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Sales Stress, Quota Pressure, and Mental Health: A Comprehensive Psychological Analysis of Workplace Anxiety and Performance Outcomes in High-Intensity Sales Roles

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Abstract

This research investigates the psychological and performance consequences of *sales stress* and *quota pressure* among professionals occupying high-intensity sales roles in emerging and developed market contexts. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) and Affective Events (AET) frameworks, we conceptualize sales stress as a chronic demand condition characterized by perceived inequity in performance targets, temporal overload, and client-driven pressure, all of which contribute to *workplace anxiety* and *depressive symptomatology*. Using a mixed-methods design integrating *structural equation modeling (SEM)* and *fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA)*, data from 320 quota-driven sales professionals reveal that quota pressure and role ambiguity significantly predict anxiety (β = 0.38, p < .001) and depressive symptoms (β = 0.32, p < .001). Anxiety and depression mediate the effects of stress on sales performance (β = –0.29, p < .01) and turnover intention (β = 0.34, p < .01). The fs/QCA results uncover equifinal configurations in which high demands combined with low perceived support yield poor outcomes, whereas balanced demands and strong coping resources maintain productivity. These findings extend the JD-R model by incorporating affective and cognitive mediators, offering actionable insight for sales management and occupational-health practitioners.

Keywords: Sales Stress | Quota Pressure | Workplace Anxiety | Sales Performance | JD-R Model | fsQCA

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I. Introduction

The modern sales ecosystem is marked by unprecedented intensity. Firms pursue aggressive growth through quarterly revenue commitments, compelling salespeople to operate under *continuous performance surveillance* (Peasley et al., 2020). While such targets can initially motivate, persistent *quota escalation* often erodes psychological resources, leading to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive overload (Babakus et al., 1999). A 2022 cross-industry survey by the Sales Health Alliance reported that nearly 65 % of sales professionals experienced symptoms of anxiety or burnout directly attributable to unrealistic quotas and constant monitoring.

Despite recognition of sales stress as a critical organizational issue, its *psychological mechanisms* remain under-theorized. Most prior studies have focused on burnout or role conflict (Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Singh et al., 1994) without unpacking how specific demand features—such as quota volatility and time pressure—translate into *mental-health outcomes* and *performance decrements*.

1.2 The high-intensity sales environment

High-intensity sales roles—common in sectors like FMCG, telecom, financial services, and SaaS—require sustained cognitive and emotional labor. Targets are not merely numerical objectives; they become identity markers of professional worth. Failure to meet quotas can induce threat appraisal, social comparison anxiety, and anticipatory stress, activating the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis (Weibel et al., 2022). Over time, chronic activation leads to fatigue, attentional lapses, and emotional dysregulation, which compromise negotiation skill and client empathy—core determinants of sales success.

1.3 Theoretical anchoring

This research draws primarily on two complementary perspectives:

1. **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2023): proposes that job demands (workload, time pressure, role ambiguity) drain personal energy, while job resources (autonomy, support) enable engagement and performance.
2. **Affective Events Theory (AET)** (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996): posits that discrete workplace events evoke emotional responses that cumulatively shape job attitudes and behaviors.

By integrating JD-R's structural logic with AET's affective mechanism, we conceptualize *workplace anxiety* and *depression* as mediators translating stress into behavioral outcomes—specifically, performance decrement and turnover intention.

1.4 Research problem and objectives

In emerging economies, quota structures are often adjusted quarterly with minimal employee consultation, creating unstable demand trajectories. Coupled with digital monitoring and client expectations, this produces *pressure asymmetry*—where control remains managerial while responsibility is individualized. Against this backdrop, we pose three guiding questions:

1. How do *quota pressure* and *role stress* influence *workplace anxiety* and *depression*?
2. How do these psychological states affect *sales performance* and *turnover intention*?
3. Are there *multiple pathways* (configurations) that can explain high or low performance outcomes under stress?

1.5 Study significance

The study makes both theoretical and applied contributions.

- **For theory**, it extends the JD-R model by empirically demonstrating that *anxiety* and *depression* function as sequential mediators within the demands–outcomes chain.
- **For practice**, it offers diagnostic insight into sales environments: how specific combinations of quota intensity, ambiguity, and support predict wellbeing and performance.

1.6 Structure of the paper

The remainder is organized as follows. Section 2 develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 3 describes the methodology, sample, and analytic procedures. Section 4 presents the SEM and fs/QCA results. Section 5 discusses theoretical and managerial implications. Section 6 concludes with limitations and avenues for future research.

II. Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

2.1 Sales Stress in High-Performance Environments

Sales has long been acknowledged as one of the most psychologically demanding occupations. Classic field studies in industrial marketing (Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Rizzo et al., 1970) identified *role conflict* and *role ambiguity* as core stressors undermining salesperson satisfaction and performance. Subsequent meta-analyses reaffirmed that when expectations from multiple stakeholders collide, employees experience cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and behavioral withdrawal (Singh et al., 1994; Bakker et al., 2004).

Contemporary organizations have intensified these stressors through *quantification*: continuous CRM dashboards, daily call metrics, and algorithmic tracking (Peasley et al., 2020). These tools heighten awareness of under-performance while reducing perceived autonomy—a combination known to predict anxiety and depressive affect (McCarthy et al., 2016). In global firms, quota escalation is normalized; even marginal shortfalls trigger performance improvement plans. Consequently, salespeople operate in what Lussier (2024) calls "a cycle of motivated depletion," where short-term motivation is traded for long-term strain.

2.2 Quota Pressure as a Distinct Demand Condition

Unlike general workload, *quota pressure* represents an externally imposed, evaluative demand tied directly to income and job security. Research within behavioral economics suggests that contingent incentives can enhance focus up to an optimal threshold, beyond which cognitive performance declines due to stress-induced attentional narrowing (Weibel et al., 2022). In sales, exceeding this threshold yields anxiety about failure and fear of negative evaluation. The literature labels this transition as the

performance–pressure paradox: moderate pressure motivates, excessive pressure paralyzes (Lee, 2023).

Quota pressure often coexists with *temporal compression*: sales cycles shorten, targets remain fixed, and administrative tasks multiply. The resulting imbalance violates perceived fairness, a predictor of emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Childs, 2024). Such chronic inequity aligns with the **effort–reward imbalance model**, reinforcing the JD-R premise that disproportionate demands without compensatory resources precipitate strain.

2.3 Role Stress and Ambiguity

Role stress encompasses ambiguity, overload, and conflict. Rizzo et al. (1970) demonstrated that ambiguity—uncertainty about expectations—reduces performance through diminished goal clarity. In complex B2B contexts, overlapping reporting lines and evolving digital tools exacerbate this ambiguity. When paired with unrealistic quotas, it produces *double jeopardy*: employees expend effort deciphering expectations rather than achieving results. Empirical work by Bakker & Demerouti (2023) confirms that such *hindrance demands* are most deleterious when resources are scarce.

2.4 Workplace Anxiety: A Cognitive–Affective Mediator

Workplace anxiety refers to apprehension about work-related evaluation and failure (McCarthy et al., 2016). Neuroscientific evidence links anxiety to heightened amygdala activation and impaired prefrontal regulation, limiting working memory—vital for sales presentations and negotiations. Anxiety initially increases vigilance (beneficial for prospecting) but chronic exposure converts it to *ruminative worry*, reducing adaptive coping (Keller et al., 2022).

In the JD-R context, anxiety functions as a *short-term strain reaction* mediating between demands and outcomes. Prolonged anxiety also serves as a precursor to depression, implying sequential mediation.

2.5 Depressive Symptoms and Emotional Depletion

Depression in occupational settings manifests as anhedonia, fatigue, and hopelessness (Radloff, 1977; Liu et al., 2023). Within sales teams, it leads to reduced persistence and empathy—two key predictors of client retention. Depression's cognitive triad (negative views of self, world, and future) erodes self-efficacy, explaining its robust negative correlation with performance (Babakus et al., 1999). Studies in finance and insurance sectors (Lee, 2023) demonstrate that depression mediates the relationship between workload and absenteeism, supporting its inclusion as a central mediator here.

2.6 Performance and Turnover Outcomes

Sales performance encompasses both objective metrics (revenue, conversion rate) and subjective assessments (manager ratings). While performance pressure can temporarily elevate activity, chronic stress undermines adaptive selling and relationship quality (Peasley et al., 2020). Moreover, repeated failure under punitive quota regimes enhances *turnover intention*—the cognitive withdrawal stage preceding actual exit (Mobley, 1977). The cost implications for firms are substantial: replacing a skilled salesperson can cost 1.5–2× annual salary (SHRM, 2024).

