings suggest that heightened work stress and WFC tend to co-occur and jointly weaken employees' attachment to work, thereby fueling QQ tendencies.

The relationships examined in this study are interpreted through three lenses: Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and Role theory. COR theory proposes that people are motivated to obtain and safeguard key resources such as time, energy, and psychological strength and that the threat or depletion of these resources is a central mechanism of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). The JD-R model suggests that when job demands are high and resources are insufficient, strain and burnout increase, whereas adequate resources promote motivation and

engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). Role theory underlines that incompatible expectations between work and family domains generate inter-role conflict and prompt disengagement from one of these roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Viewed together, these frameworks imply that QQ can be interpreted as a resource-protection tactic: under escalating demands and role conflicts, employees may deliberately restrict their effort to the minimum required level to slow further resource loss.

Although recent studies have examined QQ alongside work stress, work-life imbalance, and burnout, empirical models that explicitly test the mediating role of WFC remain scarce, particularly in high-risk, shift-based sectors such as aviation. Prior research indicates that elevated work stress is linked to stronger QQ tendencies, whereas higher job satisfaction is associated with lower QQ (Ardıç & Erişen, 2025; Zhong et al., 2023). However, there is little research that simultaneously considers GWS, WFC, and QQ in a single structural framework among A-category airport ground handling personnel.

Ground handling companies are critical to operational continuity in aviation and are directly exposed to heavy and fluctuating workloads, shift work, frequently updated safety procedures, and digitalization-driven process changes. Examining GWS, WFC, and QQ among A-category ground handling staff, therefore, constitutes the focal point of this research. The study aims to investigate the effect of GWS on QQ among airport ground handling personnel and the mediating role of WFC in this relationship. Specifically, it tests an integrative structural model linking GWS, WFC, and QQ within the COR and JD-R frameworks and provides empirical and practical implications for managing work stress and work-family boundaries in safety-critical airport ground handling operations.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

Grounded in COR theory, the JD-R model, and Role theory, this study proposes a framework explaining how GWS translates into QQ through WFC among A-category airport ground handling personnel. COR argues that chronic exposure to high job demands threatens or depletes valued resources such as time, energy, and psychological resilience, prompting protective strategies (Hobfoll, 1989). The JD-R model complements this view by emphasizing that the combination of high demands and insufficient resources leads to burnout, strain, and withdrawal outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2001). Role theory conceptualizes WFC as inter-role tension arising from incompatible expectations across work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Within this integrated framework, GWS is expected to increase WFC by intensifying resource depletion and role incompatibilities, while sustained conflict is assumed to foster QQ as a low-cost, covert withdrawal strategy.

### **2.1. General Work Stress and Work-Family Conflict**

GWS refers to a chronic state of strain that arises when employees are exposed to persistent job demands such as workload, time pressure, role ambiguity, and emotional labor that exceed their coping resources (De Bruin, 2006; Teleş, 2021). This strain rarely remains confined to the workplace; it tends to spill over into private and family life, creating tensions between employees' work and family roles.

From a Role theory perspective, WFC reflects inter-role tension: time-, strain- or behavior-based demands from work and family become incompatible, and employees struggle to perform both roles satisfactorily (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Allen et al., 2000). In this sense, GWS can be regarded as a proximal antecedent of WFC.

COR theory offers a central explanatory basis for this relationship. Individuals are motivated to preserve and build resources such as time, energy, psychological resilience, and social support. Stress arises when these resources are threatened or depleted (Hobfoll, 1989). As job demands escalate, employees devote a greater portion of their finite resources to the work domain, leaving fewer resources for family life and heightening the likelihood of WFC (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Li et al., 2022). The JD-R model similarly asserts that elevated job demands combined with insufficient resources foster burnout and psychological strain, which manifest as time- and strain-based WFC (Choi, 2024; Demerouti et al., 2001).

Empirical findings support these theoretical premises: job demands, role conflict, and role ambiguity are robust predictors of WFC, and work environments characterized by high stress and emotional load intensify the spillover of strain into the family sphere (Amstad et al., 2011; Byron, 2005; Jerg-Bretzke et al., 2020; Kalliath et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2022; Poms et al., 2016). In aviation and airport operations, irregular and long working hours, night shifts, high responsibility levels, and safety-critical tasks further amplify these dynamics. Studies on Turkish pilots and aviation personnel show that such conditions increase perceived work stress and WFC and reduce job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Adiller, 2011; Koçak et al., 2019; Zorlu & Gündüz, 2024). In A-category ground handling, excessive workload, time pressure, strict safety procedures, and shift work constrain employees' ability to maintain work-family balance. Viewed through COR theory and JD-R model, these demands can be expected to deplete resources, generate strain spillover from work to family, and elevate WFC. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is:

H<sub>1</sub>: General work stress has a statistically significant and positive effect on work-family conflict.

## **2.2. Work-Family Conflict and Quiet Quitting**

WFC is generally understood as chronic strain that emerges when the expectations and demands of work and family collide, such that investment in one role makes it difficult to fulfil obligations in the other (Chang et al., 2017; Orellana et al., 2023). As incompatibilities accumulate, individuals may feel they are continuously falling short in one or both domains, which amplifies stress and undermines their sense of effectiveness. Elevated WFC is linked to lower job and life satisfaction, weaker organizational commitment, and poorer psychological well-being, including higher emotional exhaustion and distress (Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011).

QQ, in this context, can be conceptualized as a covert withdrawal behavior in which employees remain formally in their jobs but limit themselves to the formal requirements of their role and reduce

extra-role behaviors and discretionary contributions (Kim & Sohn, 2024; Lu et al., 2023; Serenko, 2024). From a COR perspective, WFC is a salient contextual stressor that drains emotional and cognitive resources in both domains, thereby increasing the attractiveness of QQ as a resource-conservation strategy (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989). From a Social Exchange and psychological contract perspective, chronic WFC may also be perceived as organizational underinvestment in employees' non-work roles, eliciting QQ as a form of negative reciprocity (Arar et al., 2023; Serenko, 2024).

