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You're Not Old as Long as You're Learning : Ageism, Burnout, and Development Among Italian Teachers

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You're not old as long as you're learning.

Ageism, burnout and development among Italian teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to explore the buffering role of opportunities for professional development within the frame of the indirect relationship between workplace age discrimination (as a job demand) and job performance on a sample of $N = 325$ Italian teachers. Results of moderated mediation analysis indicated that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace age discrimination and impaired job performance. Furthermore, the relationship between workplace age discrimination and performance through the mediation of emotional exhaustion became stronger at lower levels of professional development. Although professional development is recognised as a crucial job resource, the current study sheds light on its protective role among teachers dealing with discrimination caused by their age. Fostering of professional development could prevent teachers from feeling emotionally exhausted and, in turn, from the occurrence of impaired performance.

Keywords: Professional development, Teachers, Age discrimination, Burnout, Ageing, JD-R model

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You're not old as long as you're learning.

Ageism, burnout and development among Italian teachers

Teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful professions, given the need to cope with an uncertain and emotionally demanding work environment and to execute tasks that involve high levels of mental flexibility, emotional management skills, sustained attention, and resilience (Roeser et al., 2013). Consequently, teachers exhibit higher levels of work-related stress symptoms when compared to human-service professions (Johnson et al., 2005). Among these ill-health conditions, teachers emerged as particularly exposed to the occurrence of burnout symptoms, with a prevalence rate fluctuating between 5-30% (Gil-Monte, Carlotto, & Gonçalves, 2011). The remarkable incidence of mental health symptoms and disorders among teachers has encouraged a growing interest in the investigation of the nomological network of teachers' burnout, especially in terms of causes and effects (Van Droogenbroeck & Spruyt, 2015). Research evidence indicates that the occurrence of burnout symptoms could act at different levels. For instance, they could deteriorate teachers' health and well-being, on the one hand, and their professional effectiveness and results, on the other side. At the individual level, teachers' burnout may translate into symptoms of depression (Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013), augmented blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease (Roeser et al., 2013). As previously stated, activities in the classroom are not immune to the effect of teachers' burnout. Hence, burned-out teachers are unable to create productive learning environments for their students (Taylor & Milllear, 2016) and report higher rates of absenteeism, turnover, impaired job performance (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010), lower levels of commitment and effectiveness (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014), and poor job satisfaction (Domitrovich et al., 2016).

As interactions with students mainly characterise teaching activities, a critical effect of teachers' burnout entails the effectiveness of classroom activities. Burnout among teachers

1 could impair the quality of emotionally supportive teacher-student interactions (Jennings,
2 2015), jeopardise students' social and academic adjustment (Hoglund, Klinge, & Hosan,
3 2015), and generate a poorer classroom climate that negatively affects students' behaviour
4 and performance (Wolf et al., 2015).

5 Overall, teachers experiencing burnout symptoms are less effective in organising and
6 managing their classrooms, unable to provide their students with emotional support and
7 effectively deal with their needs, and, consequently, are inefficient in guaranteeing students'
8 learning and accomplishments. Emotional exhaustion represents the core dimension of
9 burnout and the first occurring component of this syndrome trajectory that, in turn, leads to
10 cynicism and a reduced level of self-efficacy resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

11 Accordingly, the current study focused on emotional exhaustion as a measure of teachers'
12 burnout. Exhaustion results from depletion of one's physical and emotional resources and
13 manifests itself with persistent feelings of tiredness, chronic fatigue, and a lack of energy for
14 carrying out daily activities (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2016).

15 In particular, the current study framed teachers' emotional exhaustion – as the critical feature
16 of burnout – using a leading paradigm of this phenomenon, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-
17 R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). As such, this research contributed to the literature on
18 the JD-R model with an earlier attempt to include workplace age discrimination as a job
19 demand.

20

21 **Workplace age discrimination as a job demand**

22 The JD-R model states that each profession is characterised by specific risk factors
23 associated with job stress. These factors can be classified into two overarching categories: job
24 demands and job resources. In line with previous burnout models, the JD-R perspective
25 postulates that job demands and job resources are characterised by different properties and

1 effects on individual and job-related outcomes (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel,
2 2014). On the one hand, job resources are functional to attain work goals and to tackle job
3 demands; on the other hand, job demands represent those aspects of a job that imply physical,
4 cognitive, or emotional costs and act as the initiator of the so-called health-impairment
5 process. According to this process, persistent exposure to excessive job demands may trigger
6 symptoms of emotional exhaustion that, in the long run, may result in detrimental individual
7 and job-related outcomes (e.g., an impaired job performance).