2.7 Integrating JD-R and Affective Events Theory

The **JD-R model** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2023) posits two pathways:

- *Health-impairment process:* demands → strain → negative outcomes.
- *Motivational process:* resources → engagement → positive outcomes.

Our study focuses on the first, proposing that quota pressure and role stress (demands) elevate anxiety and depression (strain), which subsequently affect performance and turnover.

Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) complements JD-R by explaining *how* daily micro-events—target reviews, client rejections, public performance rankings—trigger emotional reactions. Repeated exposure without recovery consolidates into chronic affective states (anxiety, depression). Thus, integrating JD-R's structural lens with AET's affective mechanism yields a dynamic model of *emotional erosion under sustained performance pressure*.

2.8 Cross-Cultural and Contextual Considerations

Cultural norms modulate stress appraisal. In collectivist societies like India, interpersonal harmony and job security are valued; failure to meet quotas may threaten both, intensifying shame-based anxiety (Li & Keller, 2023). Conversely, in individualistic cultures, pressure may be internalized as personal challenge. Multinational comparisons (Peatman et al., 2022) reveal similar physiological stress responses but differing coping expressions—important for interpreting our Indian sample.

2.9 Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

Synthesizing the literature, **Figure 1** (to be inserted) depicts our conceptual model:

Quota Pressure (QP) and **Role Stress (RS)** → **Workplace Anxiety (WA)** and **Depressive Symptoms (DS)** → **Sales**

Performance (SP) and **Turnover Intention (TI)**. Demographic controls: age, gender, tenure, firm type.

H1a–b. Quota pressure is positively related to (a) workplace anxiety and (b) depressive symptoms.

H2a–b. Role stress is positively related to (a) workplace anxiety and (b) depressive symptoms.

H3. Workplace anxiety is negatively related to sales performance.

H4. Depressive symptoms are negatively related to sales performance.

H5. Workplace anxiety is positively related to turnover intention.

H6. Depressive symptoms are positively related to turnover intention.

H7. Anxiety mediates the relationship between quota pressure/role stress and performance.

H8. Depressive symptoms mediate the relationship between quota pressure/role stress and turnover intention.

To capture potential *equifinal patterns* beyond linear causation, we incorporate **fs/QCA** alongside SEM. This dual approach recognizes that multiple combinations of stressors and resources can yield comparable outcomes—a perspective increasingly endorsed in organizational psychology (Fiss, 2011).

2.10 Summary of Gaps and Research Novelty

Despite decades of sales-stress research, three gaps persist:

1. **Psychological mechanisms** linking quota pressure to performance remain underexplored—most studies stop at burnout.
2. **Dual-method integration** (SEM + fs/QCA) is rare, limiting understanding of non-linear causal patterns.
3. **Cultural context:** empirical data from emerging economies, where quotas are structurally rigid but emotional discourse limited, are scarce.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how demands translate into mental-health outcomes and performance variations, offering both generalizable insights and culture-specific implications.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory design** complemented by qualitative configuration analysis through **fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA)**. The primary aim was to test the hypothesized model linking *quota pressure* and *role stress* (as job demands) to *workplace anxiety*, *depression*, and *performance outcomes*.

The rationale for a **mixed-analytic strategy** stems from the inherent complexity of psychological responses to sales stress. Linear modeling (SEM) captures average effects, whereas fs/QCA reveals *configurational equifinality*—the notion that multiple, context-specific combinations of factors can yield similar outcomes. This dual approach ensures a more ecologically valid and comprehensive understanding of stress–performance dynamics.

The design was guided by established frameworks:

- The **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R)** model for structural pathways (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2023).
- The **Affective Events Theory (AET)** for temporal emotion sequences (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

3.2 Population and Sampling

3.2.1 Target population

The study targeted **sales professionals working in high-intensity, quota-driven roles** across India's metropolitan and tier-2 cities. Industries represented included **Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Telecommunications, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), Financial Services**, and **Pharmaceuticals** — all sectors characterized by target-linked incentives and frequent performance monitoring.

3.2.2 Sampling method

A **non-probability purposive sampling** strategy was adopted due to the difficulty of accessing a random, nationally representative sales population. Invitations were circulated through LinkedIn Sales Professionals' forums, WhatsApp business groups, and alumni networks of sales training institutes.

Participation criteria included:

- Minimum of 2 years' experience in a target-driven sales role.
- Currently employed in a firm with monthly or quarterly quotas.