Empirical work, often operationalized via work-life imbalance, shows that imbalance and burnout heighten QQ tendencies, while job satisfaction partially buffers this effect (Paranamana & Kaluarachchige, 2025; Prentice et al., 2025; Priya et al., 2025). Studies that explicitly examine WFC and QQ report positive associations between both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and QQ (Azzam et al., 2026). In airport ground handling, irregular shifts, unpredictable working hours, intense seasonal workload, and safety-critical responsibilities make it particularly difficult to sustain work-family balance. Under such conditions, increases in WFC are likely to weaken emotional attachment to work and strengthen QQ tendencies. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is:

H<sub>2</sub>: Work-family conflict has a statistically significant and positive effect on quiet quitting.

### **2.3. General Work Stress and Quiet Quitting**

GWS refers to a chronic state of strain that emerges when high job demands such as workload, time pressure, role ambiguity, and emotional labor erode individuals' coping resources (De Bruin, 2006; Siu & Cooper, 1998). Earlier stress research shows that elevated organizational stress undermines job satisfaction and psychological health and strengthens turnover intentions and withdrawal tendencies (Siu & Cooper, 1998). QQ may represent a subtle, low-visibility manifestation of this withdrawal process in which employees maintain employment but disengage from extra-role contributions.

Within COR theory, high job demands trigger resource depletion, reduce opportunities for recovery, and may initiate a "resource loss spiral" (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989). As this spiral deepens, employees adopt defensive strategies to prevent further loss. QQ can thus be interpreted as a resource-protection strategy whereby employees confine themselves to a minimum in-role performance to shield remaining resources (Arar et al., 2023; Serenko, 2024). The JD-R model similarly suggests that high demands combined with low resources foster burnout and cynicism, which are linked to reduced performance, higher absenteeism, and diverse forms of withdrawal behavior, including QQ (Choi, 2024; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kim & Sohn, 2024).

Empirical findings across sectors support the association between work stress and QQ or related outcomes. In healthcare and service settings, professional stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction significantly heighten QQ tendencies; as stress and burnout intensify, emotional attachment to work declines and employees restrict their efforts to the bare minimum (Galanis et al., 2024; Hamouche et al.,

2023; Karadaş & Çevik, 2025; Toska et al., 2025). Research on younger employees further indicates that work stress, perceived injustice, and poor work-life balance increase QQ, while job satisfaction and psychological contract perceptions partially mediate these relationships (Zhong et al., 2023). Evidence from Türkiye reveals that GWS is positively associated with QQ and turnover intention, particularly under conditions of low satisfaction (Ardıç & Erişen, 2025). Given the intense job demands faced by Category A ground handling personnel, GWS is expected to be an important predictor of QQ. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

H<sub>3</sub>: General work stress has a statistically significant and positive effect on quiet quitting.

#### **2.4. Relationship between General Work Stress, Work-Family Conflict, and Quiet Quitting**

The triad of GWS, WFC, and QQ offers an integrated lens for understanding how demanding work environments shape withdrawal patterns. QQ appears particularly likely under conditions of high work stress and disrupted work-life balance (Karrani et al., 2024; Serenko, 2024). Rather than treating work stress and WFC as separate predictors, it is appropriate to conceptualize them as sequential links in a process that culminates in QQ.

From a COR perspective, high GWS reflects intensive consumption of valued resources such as time, energy, and social support (Hobfoll, 1989). When employees invest disproportionate resources in the work role, insufficient time and energy remain for family responsibilities, generating WFC as inter-role strain (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). As this conflict becomes chronic, it further erodes resources and satisfaction, deepening the loss spiral and making QQ an attractive resource-protection response (Arar et al., 2023; Serenko, 2024). The JD-R model reinforces this logic by positing that high job demands coupled with limited resources lead to burnout, psychological strain, and withdrawal behaviors (Demerouti et al., 2001). In airport ground handling, irregular shifts, intense time pressure, physical and emotional labor and safety-critical responsibilities create exactly such a configuration.

Empirical evidence is broadly consistent with this stepped process. Meta-analytic and longitudinal studies show that increases in WFC are closely linked to psychological strain, burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and stronger withdrawal intentions (Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011; Hammer et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2022). Recent research indicates that work-life imbalance and burnout make employees feel exhausted and unhappy, thereby strengthening QQ tendencies (Paranamana & Kaluarachchige, 2025; Prentice et al., 2025). Among the few studies directly linking WFC and QQ, Azzam et al. (2026) find that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict significantly increase QQ among academics. Other studies show that job stress and burnout predict QQ and that job satisfaction, affective commitment, and perceived organizational support may mediate or moderate these relationships (Ardıç & Erişen, 2025; Kim & Sohn, 2024; Zhong et al., 2023).

Synthesizing COR and JD-R perspectives with this empirical evidence, it is plausible to expect a pathway whereby GWS depletes employees' resources and elevates WFC, WFC generates additional resource losses and reductions in satisfaction across life domains, and employees attempt to slow this loss spiral by engaging in QQ. Empirical tests of this mechanism in airport ground handling remain limited. Addressing this gap, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Work-family conflict mediates the effect of general work stress on quiet quitting.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

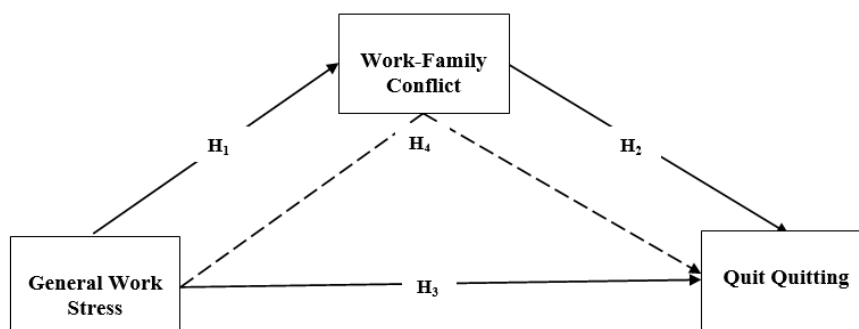
This section outlines the research models, describes the population and sampling strategy, details the measurement instruments, and explains the procedures used for data collection and analysis.