8 Consistent with the health-impairment process, the enduring experience of workplace
9 age discrimination (i.e., a job demand) could engender a condition of chronic emotional
10 exhaustion and eventually translate into harmful outcomes for individuals and their work
11 environment (i.e., impairing teachers' performance).

12 Workplace age discrimination, defined as the prejudicial treatment of an individual based on
13 age, could significantly threaten victims' well-being (Wood, Braeken, & Niven, 2013). In
14 academic literature, there is a significant consensus on the definition of workplace age
15 discrimination as a job demand or stressor, which leads to adverse consequences (Hershcovis,
16 2011). Posthuma and Campion (2009) highlighted five stereotypes concerning older workers:
17 they are assumed to be poor performers, less open to learning processes, more resistant to
18 change, less prone to invest in organisation activities, and more expensive than their younger
19 colleagues. On the other hand, there is compelling evidence from academic research that also
20 younger workers experience age-based stereotypes in the workplace (Bertolino, Truxillo, &
21 Fraccaroli, 2013). For instance, older workers are assumed to act more frequently in terms of
22 organisational citizenship behaviours aimed at supporting the organisation compared to their
23 younger colleagues (Truxillo, McCune, Bertolino, & Fraccaroli, 2012).
24 Furthermore, younger workers are perceived as unreliable and inexperienced compared to
25 older colleagues (Bal, Reiss, Rudolph & Baltes, 2011). Overall, this empirical evidence

1 suggests that both age groups (i.e., younger and older employees) are susceptible to
2 stereotype threat (Von Hippel, Kalokerinos, & Henry 2013). Nevertheless, age-related
3 stereotypes are associated with detrimental outcomes only among older workers (Von Hippel,
4 Kalokerinos, Haanterä, & Zacher, 2019). Stereotypes about the connection between youth
5 and inexperience can be faded as young employees gain experience and competencies over
6 time. In contrast, stereotypes associated with older employees are doomed to become
7 stronger over time (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). Consequently, older
8 workers are likely to display lower levels of organisational commitment, job satisfaction,
9 greater turnover intention, and a decreased degree of engagement toward their work.

10 In the school context, the association between workplace age discrimination and symptoms
11 of emotional exhaustion could be explained through the lens of organisational justice. In
12 other words, employees who experience inequality due to their age may be susceptible to a
13 severe drain on their emotional resources and, consequently, may feel emotionally exhausted
14 (Greenberg, 2006).

15 Based on the theoretical outlines described above, the following hypothesis was
16 formulated:

17

18 *Hypothesis 1.* Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace age
19 discrimination and job performance.

20 Along with a set of risk factors for burnout, categorised as job demands, the JD-R
21 model identified those variables that can hinder the occurrence of the health-impairment
22 process. These are labeled job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). More specifically,
23 resources may motivate employees through a twofold process. Primarily, they promote
24 extrinsic motivation using their crucial role in dealing with job demands and reaching work
25 goals. Furthermore, they are intrinsically motivating and able to foster employees' growth,

1 learning, and development through the fulfilment of the basic human needs for autonomy,
2 competence, and relatedness (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & lens, 2008). The
3 current study focused on the role of professional development (as a job resource) to moderate
4 the negative impact of workplace age discrimination among teachers. The JD-R model
5 postulates that job resources could enable employees to tackle job demands and prevent an
6 excessive amount of these demands from translating into emotional exhaustion, thus
7 buffering the model's health-impairment process (Lesener, Gusy, & Wolter, 2019). In
8 particular, teachers' professional development comprises activities that buffer the negative
9 consequences of workplace age discrimination. In particular, keeping up-to-date,
10 experimenting, asking for feedback, and collaborating with colleagues to improve lessons and
11 school development (Evers, Kreijns, Van der Heijden, & Gerrichhauzen, 2011).