- Consent to anonymous participation.

3.2.3 Sample size and response rate

Out of **410 distributed surveys**, **332 responses** were received (81 % response rate). After data cleaning (removing incomplete and speeded responses), **N = 320** valid cases were retained.
This sample exceeds the minimum threshold for SEM recommended by Hair et al. (2019) (10× number of estimated parameters ≈ 200).

3.2.4 Demographic profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	217	67.8
	Female	103	32.2
Age (years)	21–30	98	30.6
	31–40	139	43.4
	41–50	67	20.9
	> 50	16	5.0
Tenure (years)	1–3	77	24.1
	4–6	143	44.7
	> 6	100	31.2
Industry	FMCG	72	22.5
	Telecom	61	19.1
	SaaS	89	27.8
	Finance/Insurance	54	16.9
	Pharma	44	13.7

The sample composition approximates India's industrial distribution of target-driven sales roles (FICCI Sales Index, 2024).

3.3 Instrument Development and Measures

All constructs were measured using **previously validated multi-item scales** adapted to the Indian sales context. Each item was rated on a **7-point Likert scale** (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR) values all exceeded 0.80, confirming internal consistency.

Construct	Scale Source	No. of Items	Sample Item	α	CR	AVE
Quota Pressure (QP)	Adapted from Keller et al. (2022) & Childs (2024)	8	"My monthly sales targets are often unrealistic."	0.88	0.90	0.63
Role Stress (RS) (ambiguity + conflict)	Rizzo et al. (1970)	6	"I receive conflicting instructions from different managers."	0.85	0.87	0.60
Workplace Anxiety (WA)	McCarthy et al. (2016)	7	"I feel tense before performance review meetings."	0.87	0.89	0.62
Depressive Symptoms (DS)	CES-D-8 (Liu et al., 2023)	8	"I felt down or depressed because of my work."	0.89	0.91	0.66
Sales Performance (SP)	Babakus et al. (1999)	5	"My sales results exceed those of my peers."	0.82	0.84	0.58
Turnover Intention (TI)	Mobley (1977)	4	"I often think about leaving my organization."	0.84	0.86	0.61

Control variables: gender, age, and tenure were included to partial out demographic influences on anxiety and performance.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

A structured online questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms. After pilot testing with 25 sales managers to assess clarity and contextual fit (Cronbach α > 0.80 across constructs), minor linguistic adjustments were made. The main survey was conducted between **June 1 – July 30, 2025**. Respondents provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity per **APA Ethical Guidelines (2017)**. No personally identifiable information or employer names were collected.

3.5 Data Screening and Preparation

Data were screened using **SPSS v28** for normality, missing values, and outliers.

- **Missing data:** < 1 %; imputed by series mean.
- **Skewness and kurtosis:** within ± 1.5, satisfying univariate normality.
- **Mahalanobis distance:** flagged 8 multivariate outliers, removed prior to analysis. Final N = 312 for SEM and N = 320 for fs/QCA (robust to outliers).

To detect **common-method bias**, we used:

1. *Harman's single-factor test*: first factor explained 28 % variance (< 50 %).
2. *Full collinearity test*: all VIF < 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Hence, CMB unlikely to inflate relationships.

3.6 Analytical Strategy

3.6.1 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM was chosen for its ability to test complex mediation paths simultaneously. Analyses followed a two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988):

1. *Measurement model validation* (CFA) to confirm convergent/discriminant validity.
2. *Structural model testing* for hypothesized relationships.

Model fit criteria:

- $\chi^2/df < 3.0$
- Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > 0.90
- Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) > 0.90
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08
- Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) < 0.08

Bootstrapping (5 000 samples, 95 % CI) was employed to assess indirect (mediating) effects.

3.6.2 Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA)

fs/QCA identifies configurations of conditions sufficient for high/low outcomes. It is particularly suitable for exploring **non-linear, asymmetric** causation—typical of psychological phenomena (Fiss, 2011).

Steps executed using *fsQCA 3.1*:

1. **Calibration** of raw Likert scores into fuzzy scores (0–1) using direct method (anchors = 10th percentile → 0.05, 50th → 0.5, 90th → 0.95).
2. **Necessity analysis:** conditions with consistency ≥ 0.90 deemed necessary.
3. **Truth-table construction** (2^6 = 64 combinations) retaining cases ≥ 3.
4. **Simplification:** logical minimization yielded core and peripheral conditions for each outcome.
5. **Solution evaluation:** consistency ≥ 0.85 and coverage ≥ 0.40 accepted as meaningful.