#### 3.1. Research Model

This research is structured as a quantitative study with a cross-sectional, explanatory design. Drawing on Hobfoll's COR theory, Demerouti et al.'s JD-R model, and Role theory, it tests a mediation model in which GWS increases WFC, and heightened WFC in turn strengthens QQ tendencies among A-category airport ground handling personnel (Demerouti et al., 2001; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hobfoll, 1989; Serenko, 2024).

In the model, GWS is specified as the independent variable, WFC as the mediator, and QQ as the dependent variable. Accordingly, the direct effect of GWS on WFC (H1), the direct effect of WFC on QQ (H2), the direct effect of GWS on QQ (H3), and the indirect effect of GWS on QQ through WFC (H4) are tested simultaneously within a single structural model.

**Figure 1.** Research Model



#### 3.2. Population and Sample

The target population of this research consists of airport ground handling staff employed by A-category ground handling companies operating in Türkiye. These firms are key actors in ensuring the continuity of aviation operations and are directly exposed to change-related demands such as high workload, shift work, frequently revised safety procedures, digitalization initiatives, and process improvements. Within this context, focusing on psychosocial constructs such as WFC, GWS, and QQ among A-category ground handling personnel constitutes the core concern of the present study.

The empirical sample was drawn from employees working for A-category ground handling companies at Istanbul Airport, Sabiha Gökçen Airport, Ankara Esenboğa Airport, and İzmir Adnan Menderes Airport. According to the General Directorate of State Airports Authority, these airports rank among the busiest terminals in Türkiye in terms of passenger traffic and flight frequency and therefore employ large numbers of ground handling personnel. They were thus selected in order to enhance the representativeness of the target population.

Because it was not feasible to survey the entire population, a non-probability convenience sampling strategy was employed, and data were collected from participants who were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Neuman, 2014). The required sample size was calculated on the basis of a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. In line with the recommendations of Gürbüz and Şahin (2018) and Cohen et al. (2000), a minimum of 384 respondents is considered sufficient for populations of 100,000 or more. Accordingly, data were collected in November 2025 via an online questionnaire administered to 416 A-category ground handling employees. Following data screening (elimination of incomplete responses, extreme outliers, and inconsistent cases), 18 questionnaires were excluded, yielding a final analytic sample of 398 participants ( $N = 398$ ).

Since all variables were measured using self-report scales, the risk of common method bias was investigated. Mixed factor analysis showed that the first factor explained less than 40% of the total variance, indicating that no single general factor dominated the data. Furthermore, the full collinearity VIF values for all constructs were below 3.3, suggesting that multicollinearity and common method variance were unlikely to have a significant impact on the findings (Kock, 2015; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

With regard to demographic characteristics, the final sample ( $N = 398$ ) is almost evenly split by gender (51.5% male, 48.5% female). The largest age groups are employees aged 30-35 years (30.2%) and 24-29 years (28.9%). Just over half of the respondents are single (55.0%), and most have completed at least an associate degree, with 47.0% holding a bachelor's and 35.9% an associate degree. Sectoral tenure is concentrated among relatively early-career employees, as those with 1-4 years (24.6%) and 4-8 years (22.9%) of experience constitute the two largest groups.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instruments**

The research data were obtained through an online questionnaire composed of four main sections. The first section gathered basic background information from respondents, including their gender, age, marital status, educational level, and total work experience in the aviation industry.

The second section of the questionnaire assessed work-family conflict. For this purpose, the Work-Family Conflict Scale originally developed by Haslam et al. (2015) and adapted to Turkish by Akın et al. (2017) was used. In the Turkish adaptation study, confirmatory factor analysis supported a two-factor, 10-item structure (work-to-family and family-to-work conflict) with satisfactory model fit “( $\chi^2(30) = 86.78$ , RMSEA = .09, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, and GFI = .92)”. Cronbach's alpha coefficients

were .91 for the work-to-family conflict subscale, .87 for the family-to-work conflict subscale, and .86 for the overall scale, with corrected item-total correlations ranging from .61 to .84, indicating adequate reliability. The instrument includes ten statements, five reflecting the extent to which work roles interfere with family life (items 1-5) and five reflecting the interference of family demands with work roles (items 6-10). A seven-point Likert response format was employed, with scale points ranging from minimal to maximal agreement with each statement. Although the Work-Family Conflict Scale has two subdimensions, the present study used the overall WFC score in the mediation model to capture employees' overall inter-role conflict burden and to preserve model parsimony.

Quiet quitting tendencies were evaluated in the third section using the Quiet Quitting Scale designed by Akduman (2025). In the original scale development study, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a single-factor, seven-item structure with acceptable model fit indices “(e.g.,  $\chi^2/df = 3.17$ , RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .04, GFI = .96, CFI = .97)” and satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ), indicating that the instrument is a valid and reliable measure of quiet quitting. In the present study, this single-dimensional scale comprising seven items was used to capture employees' inclination to reduce discretionary effort and psychologically withdraw from work. Items were evaluated on a five-level Likert-type response format, with 1 representing the lowest and 5 the highest level of agreement with each statement.