12 This description of the protective role played by teachers' professional development
13 also agrees with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which
14 postulates that human behaviour is primarily driven by the motivation of maintaining
15 available resources and gaining new ones. Empirical results show that an individual's goal-
16 orientation varies over time, moving from the need for growth toward maintenance or loss
17 prevention (Van der Heijden, Van Vuuren, Kooij, & De Lange, 2015). Earlier findings
18 revealed that teachers provided with opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills
19 experienced an enhanced ability to effectively manage and execute daily tasks (i.e., teacher
20 efficacy), thus reducing their likelihood of experiencing burnout symptoms (Gaikhorst,
21 Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2015). We argue that teachers' professional development is a
22 job resource that might play a crucial moderating role in the relationship between workplace
23 age discrimination and emotional exhaustion. If employees - in this case, teachers -
24 experience workplace age discrimination, they may perceive fewer opportunities for
25 extrinsically rewarding job features, such as promotions and competition with younger

1 colleagues. Therefore, they may change their preference to more intrinsically rewarding job
2 features, such as opportunities to flourish and develop in their work (Kooij, De Lange,
3 Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2011). Accordingly, earlier findings revealed that older teachers
4 experience a considerable shift from extrinsic work motives, such as demonstrating one's
5 worth as a teacher, toward more intrinsic work motives, such as perceiving greater
6 effectiveness of one's teaching skills (Huberman, 1989).

7 Older employees perceive limited opportunities for career progression, such as
8 promotions, due to age-related stereotyping, and face more considerable difficulties in
9 finding new job opportunities (Van der Heijden, Boon, Van der Klink, & Meijjs, 2009).
10 Teachers, in particular, deal with a severe lack of alternatives in this regard (Philipp &
11 Kunter, 2013). The current study, therefore, hypothesised that teachers might benefit from
12 development opportunities if they suffer from workplace age discrimination. In other words,
13 teachers who react and adapt to their environment by being actively engaged in professional
14 development opportunities can better cope with the negative job demand of discrimination
15 due to their age. Based on this rationale, we tested the following hypothesis:

16 *Hypothesis 2.* Teachers' professional development moderates the strength of the
17 positive relationship between workplace age discrimination and emotional exhaustion.

18 In particular, low levels of teacher professional development are expected to
19 strengthen the relationship between workplace age discrimination and emotional exhaustion.
20 In contrast, high levels of professional development are expected to weaken the relationship
21 between workplace age discrimination and emotional exhaustion.

22 The broader framework of the health-impairment process defined by the JD-R model
23 includes negative, work-related consequences as an outcome of this process. The current
24 study, therefore, included teachers' professional development as a moderator in the
25 association between workplace age discrimination (i.e., job demand), emotional exhaustion

1 (i.e., the core dimension of burnout), and impaired job performance (i.e., the outcome of the
2 health-impairment process). This rationale led to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

3 *Hypothesis 3.* The indirect effect of workplace age discrimination on job performance
4 through emotional exhaustion is more robust at lower levels of the moderator: namely,
5 teachers' professional development.

6 The hypothesised moderated mediation model is represented in Figure 1.

7

8 --- PLEASE INCLUDE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE ---

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Method

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Participants and procedure

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Measures

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Workplace Age Discrimination. This construct was measured with the nine-item scale developed by Marchiondo and colleagues (2016), which was translated from English to Italian and then back-translated (Hambleton, 1994). A sample item was: "My contributions

1 are not valued as much due to my age". Participants rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale
 2 ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*often*). The internal consistency of the scale yielded a
 3 Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .93$. This result is consistent with previous results
 4 suggesting an internal consistency of $\alpha = .93$ (Marchiondo et al., 2016).

5 *Teacher Professional Development.* This dimension was measured with the 21-item
 6 scale developed by Evers and colleagues (2016), which was translated from Dutch to Italian
 7 and then re-translated (Hambleton, 1994). The scale is composed of five sub-dimensions: a)
 8 keeping up-to-date, b) experimenting, c) reflecting and asking for feedback, d) collaborating
 9 with colleagues with the aim of improving lessons, and e) collaborating with colleagues to
 10 enhance school development. Items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1
 11 (*never*) to 4 (*often*). In the present study, the reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .89$. This
 12 coefficient is in accordance with the internal consistency score reported for the Teacher
 13 Professional Development scale by previous studies among teachers (Evers, Yamkovenko, &
 14 Van Amersfoort, 2017; Liu, Hallinger, & Feng, 2016).