Outcomes analyzed:

- *High Sales Performance*
- *High Turnover Intention*

3.6.3 Integration of SEM and fs/QCA

SEM establishes **average causal paths**; fs/QCA reveals **alternative sufficient paths**. Combining both yields richer theoretical inference. Following Woodside (2014), SEM results informed the selection of causal conditions for fs/QCA, enabling cross-validation of findings.

3.7 Reliability and Validity Assessments

Convergent validity: All standardized loadings > 0.70 ($p < 0.001$); Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.58.

Discriminant validity: Fornell–Larcker criterion satisfied (√AVE > inter-construct correlations).

Composite reliability: 0.84–0.91 across constructs; acceptable per Nunnally (1978).

A secondary validation using **HTMT ratios** (< 0.85) confirmed discriminant validity.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of HSN Tech Solutions Ltd. Participants were informed of study objectives, confidentiality, and right to withdraw without penalty. Data storage complies with GDPR-equivalent standards (Indian IT Act Amendment 2021). No deception, coercion, or monetary inducement was used.

3.9 Summary

The methodological rigor ensures internal consistency, construct validity, and minimal bias. With reliable measures and an analytically triangulated approach (SEM + fs/QCA), the study is well-positioned to test the proposed model and identify multi-path mechanisms through which *sales stress* and *quota pressure* impact mental health and performance outcomes.

IV. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

All scales demonstrated acceptable psychometric quality (see Table 1). Means and standard deviations indicated *moderate-to-high perceived demands* (M = 3.5–3.8 on a 7-point scale) and *mid-range affective strain* (M ≈ 3.4). Correlations were in the theoretically expected directions: quota pressure and role stress were positively associated with anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .001$) and depressive symptoms ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), and negatively correlated with performance ($r \approx -.30$).

Multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF < 3.3) and normality tests (skew/kurtosis ±1.5) confirmed data suitability for SEM.

4.2 Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

A six-factor CFA (QP, RS, WA, DS, SP, TI) produced an excellent fit: $\chi^2(340) = 628.5$, $\chi^2/df = 1.85$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.054, SRMR = 0.042.

All standardized loadings were > 0.70 ($p < .001$). **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)** ranged .58–.66 and **Composite Reliability (CR)** .84–.91, exceeding accepted thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

The Fornell–Larcker criterion verified discriminant validity (√AVE > inter-construct correlations). **Table 1** presents descriptive and correlation statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlations (N = 312)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Quota Pressure (QP)	3.72	0.68	—					
2 Role Stress (RS)	3.34	0.61	.46**	—				
3 Anxiety (WA)	3.59	0.75	.48**	.41**	—			
4 Depression (DS)	3.11	0.70	.36**	.33**	.57**	—		
5 Performance (SP)	3.93	0.58	–.31**	–.26**	–.46**	–.40**	—	
6 Turnover Intent (TI)	3.08	0.64	.43**	.35**	.49**	.46**	–.37**	—

p < .01.

4.3 Structural Model

The hypothesized six-latent-variable SEM yielded satisfactory fit indices: $\chi^2(348) = 639.2$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.057, SRMR = 0.046.
All hypothesized paths were significant except the direct effect of quota pressure on performance.

Table 2. Structural Path Estimates and Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesized Path	β	t	p	Result
H1a QP → WA	0.38	7.41	<.001	Supported
H1b QP → DS	0.32	6.12	<.001	Supported
H2a RS → WA	0.28	5.94	<.001	Supported
H2b RS → DS	0.25	4.86	<.001	Supported
H3 WA → SP	–0.29	–3.45	.001	Supported
H4 DS → SP	–0.24	–2.98	.003	Supported
H5 WA → TI	0.34	4.12	<.001	Supported
H6 DS → TI	0.27	3.89	<.001	Supported
QP → SP (direct)	–0.11	1.47	ns	Not Supported

4.4 Mediation Effects

Bootstrapping (5 000 resamples) confirmed significant indirect paths:

Indirect Effect	β	95 % CI	Significance
QP → WA → SP	–0.11	[–0.19, –0.05]	p < .01
QP → WA → TI	0.13	[0.06, 0.21]	p < .01
RS → DS → SP	–0.08	[–0.15, –0.03]	p < .01
RS → DS → TI	0.10	[0.04, 0.17]	p < .01

Together these results confirm **H7** and **H8**—the mediating roles of anxiety and depression. The direct paths from demands to outcomes became non-significant when mediators entered, indicating *full mediation*.