The fourth section measured perceived general work stress. For this purpose, the General Work Stress Scale developed by De Bruin (2006) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Teleş (2021) was employed. In the Turkish validation study, item analyses together with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a single-factor, nine-item structure with good model fit “( $\chi^2/df = 1.96$ , RMSEA = .06, CFI = .99, IFI = .99, GFI = .97, RMR = .04, NFI = .99)” and excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ; Spearman-Brown = .89), indicating that the Turkish form is a valid and reliable measure of general work stress. The instrument consists of nine items forming a unidimensional measure of overall work-related stress. Items are rated on a five-point agreement format, where 1 reflects the lowest and 5 the highest degree of agreement with each item.

### **3.4. Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were gathered using a self-administered online questionnaire. Before beginning the survey, potential participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the principles of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation, and electronic informed consent was obtained. Eligibility criteria required that respondents be currently employed as A-category airport ground handling personnel, be at least 18 years of age, and provide voluntary consent. Exclusion criteria comprised pilot study responses, questionnaires with more than 10% missing data, and cases identified as outliers or displaying inconsistent response patterns.

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, IBM SPSS AMOS 24, and Hayes' PROCESS Macro 4.2. As a preliminary step, the dataset was examined for missing values, extreme observations, and inconsistent response patterns, and distributional assumptions were checked by inspecting skewness and kurtosis coefficients. The construct validity and reliability of the WFC, GWS, and QQ measures were then evaluated in two stages. First, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted to explore the underlying factor structures; second, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were performed to verify model fit. Convergent and discriminant validity, as well as reliability indicators (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , composite reliability, and average variance extracted [AVE]), were examined and found to satisfy widely accepted benchmark criteria. Subsequently, bivariate associations among the key study variables were assessed using Pearson correlation coefficients.

To test the main hypotheses, a mediation model was specified in which GWS was defined as the predictor (X), WFC as the mediator (M), and QQ as the outcome variable (Y). This model was estimated using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro. The significance of the mediating mechanism was evaluated through a bootstrapping procedure with 5.000 resamples, yielding 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect. Estimates of the total, direct, and indirect effects, together with their corresponding coefficients and confidence intervals, were reported.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

This section presents the empirical results, including the preliminary tests of factorability, the validity and reliability evidence for the measurement scales, the correlation patterns among the variables, and the outcomes of the mediation analysis.

Prior to performing the factor analyses, the appropriateness of the data for factor-analytic procedures was examined by calculating the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy index and conducting Bartlett's test of sphericity. Consistent with the guidelines reported by Büyüköztürk (2018), KMO values above .60 together with a statistically significant Bartlett test indicate that the correlation matrix is suitable for factor analysis. In the present study: For the GWS scale, KMO = .948; Bartlett's  $\chi^2(36) = 1905.285$ ;  $p < .001$ . For the WFC scale, KMO = .897; Bartlett's  $\chi^2(45) = 1838.826$ ;  $p < .001$ . For the QQ scale, KMO = .922; Bartlett's  $\chi^2(21) = 1317.463$ ;  $p < .001$ . These values indicate that the datasets for all three scales are highly suitable for factor analysis.

**Table 1.** EFA Results for the General Work Stress (GWS) Scale

| Item                         | F1       |
|------------------------------|----------|
| GWS_08                       | .848     |
| GWS_05                       | .791     |
| GWS_01                       | .776     |
| GWS_06                       | .772     |
| GWS_07                       | .772     |
| GWS_04                       | .771     |
| GWS_02                       | .762     |
| GWS_03                       | .733     |
| GWS_09                       | .730     |
| Statistic                    | Value    |
| Total variance explained (%) | 59.858   |
| KMO                          | .948     |
| Bartlett's $\chi^2$          | 1905.285 |
| df                           | 36       |
| p                            | .001     |

The EFA results for the GWS scale are reported in Table 1. Using principal component analysis, a single-factor solution explaining 59.858% of the total variance was obtained. The high KMO value (.948) and the significant Bartlett's test ( $\chi^2(36) = 1905.285$ ;  $p < .001$ ) confirm the adequacy of the sample and inter-item correlations. All items loaded on a single factor, with factor loadings ranging between .730 and .848, and no item removal was required.

**Table 2.** EFA Results for the Work-Family Conflict (WFC) Scale

| Item                         | F1       | F2   |
|------------------------------|----------|------|
| WFC_01                       | .848     |      |
| WFC_02                       | .822     |      |
| WFC_03                       | .738     |      |
| WFC_04                       | .852     |      |
| WFC_05                       | .837     |      |
| WFC_06                       |          | .852 |
| WFC_07                       |          | .784 |
| WFC_08                       |          | .767 |
| WFC_09                       |          | .793 |
| WFC_10                       |          | .703 |
| Statistic                    | Value    |      |
| Total variance explained (%) | 65.027   |      |
| KMO                          | .897     |      |
| Bartlett's $\chi^2$          | 1838.826 |      |
| df                           | 45       |      |
| p                            | .001     |      |

EFA results for the WFC scale are presented in Table 2. Consistent with the original instrument, a two-factor structure was specified, explaining 65.027% of the total variance. In line with the theoretical model, items WFC1-WFC5 loaded on the work-to-family conflict factor, whereas items WFC6-WFC10

loaded on the family-to-work conflict factor. Factor loadings ranged from .703 to .852, indicating strong item-factor relationships and no need for item deletion.

**Table 3.** EFA Results for the Quiet Quitting (QQ) Scale

| Item                         | QQ (F1)      |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| QQ_01                        | .799         |
| QQ_02                        | .789         |
| QQ_03                        | .822         |
| QQ_04                        | .751         |
| QQ_05                        | .748         |
| QQ_06                        | .723         |
| QQ_07                        | .819         |
| <b>Statistic</b>             | <b>Value</b> |
| Total variance explained (%) | 60.779       |
| KMO                          | .922         |
| Bartlett's $\chi^2$          | 1317.463     |
| df                           | 21           |
| p                            | .001         |

EFA results for the QQ scale are shown in Table 3. A single-factor solution accounting for 60.779% of the total variance was obtained. All items loaded on the QQ factor, with loadings between .723 and .822, and were retained in the scale.