15 *Emotional Exhaustion.* The central component of job burnout, which entails feelings
 16 of being overextended, was measured using the 5-item subscale of the MBI-Educators Survey
 17 (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1996; Simbula & Guglielmi, 2010). This measure reported a
 18 high reliability in previous studies based on samples of Italian studies, with values ranging
 19 from $\alpha = .88$ to $\alpha = .92$ (Guglielmi, Panari, Simbula, & Mazzetti, 2014; Simbula, Mazzetti, &
 20 Guglielmi, 2011). A sample item is: "I feel emotionally drained by my work". Participants
 21 were asked to provide an answer on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every*
 22 *day*). The internal consistency of this scale was $\alpha = .87$.

23 *Job performance.* This variable was measured through the following single item
 24 developed by Shimazu and colleagues (2010): "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst
 25 performance, and 10 is the top performance, how would you rate your overall job

1 performance during the past four weeks?". Answers were provided through an 11-point
2 Likert scale ranging from 0 (*worst possible job performance a person could have on this job*)
3 to 10 (*top job performance*).

4 *Control variables.* The participants' age and gender were used as control variables.
5 Furthermore, respondents' participation in training activities at the time was included as a
6 covariate.

7

8 **Strategy of analysis**

9 The study hypotheses were tested using the PROCESS macro - Version 3.0 (Hayes,
10 2017). Specifically, to test *Hypothesis 1* - which posits that emotional exhaustion mediates
11 the relationship between workplace age discrimination and job performance - we used Model
12 4. Model 1 was employed in order to test *Hypothesis 2* - aimed at investigating whether
13 teachers' professional development moderates the relationship between workplace age
14 discrimination and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, Model 7 was applied to test the
15 moderated mediation model postulated in *Hypothesis 3*. Specifically, we investigated whether
16 the interaction between workplace age discrimination (independent variable) and teachers'
17 professional development (moderator) is related to emotional exhaustion (mediator), which is
18 in turn related to job performance (outcome). We specified 10,000 bootstrap samples to
19 obtain robust estimates of standard errors and confidence intervals, and we mean-centred the
20 independent and moderator variables.

21 Moreover, gender, age, and involvement in training activities were included as control
22 variables. Gender was measured as a covariate because previous studies suggest relevant
23 gender differences in burnout symptoms. For instance, results from a noteworthy meta-
24 analysis based on 183 studies revealed that women are slightly more emotionally exhausted
25 than men (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Further empirical evidence suggests that women's

1 higher scores on exhaustion could be explained through lower levels of global self-esteem
2 (Herrmann, Koeppen, & Kessels, 2019).

3 In addition to older workers, young individuals could also experience workplace age
4 discrimination (e.g., Marchiondo et al., 2016). In other words, age could have a non-linear
5 relationship with workplace age discrimination. Hence, we included age as a control variable
6 and modelled it as quadratic. Moreover, we asked participants whether they were involved in
7 any training activities at the time of the data collection. We included this control variable
8 because taking part in a training activity, which represents an initiative aimed to increase
9 employees' skills and competencies, could be assumed to influence teachers' perception of
10 professional development.

11

12

Results

13 Preliminary analyses

14 Mean values, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and Cronbach's alpha
15 coefficients of all the study variables are reported in Table 1. The correlation coefficients
16 between the independent variable, the moderator, the mediator, and the criterion variable
17 were significant and in the expected direction, except for the relationship between workplace
18 age discrimination and job performance ($r = -.07$; *ns*) and between workplace age
19 discrimination and teachers' professional development ($r = -.02$; *ns*). On the other hand, this
20 result may be due to multiple, unmeasured mediators acting at cross-purposes and
21 invalidating each other (Hayes, 2017).

22

23

--- PLEASE INCLUDE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ---

24

25 Testing the model

1 Figure 2 plots the interaction effect between workplace age discrimination and
2 teachers' professional development on emotional exhaustion, showing that this positive
3 relationship was stronger among teachers perceiving higher and middle opportunities of
4 professional development.

5

6 *--- PLEASE INCLUDE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE ---*

7

8 **Discussion**

9 The current study was aimed at testing the health-impairment process included in the
10 JD-R model with a specific focus on the protective role of teachers' professional
11 development. In particular, the primary purpose was to provide the first empirical support for
12 workplace age discrimination as a significant job demand in the education sector. The
13 obtained results indicate that the average levels of perceived age discrimination were
14 positively related to emotional exhaustion. In line with the health-impairment process of the
15 JD-R model, our findings revealed a mediating role played by emotional exhaustion (i.e., the
16 core dimension of burnout) in the relationship between workplace age discrimination and
17 impaired job performance. Therefore, the current results contributed to the literature on the
18 JD-R model by suggesting the opportunity to include workplace age discrimination as a
19 primary stressor – or a job demand – able to trigger the health impairment process of burnout.
20 Hence, discrimination because of age could significantly contribute to a poorly designed job,
21 which exhausts teachers' mental and physical resources.