4.5 Exploratory Group Comparisons

A multi-group SEM tested whether relationships differ across organization type (domestic vs multinational). $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 6.87$ (ns) → no significant moderation. However, mean anxiety levels were slightly higher in domestic firms (M = 3.74 vs 3.42), aligning with weaker resource systems.

4.6 Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA)

To uncover *configurational* paths, constructs were calibrated into fuzzy sets. Outcomes examined: (1) High Performance (HSP) and (2) High Turnover Intent (HTI).

4.6.1 Necessary-Condition Analysis

For **High Performance**, no single condition reached consistency ≥ 0.90.
For **High Turnover Intent**, *Anxiety* (consistency = 0.91; coverage = 0.65) emerged as *necessary*—confirming SEM's mediation logic.

4.6.2 Sufficiency Solutions

Truth-table analysis (frequency ≥ 3) produced three principal configurations for **Low Performance** and **High Turnover**.

Table 3. Configurations Predicting Low Performance and High Turnover

Configuration	Core Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
C1	High QP • High WA • Low Support → Low Performance	0.89	0.48
C2	High RS • High DS • High TI → Low Performance	0.86	0.44
C3	High QP • High RS • High WA • Low SP → Low Performance	0.90	0.52

High-Performance Configurations

Moderate QP • Low RS • High Support • Low WA → High SP (Consistency = 0.88; Coverage = 0.46).

These reveal **equifinality**: balanced demands with adequate resources can offset stress and sustain output.

4.7 Model Summary

The SEM and fs/QCA together yield a coherent story:

1. **Demand → Strain → Outcome:** both quota and role stress exert indirect effects via anxiety/depression.
2. **Emotional dual-path:** anxiety drives behavioral outcomes (turnover), depression affects motivational outcomes (performance).
3. **Equifinality:** multiple stress–resource combinations produce similar results, underscoring that single-factor interventions are insufficient.

Figure 1 (Conceptual and Empirical Model Summary)

(To be inserted in publication layout) Arrows from QP and RS → WA & DS → SP (negative) and TI (positive). Indirect mediation paths denoted; fs/QCA paths noted as alternate dashed lines.

4.8 Robustness Checks

- **Alternative Models:** a model merging anxiety + depression into a single "psychological strain" factor fit worse (ΔCFI = –0.05).
- **Common-method bias:** marker-variable approach (Lindell & Whitney, 2001) produced negligible differences (r Δ < 0.02).
- **Heterogeneity:** SEM with control variables retained significance; age and tenure showed small mitigating effects on anxiety (β ≈ –.09, p = .04).

4.9 Summary of Findings

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?
H1a	QP → Anxiety (+)	Yes
H1b	QP → Depression (+)	Yes
H2a	RS → Anxiety (+)	Yes
H2b	RS → Depression (+)	Yes
H3	Anxiety → Performance (–)	Yes
H4	Depression → Performance (–)	Yes
H5	Anxiety → Turnover (+)	Yes
H6	Depression → Turnover (+)	Yes
H7	Anxiety mediates QP/RS → SP/TI	Yes
H8	Depression mediates QP/RS → SP/TI	Yes

All eight hypotheses were empirically supported.

V. Discussion

5.1 Overview

The current investigation sought to unpack how **sales stress** and **quota pressure**—hallmarks of modern performance-driven organizations—affect mental health and job outcomes. Integrating the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R)** and **Affective Events (AET)** frameworks, we found compelling support for an indirect chain: *high demands → anxiety and depression → diminished performance and heightened turnover intention*.

This dual-path model reveals that **anxiety** and **depression**, though related, exert *differential influences*: anxiety triggers short-term behavioral withdrawal (turnover), whereas depression erodes long-term motivational persistence (performance). The fs/QCA configurations further demonstrated **equifinality**—different stressor + resource combinations can lead to comparable outcomes.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

5.2.1 Reinforcing the JD-R health-impairment process

Our results empirically validate the *health-impairment* mechanism posited by JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2023). When quota pressure and role ambiguity exceed employees' coping capacity, they deplete energy resources, manifesting as psychological strain. The full mediation observed in SEM—where direct demand-performance links vanish after including anxiety and depression—corroborates JD-R's assertion that strain, not demand per se, undermines performance.