Following EFA, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for each scale to assess model fit and convergent validity. Model fit was evaluated using commonly reported indices, including CMIN/df, RMSEA, SRMR, GFI, CFI, NFI, RFI, and AGFI. In the literature, values of CMIN/df  $\leq 5$ , RMSEA and SRMR  $\leq .08$ , GFI and AGFI  $\geq .80$ –.90, and CFI and NFI  $\geq .90$ –.95 are typically considered indicative of acceptable to ideal fit (Doll et al., 1994).

**Figure 2.** CFA Results for GWS Scale

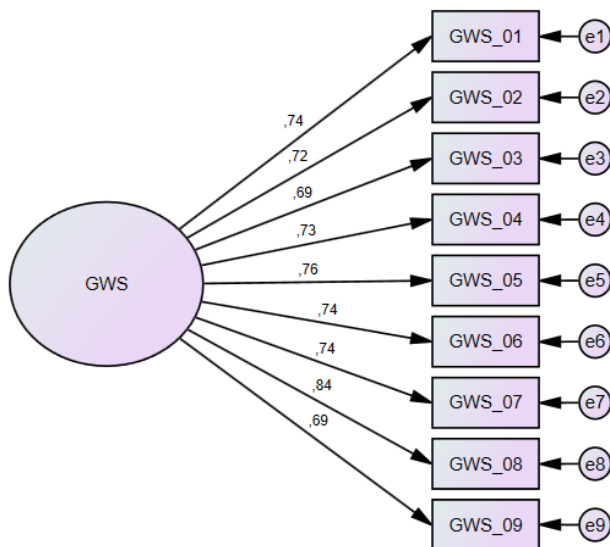


**Table 4.** Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the CFA of the GWS Scale

|            | CMIN/df  | RMSEA      | SRMR       | GFI        | CFI        | NFI        | RFI        | AGFI       |
|------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Ideal      | $\leq 2$ | $\leq .05$ | $\leq .05$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .97$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .90$ | $\geq .90$ |
| Acceptable | $\leq 5$ | $\leq .08$ | $\leq .08$ | $\geq .80$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .90$ | $\geq .85$ | $\geq .80$ |
| Obtained   | 1.426    | .033       | .020       | .979       | .994       | .980       | .973       | .965       |

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 4, the single-factor CFA model for the GWS scale demonstrates an ideal fit, with all indices meeting or exceeding commonly accepted criteria.

**Figure 3.** CFA Results for WFC Scale

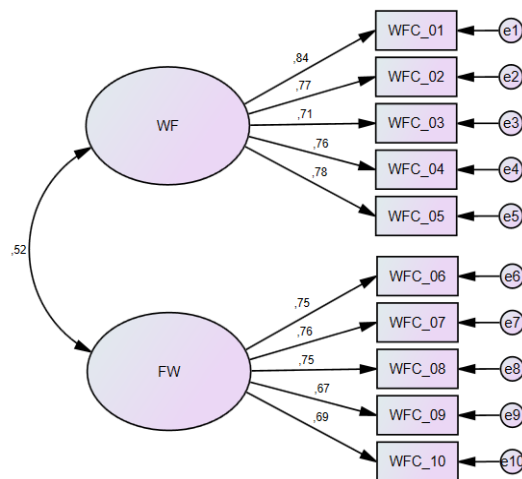


**Table 5.** Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the CFA of the WFC Scale

|            | CMIN/df  | RMSEA      | SRMR       | GFI        | CFI        | NFI        | RFI        | AGFI       |
|------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Ideal      | $\leq 2$ | $\leq .05$ | $\leq .05$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .97$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .90$ | $\geq .90$ |
| Acceptable | $\leq 5$ | $\leq .08$ | $\leq .08$ | $\geq .80$ | $\geq .95$ | $\geq .90$ | $\geq .85$ | $\geq .80$ |
| Obtained   | 1.635    | .040       | .034       | .973       | .988       | .970       | .960       | .957       |

As shown in Figure 3 and Table 5, the two-factor CFA model for the WFC scale exhibits an ideal overall fit, with all indices falling within recommended thresholds.

**Figure 4.** CFA Results for QQ Scale

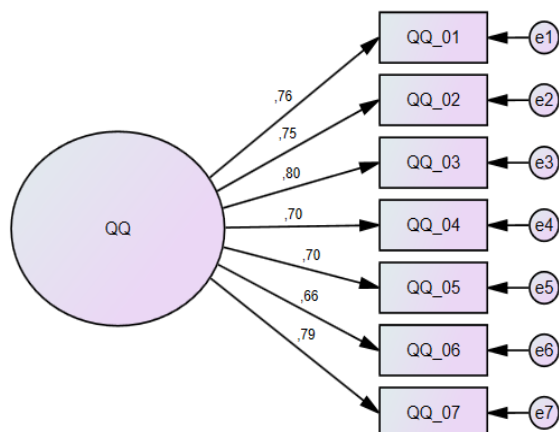


**Table 6.** Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the CFA of the QQ Scale

|            | <b>CMIN/df</b> | <b>RMSEA</b> | <b>SRMR</b> | <b>GFI</b> | <b>CFI</b> | <b>NFI</b> | <b>RFI</b> | <b>AGFI</b> |
|------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Ideal      | ≤ 2            | ≤ .05        | ≤ .05       | ≥ .95      | ≥ .97      | ≥ .95      | ≥ .90      | ≥ .90       |
| Acceptable | ≤ 5            | ≤ .08        | ≤ .08       | ≥ .80      | ≥ .95      | ≥ .90      | ≥ .85      | ≥ .80       |
| Obtained   | 1.280          | .027         | .018        | .988       | .997       | .987       | .980       | .976        |

As shown in Figure 4 and Table 6, the CFA results for the QQ scale indicate ideal model fit, with all indices falling within commonly accepted cut-off values.