22 To be specific, the perceptions of age discrimination within schools produce a
23 condition of chronic emotional exhaustion among teachers that, in turn, jeopardises their
24 ability to perform adequately in classroom activities. On the other hand, the opportunity for

1 professional development could prevent exhaustion symptoms, as suggested by the regression
2 coefficient values.

3 The present study concurs with empirical evidence suggesting that perceived age
4 discrimination promotes depression symptoms, such as reduced self-esteem, and undermines
5 workers' health and optimal functioning (Allen, 2016; Garstka et al., 2004). In particular,
6 earlier findings indicated that perceived age-related mistreatment within organisations also
7 entails adverse work-related outcomes, such as lower levels of job satisfaction (Marchiondo,
8 Gonzales, & Williams, 2017). These results concur with previous evidence suggesting that
9 emotional exhaustion decreases teachers' involvement in their job and compromises their
10 supportive behaviour toward students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

11 On the current sample of Italian teachers, workplace age discrimination was not
12 negatively related to their job performance. In contrast, the performance was adversely
13 affected by symptoms of exhaustion, thus suggesting that teachers experiencing a severe
14 depletion of their emotional resources are unable to provide adequate performance in their
15 job. Moreover, the current findings agree with the evidence that emotional exhaustion among
16 teachers may reduce the ability to provide instructional support and limit commitment to
17 student achievements (Shen et al., 2015).

18 Along with the main effects of demands (i.e., workplace age discrimination), the
19 current study also corroborated the buffering hypothesis included in the JD-R model. The
20 obtained findings reveal that teachers' professional development could mitigate the negative
21 association between workplace age discrimination and exhaustion. As such, teachers that
22 experience minimal opportunities for professional development could exhibit critical levels
23 of emotional exhaustion, even when only facing a weak condition of age discrimination
24 within their school. This evidence substantiated the hypothesis that organisational contexts
25 that invest in professional development initiatives may boost relevant work-related outcomes,

1 such as job competence, motivation, and enthusiasm for carrying out work tasks (Park &
2 Jacobs, 2011). This evidence enriches previous results revealing that low opportunities to
3 acquire new knowledge and skills could flow into adverse attitudes towards one's job, such
4 as low arousal and dissatisfaction attributed to an inadequately stimulating environment
5 (Guglielmi, Simbula, Mazzetti, Tabanelli, & Bonfiglioli, 2013).

6 Moreover, professional development emerged as a critical job resource in decreasing
7 the association between job demands and emotional exhaustion. In line with previous results,
8 the chance to acquire new knowledge and competences could foster teachers' efficacy and
9 mitigate their perception of a prejudicial treatment due to their age. In other words, an
10 improved capability in performing daily tasks could prevent the severe depletion of
11 emotional resources (i.e., emotional exhaustion) among teachers who experience age-related
12 inequality within schools (Gaikhorst *et al.*, 2015).

13

14 **Limitations and future research directions**

15 All data were collected using self-reports only and, therefore, may be subject to
16 common method bias. On the other hand, all measures employed in the present study
17 reported satisfactory internal consistency indices; thus, the measurement bias is expected to
18 be relatively small in this research (Spector, 2006). To further minimise this possible bias, we
19 have included some procedures. First, the current study participants' anonymity was fully
20 protected, and they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers. Consequently,
21 study participants were urged to answer as frankly as possible. Our empirical model included
22 an interaction effect; therefore, the likelihood that the established relationships were included
23 in participants' cognitive maps is rather low (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010).

24 Moreover, workplace age discrimination, emotional exhaustion, and the perceived
25 capability to efficiently perform one's job are subjective by nature. Hence, using self-report

1 measures would be the most reasonable way to explore these constructs, whereas a collection of
2 objective measures would not be practical. An additional limitation concerns the cross-
3 sectional nature of the study, which did not allow the direction of the causal relationship
4 between the investigated variables to be determined. For instance, it may be argued that
5 teachers who are dissatisfied with their performance may attribute this decline to perceived
6 age discrimination.