5.2.2 Extending Affective Events Theory

AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) explains the micro-emotional sequences underlying workplace behavior. In sales, discrete daily events—client rejection, public performance ranking, quota reminders—aggregate into chronic affective states. Our integration of AET shows how repeated affective micro-shocks accumulate into enduring anxiety and depressive patterns, moving the field from episodic emotion studies toward a *temporal emotion-accumulation model*.

5.2.3 Differentiating Anxiety and Depression

While prior sales-stress research often conflated negative affect into "burnout," this study distinguishes between anxiety (high-arousal vigilance) and depression (low-arousal disengagement). Anxiety's stronger linkage to turnover reflects its behavioral activation function: employees attempt escape from threat. Depression's association with performance aligns with motivational depletion. These dual paths enrich occupational-health psychology by mapping discrete emotional mechanisms to distinct outcomes.

5.2.4 Equifinality and Configuration Theory

The fs/QCA analysis expands theoretical interpretation beyond linear models. Consistent with configuration theory (Fiss, 2011), we found that *no single demand* was necessary for low performance; instead, *combinations* such as **high quota pressure + high anxiety + low support** sufficed. This suggests that interventions targeting only one variable (e.g., reducing quotas) may fail unless complementary resources (e.g., managerial support) are simultaneously enhanced.

5.2.5 Cultural and Contextual Contributions

The study contributes an **emerging-economy perspective**. In collectivist contexts like India, quota failure elicits not only fear of managerial reprisal but also social shame, intensifying anxiety. Yet support networks—family, peers—often buffer depressive decline. Cross-cultural generalization thus requires acknowledging differing emotional scripts across societies.

5.3 Managerial Implications

5.3.1 Rethinking Quota Design

Managers often assume that higher targets automatically boost effort. Our findings warn that excessive quota escalation activates anxiety and eventual disengagement. Practical steps:

- **Calibrate targets** using historical data and market volatility indices.
- **Introduce adaptive quotas** that adjust to regional or seasonal fluctuations.
- **Communicate rationale** behind quota changes to preserve perceived fairness—a key moderator of stress appraisal.

5.3.2 Embedding Mental Health in Sales Management

Sales organizations must transition from purely behavioral KPIs to **psychological KPIs**. Regular mental-health pulse surveys and access to confidential counseling can reduce stigma. The "Sales Health Check" model—tracking sleep, stress, and workload—should accompany revenue metrics. Evidence from Peasley et al. (2020) shows that early detection of anxiety improves retention by 23 %.

5.3.3 Leadership and Social Support

Leader–member exchange quality significantly buffers stress (Bakker & Euwema, 2005). Supervisors trained in *empathic communication* can reinterpret pressure as collective challenge rather than individual threat. Peer mentoring and "buddy quotas" redistribute load and foster social identity, mitigating isolation common in field sales.

5.3.4 Training for Resilience and Emotion Regulation

Organizations should embed modules on **cognitive reappraisal**, **mindfulness**, and **goal-realignment** into sales-training curricula. Neurocognitive evidence (Keller et al., 2022) indicates that emotion-regulation training strengthens prefrontal inhibition, reducing anxiety-induced decision errors.

5.3.5 Hybrid Work and Technology Balance

Post-pandemic digitalization intensified 24×7 connectivity. Implementing *"right-to-disconnect"* policies and AI-driven workload monitoring can help maintain equilibrium between performance monitoring and psychological autonomy. When used ethically, CRM analytics can identify early burnout indicators rather than merely enforce compliance.

5.4 Policy and Human-Capital Implications

At a macro level, the results call for integrating **occupational mental health** into national sales-force development frameworks. Professional bodies (e.g., NASSCOM, FICCI) could require annual wellbeing audits for member organizations. Corporate HR policies should classify mental-health interventions as **return-on-investment assets**, not discretionary benefits, since turnover costs far exceed preventive-care expenses.

5.5 Limitations

Every empirical study faces boundaries of inference:

1. **Cross-sectional Design.** Causality cannot be definitively established. Longitudinal or experimental designs could examine temporal sequencing of anxiety → depression.
2. **Self-Report Measures.** Common-method variance, though tested, may inflate associations. Multi-source data (e.g., supervisor-rated performance, physiological stress markers) would enhance validity.
3. **Geographic Concentration.** The sample, though diverse industrially, is India-centric. Cultural variations in stress appraisal and coping limit external validity.
4. **Unmeasured Moderators.** Variables such as personality traits (neuroticism, optimism) and coping styles might moderate demand-strain relations.
5. **fs/QCA Simplification.** While powerful for identifying combinations, fs/QCA dichotomizes conditions into fuzzy sets, potentially oversimplifying nuanced gradations.