Accordingly, the measurement models are confirmed, providing a valid basis for the subsequent structural analyses (correlation and mediation tests). Prior to hypothesis testing, assessments of normality and reliability were carried out, and their outcomes are summarized in the table below.

**Table 7.** Results of Normality and Reliability Analyses

| <b>Variable</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard Deviation</b> | <b>Skewness</b> | <b>Kurtosis</b> | <b>Cronbach's alpha (α)</b> | <b>AVE</b> | <b>CR</b> |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| WFC             | 3.996       | 1.235                     | .057            | -.336           | .874                        | .561       | .927      |
| QQ              | 2.785       | .945                      | .135            | -.600           | .892                        | .544       | .892      |
| GWS             | 2.719       | .950                      | .155            | -.831           | .916                        | .549       | .916      |

As shown in Table 7, the scale means indicate moderate levels of WFC (M = 3.996), QQ (M = 2.785), and GWS (M = 2.719), with standard deviations between .945 and 1.235, suggesting sufficient variability in responses. Internal consistency is high for all three constructs: Cronbach's alpha coefficients are .874 for WFC, .892 for QQ, and .916 for GWS, comfortably exceeding the .60 benchmark commonly used in social science research (Akgül & Çevik, 2005). The AVE values (.561 for WFC, .544 for QQ, and .549 for GWS) are above the recommended .50 threshold, and the CR values (.927, .892, and .916, respectively) exceed .70, supporting convergent validity and composite reliability for each scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis. For WFC, QQ, and GWS, skewness values (.057–.155) and kurtosis values (–.831 to –.336) all fall within the ±1.5 range, indicating that the distributions do not deviate markedly from normality and that the assumption of approximate normality is tenable for subsequent analyses (Büyüköztürk, 2018).

To examine how the main study variables are related, bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated, and the corresponding results are reported in Table 8. In line with the interpretive framework suggested by Büyüköztürk (2018), coefficients with absolute values around .01–.29 were regarded as indicating low-level associations, values of approximately .30–.70 as reflecting medium-level associations, and values in the range of about .71–.99 as representing high-level linear associations.

**Table 8.** Correlation Analysis Results

| Variables | 1      | 2      | 3 |
|-----------|--------|--------|---|
| 1. WFC    | 1      |        |   |
| 2. QQ     | .288** | 1      |   |
| 3. GWS    | .361** | .154** | 1 |

$p < .01$ .

The pattern of correlations can be described as follows: The association between WFC and QQ is positive but of low magnitude ( $r = .288$ ,  $p < .01$ ). WFC also shows a moderate positive association with GWS ( $r = .361$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, QQ and GWS are related in a positive yet relatively weak manner, and this relationship is statistically significant ( $r = .154$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

To test the main hypothesis regarding mediation, a simple mediation model was estimated with Hayes's PROCESS macro (version 4.2; Model 4; Hayes, 2022). In this analysis, GWS was specified as the predictor, WFC as the mediating variable, and QQ as the outcome. Indirect effects were obtained using 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals, and the resulting coefficients and intervals are summarized in Figure 5 and Table 9. An indirect effect was regarded as statistically significant when its 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero.

**Figure 5.** Mediation Analysis Results

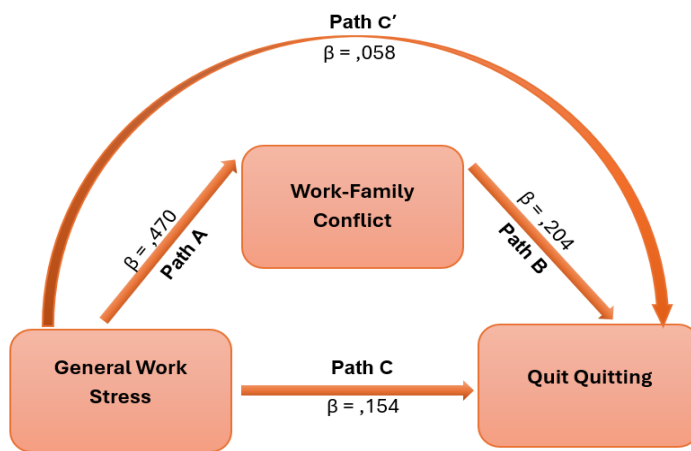


**Table 9.** Mediation Analysis Results Using PROCESS Macro (Model 4)

| Path                                                            | $\beta$ | SE            | t     | p      | 95% CI (LLCI; ULCI) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------|-------|--------|---------------------|
| A: GWS $\rightarrow$ WFC                                        | .470    | .061          | 7.707 | < .001 | [ .350; .590 ]      |
| B: WFC $\rightarrow$ QQ                                         | .204    | .040          | 5.176 | < .001 | [ .127; .282 ]      |
| C (total): GWS $\rightarrow$ QQ                                 | .154    | .049          | 3.106 | .002   | [ .056; .251 ]      |
| C' (direct): GWS $\rightarrow$ QQ (including WFC)               | .058    | .051          | 1.119 | .264   | [ -.044; .158 ]     |
| Indirect (A $\times$ B): GWS $\rightarrow$ WFC $\rightarrow$ QQ | .096    | BootSE = .024 | —     | —      | [ .052; .147 ]      |

The effect of GWS on WFC is positive and significant ( $\beta = .470$ ;  $SE = .061$ ;  $t = 7.707$ ;  $p < .001$ ; 95% CI [.350, .590]). In this model, 13.0% of the variance in WFC is explained by GWS ( $R^2 = .1304$ ;  $F(1.396) = 59.396$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Accordingly, H1 is supported.