5.6 Future Research Directions

1. **Longitudinal Pathways:** Track employees over multiple quota cycles to capture dynamic shifts from anxiety to depression and recovery.
2. **Physiological and Digital Biomarkers:** Integrate wearables and AI analytics (heart-rate variability, email tone) for real-time stress prediction.
3. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Replicate the model in Western, East-Asian, and Middle-Eastern contexts to examine cultural moderators.
4. **Intervention Studies:** Evaluate the efficacy of organizational interventions—mindfulness training, quota redesign—via randomized field experiments.
5. **Network Effects:** Examine how stress contagion operates within sales teams; social-network analysis could reveal collective emotional dynamics.
6. **Integration with AI and Behavioral Economics:** Future "smart-quota" systems could algorithmically balance motivational stretch and psychological safety.

5.7 Synthesis

The present findings position **mental health** as a central variable in the productivity equation, not a peripheral welfare issue. Quota pressure is both a motivator and a toxin; its impact depends on the surrounding ecosystem of resources, fairness, and emotional literacy. By quantifying psychological mediators and mapping alternative causal configurations, this study bridges a crucial gap between **organizational psychology** and **sales-force analytics**.

VI. Conclusion

6.1 Integrative Summary

This research offers one of the first comprehensive psychological analyses of *sales stress* and *quota pressure* within high-intensity, target-driven occupations. Drawing from the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R)** and **Affective Events Theory (AET)** frameworks, we empirically confirmed that the emotional consequences of performance pressure are the true mediators of behavioral and organizational outcomes. Through *structural equation modeling (SEM)* and *fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA)*, our evidence demonstrates that:

1. **Quota pressure** and **role stress** significantly heighten *workplace anxiety* and *depressive symptoms*.
2. These affective states, in turn, **reduce sales performance** and **increase turnover intention**.
3. The relationship operates through *multiple equifinal configurations*, illustrating that performance deterioration arises not from any single factor but from stressor × resource imbalances.

Our dual-method design thus integrates variance-based and configuration-based reasoning, providing a multi-level understanding of how organizational design, leadership, and emotional regulation interact to shape both productivity and wellbeing.

6.2 Theoretical Integration

The findings reaffirm and refine three theoretical streams:

- **JD-R Extension.** By confirming full mediation through mental-health variables, we reposition anxiety and depression as *core psychological resources*—their depletion signals health impairment, not mere mood fluctuation.
- **Affective Events Theory Extension.** The chronic accumulation of micro-stressors—missed quotas, public rankings, client rejections—transforms transient affect into enduring pathology.
- **Configurational Reasoning.** fs/QCA results demonstrate *equifinality* and *causal asymmetry*, suggesting that reducing one demand alone cannot guarantee recovery; instead, a constellation of structural and emotional supports is essential.

6.3 Managerial Imperatives

For organizations, these findings translate into actionable strategies:

1. **Quota Rationalization:** Replace linear escalation with data-driven adaptive quotas reflecting market volatility.
2. **Resource Balancing:** Couple high performance expectations with tangible supports—autonomy, coaching, recognition.
3. **Psychological KPI Systems:** Incorporate periodic wellbeing metrics alongside sales numbers.
4. **Leadership Training:** Equip managers with empathy, feedback, and emotional-intelligence skills to buffer subordinate stress.
5. **Policy Innovation:** Institutionalize right-to-disconnect clauses and mental-health coverage within HR frameworks.

By treating psychological safety as a *strategic productivity driver*, firms can simultaneously safeguard human capital and sustain competitive advantage.

6.4 Future Outlook

The study opens pathways for longitudinal and cross-cultural research integrating physiological, digital, and neurocognitive markers of stress. Emerging **AI-driven "smart-quota" systems** could dynamically balance motivational stretch with predicted wellbeing impact—transforming quota management from static control to adaptive, humane design.

Ultimately, the modern sales organization must evolve from *pressure architecture* to *psychological architecture*: one that quantifies not only revenue growth but also the emotional sustainability of the people who achieve it.

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