The effect of WFC on QQ is also positive and significant ( $\beta = .204$ ;  $SE = .040$ ;  $t = 5.176$ ;  $p < .001$ ; 95% CI [.127, .282]). In this model, 8.6% of the variance in QQ is explained when both GWS and WFC are included as predictors ( $R^2 = .0858$ ;  $F(2.395) = 18.533$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H2 is supported.

The total effect of GWS on QQ is positive and significant ( $\beta = .154$ ;  $SE = .049$ ;  $t = 3.106$ ;  $p = .002$ ; 95% CI [.056, .251]). In this model, 2.4% of the variance in QQ is explained solely by GWS ( $R^2 = .0238$ ;  $F(1.396) = 9.644$ ;  $p = .002$ ), indicating that H3 is also supported.

When WFC is included in the model as a mediator, the direct effect of GWS on QQ (Path C') becomes non-significant ( $\beta = .058$ ;  $SE = .051$ ;  $t = 1.119$ ;  $p = .264$ ; 95% CI [-.044, .158]). In contrast, the indirect effect of GWS on QQ through WFC is  $\beta = .096$ , with a bootstrap standard error of .024 and a 95% confidence interval of [.052, .147]. Since this interval does not include zero, the indirect effect is statistically significant. These results indicate that the effect of GWS on QQ operates entirely through WFC; that is, WFC plays a full mediating role in the GWS-QQ relationship. Accordingly, H4 is supported.

In summary, the findings show that GWS increases WFC ( $\beta = .470$ ;  $p < .001$ ), WFC increases QQ tendencies ( $\beta = .204$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and the total effect of GWS on QQ is significant ( $\beta = .154$ ;  $p = .002$ ). However, when WFC is incorporated into the model, the direct effect of GWS on QQ becomes non-significant ( $\beta = .058$ ;  $p = .264$ ), while the bootstrap-based indirect effect ( $\beta = .096$ ; 95% CI [.052, .147]) remains significant. Taken together, these results provide empirical support for the conclusion that WFC fully mediates the relationship between GWS and QQ.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of GWS on QQ among A-category airport ground handling personnel and the mediating role of WFC in this relationship. Drawing on COR theory, the JD-R model, and Role theory, it was hypothesized that GWS increases WFC (H1), WFC strengthens QQ (H2), GWS has a positive total effect on QQ (H3), and WFC mediates the GWS-QQ relationship (H4). The results support all four hypotheses and show that the impact of work stress on QQ operates entirely through WFC.

First, the results show that higher levels of general work stress are associated with a statistically significant increase in work-family conflict, thereby confirming H1. As GWS rises, employees experience greater difficulty in harmonizing work and family roles, and work-related strain increasingly spills over into the family domain. This pattern is consistent with Role theory, which emphasizes time-, strain- and behavior-based incompatibilities between work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and with COR's view that intensified job demands divert limited time and energy toward work, thereby triggering a resource loss spiral that exacerbates WFC (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989). Similarly, the JD-R model suggests that high demands combined with insufficient resources foster burnout and psychological strain, which in turn heighten WFC (Demerouti et al., 2001).

These results are in line with prior empirical evidence. Meta-analytic work has shown that job demands and role stressors are among the most robust antecedents of WFC (Amstad et al., 2011). Other studies demonstrate that work-related stress and role overload “spill over” into family life and increase work-to-family conflict (Kalliath et al., 2012; Kossek & Lee, 2017; Poms et al., 2016), while organizational stress has been positively linked to WFC (Jerg-Bretzke et al., 2020). A mega-meta path analysis further models job demands and stress as predictors of both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict (Miller et al., 2022). In aviation, irregular shifts, heavy workload, and operational pressure have been found to intensify WFC (Adiller, 2011; Koçak et al., 2019; Zorlu & Gündüz, 2024). The present study confirms this pattern for A-category ground handling staff and shows that high operational demands make balancing work and family roles particularly challenging.

Second, the results show that WFC has a significant and positive effect on QQ, supporting H2. As WFC increases, employees’ propensity to engage in QQ also rises. COR Theory explains this dynamic by highlighting the chronic stress and exhaustion that result from simultaneous resource loss in both work and family domains. Persistent conflict in both directions depletes emotional and cognitive resources, leading employees to protect what remains by staying in the job but reducing discretionary effort, limiting voluntary contributions, and operating at the “minimum required” level (Hobfoll, 1989; Arar et al., 2023; Serenko, 2024). From a Role theory perspective, intense WFC undermines the ability to invest in any single role fully and may therefore manifest as a form of silent withdrawal from the work role.

Although QQ is a relatively recent construct, findings based on related concepts support this conclusion. Studies in hospitality and service settings report that high work-life imbalance and burnout increase QQ intentions, with exhausted and drained employees pulling back from extra-role behaviors (Prentice et al., 2025). Similar research shows that deteriorating work-life balance and rising burnout strengthen QQ tendencies, while job satisfaction partially mediates these associations (Paranamana & Kaluarachchige, 2025; Priya et al., 2025). The limited studies that directly examine WFC and QQ reach comparable results: Azzam et al. (2026) found that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are positively related to QQ and that higher WFC is associated with stronger silent withdrawal. The present findings converge with this literature and underscore that WFC is a key antecedent of QQ in the airport ground handling context.

Third, the study shows that GWS has a positive overall effect on QQ, supporting H3. As GWS increases, QQ scores also rise, although the magnitude of this total effect is modest. This suggests that work stress alone only partially explains QQ and that intervening psychosocial mechanisms are central to the process. COR and JD-R frameworks both propose that high job demands and chronic stress trigger withdrawal through intermediate states such as burnout, cynicism, and reduced job satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2001; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Findings from healthcare indicate that professional stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction heighten QQ, as employees’ emotional attachment

to work diminishes and they shift toward minimal role performance (Toska et al., 2025; Galanis et al., 2024; Karadaş & Çevik, 2025). Likewise, Ardiç and Erişen (2025) and Zhong et al. (2023) show that high job stress is positively associated with QQ, while job satisfaction and organizational commitment weaken this relationship. The current study corroborates these patterns in the aviation ground handling context.

The most notable contribution of this research is the demonstration that WFC fully mediates the relationship between GWS and QQ, supporting H4. When WFC is taken into account, the direct link between GWS and QQ becomes non-significant, while the indirect effect via WFC remains significant. In other words, GWS affects QQ not directly but through its impact on WFC, which functions as a key conduit through which stress is translated into silent withdrawal.

This result is theoretically consistent with both COR and JD-R approaches. Under high job demands, employees allocate most of their resources to the work role; when too few resources remain for family responsibilities, WFC increases. As this conflict persists, satisfaction and well-being erode in both domains, deepening the resource loss spiral (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001). To slow this spiral, employees resort to relatively low-cost withdrawal strategies such as QQ. Empirical work by Prentice et al. (2025), Paranamana and Kaluarachchige (2025), and Priya et al. (2025) suggests that job stress and work-life imbalance set in motion a process that culminates in burnout, loss of satisfaction, and eventually QQ. Azzam et al. (2026) document the direct role of WFC in QQ, while Ardiç and Erişen (2025), Zhong et al. (2023), and Kim and Sohn (2024) highlight the mediating and moderating influence of satisfaction and commitment in the stress QQ link. Extending this literature, the present study explicitly models WFC as the central mechanism and shows that, for A-category ground handling personnel, the impact of GWS on QQ is entirely channeled through WFC.

From a practical standpoint, these findings imply that, in high-demand airport ground handling environments, the effect of job stress on QQ depends not only on the intensity of work demands but also on how those demands interfere with employees' family roles. In other words, even when the workload is high, QQ tendencies may be substantially reduced if organizations provide resources and arrangements that support work-family balance. Examples include more predictable and transparent shift schedules, limitations on consecutive night duties and excessively long shifts, additional rest or compensatory leave during peak seasons, and flexible or preferential shifts for employees with caregiving responsibilities. Establishing a climate in which employees can openly discuss family-related constraints with supervisors and in which such concerns are met with understanding rather than sanction may further reduce stress spillover from work to home. Ultimately, the results suggest that QQ is shaped less by individual unwillingness or generational attitudes and more by structural features such as job design, shift systems, and work-family policies.

### 5.1. Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study advances research on GWS, WFC, and QQ by integrating COR theory, the JD-R model, and Role theory within a single mediation framework. It shows that the effect of GWS on QQ is fully transmitted through WFC, positioning WFC as a core psychosocial mechanism linking chronic job demands, inter-role strain, and silent disengagement. In doing so, the study refines COR-based views of QQ as a resource-conservation strategy and extends JD-R and Role theory by illustrating how demands-resources imbalance and inter-role conflict jointly trigger withdrawal in the form of QQ. By focusing on A-category airport ground handling, a high-risk, 24/7, shift-intensive, and under-researched context, it also highlights that QQ may have direct implications for operational safety and service continuity in aviation.

The findings offer concrete guidance for aviation managers and HR practitioners. The full mediation of the GWS-QQ link by WFC implies that reducing QQ requires not only managing workload and performance expectations but also mitigating the impact of work conditions on employees' family roles. More predictable and transparent shift schedules, limits on consecutive night duties and excessively long shifts, additional rest or compensatory leave in peak seasons, and flexible or preferential shifts for employees with caregiving responsibilities can help reduce WFC and, indirectly, QQ. A climate in which employees can safely voice family-related constraints, and where these are met with understanding rather than sanction, may further limit stress spillover from work to home. More specifically, airport management can reduce quiet quitting through family-sensitive rostering and supervisor support. Work-family-focused practices should be seen as a strategic HR tool rather than only a welfare measure. Because QQ often manifests as subtle reductions in extra-role effort rather than explicit complaints, regularly monitoring WFC and work-life balance indicators can serve as an early warning system. Overall, the results suggest that QQ is driven less by individual unwillingness or generational attitudes and more by structural features of job design, shift systems, and work-family policies.

This study is subject to several constraints. First, the empirical evidence is based on 398 employees working for A-category ground handling firms at four major airports in Türkiye, which limits generalizability to other airport types, industries, or countries. Second, reliance on online self-report questionnaires may have introduced non-response error and biases associated with shared method variance, even though diagnostic tests did not reveal substantial concerns. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow firm conclusions about temporal precedence or causality; the proposed mediation structure reflects a theoretically derived ordering that cannot be definitively confirmed without longitudinal or experimental designs. Finally, the model focuses solely on GWS, WFC, and QQ, omitting other possible mediators or moderators such as emotional exhaustion, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, perceived support, or leadership-related variables that might enrich the

explanation of these relationships. In addition, although WFC was measured with two subdimensions, it was analyzed as a single construct. Future studies may examine these dimensions separately.

These limitations point to several avenues for future research. Longitudinal and multi-wave designs could clarify the temporal ordering among GWS, WFC, and QQ and capture how stress dynamics unfold over time. Multi-source studies combining employee self-reports with supervisor or peer ratings and objective performance indicators would help reduce common method concerns. Qualitative designs, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, or case studies, could offer richer insight into how employees experience the transition from heightened stress and WFC to more subtle forms of withdrawal. Future models might incorporate additional mediators and boundary conditions and be tested across different airport types, aviation roles, and high-demand sectors, as well as in cross-national comparisons. Subgroup analyses by gender, marital and parental status, shift type, and tenure could identify particularly vulnerable groups and inform more targeted interventions in airport ground handling and similar settings.

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University Ethics Committee on November 12, 2025, with decision number 10/27.

The author declares that the study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics.

The author states that artificial intelligence tools were employed only for the purpose of language polishing.

The author declares that there are no financial conflicts of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual associated with this article.

The author declares that they contributed equally to all processes of the research.

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