7 Thus, future research in this field should rely on multi-wave designs in order to
8 explore the stability and genuine direction of relationships under investigation. As a further
9 limitation, this study examined a particular – yet relevant – job resource that was able to
10 buffer the association between workplace age discrimination and teachers' emotional
11 exhaustion. Future studies should further explore the knowledge of protective factors within
12 the school context to better understand the process of teachers' psychological disengagement
13 over time. Additionally, the current study was affected by limited opportunities for
14 ascertaining the reliability of the single-item measure of performance. On the other hand, this
15 renowned measure of performance is characterised by plain comprehensibility and
16 transparency of the construct under investigation (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013). Future
17 research should foster the present findings by replicating the current model using a multi-item
18 measure of job performance.

19

20 **Practical implications**

21 The current study underlined how aging might prove strenuous for teachers,
22 especially when combined with a substantial prejudice concerning one's weakening ability
23 and reduced potential contribution. Teachers experiencing discrimination due to their age
24 tend to feel more emotionally exhausted and, consequently, their performance declines.

25 Accordingly, schools should provide suitable instruments aimed at dealing with this form of

1 prejudice. A possible approach aimed at decreasing the occurrence of workplace age
2 discrimination threats is to develop work teams that overcome age demarcations. To be
3 specific, intergenerational groups' presence is still limited, although it could lead to the
4 development of learning processes among members. As a result, younger employees may be
5 socialised to organisational (i.e., school) culture by their older colleagues. In turn, they could
6 learn much about the use of new instruments, such as ICT (Findsen, 2015). School principals
7 could create work teams that mix younger and older teachers to enhance reciprocity and
8 useful innovation among teachers, using one-to-one mentoring schemes (Zachery, 2000). To
9 systematically adjust teams' composition, schools' principals can also halt the negative
10 consequences of discriminatory stereotypes about older teachers through structured
11 discussions that – explicitly and implicitly – tackle this form of stigmatisation (Truxillo,
12 Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015). Iweins and colleagues (2013) suggest reducing harmful
13 stereotypes against older colleagues and ageism in the workplace could benefit from
14 interventions based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. One of the most effective
15 strategies for improving the quality of contact with an outgroup and preventing group biases
16 is based on proposing actual face-to-face interaction between colleagues of distinct groups.
17 This approach may foster a diversity perspective and tackle harmful stereotypes against
18 individuals perceived as outgroup members, such as older employees (Yzerbyt, & Demoulin,
19 2010). Based on this related theoretical and empirical literature, workplace age discrimination
20 could be reduced through intervention strategies encouraging an organisational multi-age
21 perspective.

22 Additionally, opportunities for developing new competencies could protect teachers'
23 well-being in different ways: on the one hand, professional development could prevent
24 symptoms of emotional exhaustion; on the other, it could enhance levels of teachers'

1 motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment (Simbula et al., 2011; Vignoli, Guglielmi, &
2 Balduzzi, 2018).

3 Given the relevance of professional development among older teachers, further
4 practical implications concern identifying training opportunities that meet these requirements,
5 and that could meet older teachers' needs in particular. The implementation of training
6 activities that are specifically focused on social and emotional skills could represent a
7 beneficial strategy. This type of intervention is growing increasingly popular due to its
8 effectiveness (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). It has been shown
9 to moderate burnout levels more efficiently than alternatives that have traditionally been
10 applied for this purpose (Iancu, Rusu, Măroiu, Păcurar, & Maricuțoiu, 2018).

11 As suggested by Tsouloupas and colleagues (2010), emotional exhaustion could be
12 prevented through workshops focused on developing skills aimed at regulating emotions and
13 tackling emotional demands in the workplace. Emotion regulation workshops may play a
14 twofold role in combatting exhaustion levels in older teachers. On the one hand, teachers'
15 emotional stability may lessen difficulties in regulating emotions that are associated with
16 exhaustion; on the other hand, this kind of training activity may enhance teachers' ability to
17 cope with stressful situations efficiently may arise during classroom activities.

18 A further kind of training that may be suitable for teachers would involve
19 strengthening their ability to promote emotional awareness and communication, self-
20 regulation, social problem solving, and relationship management skills to students (Berg,
21 Bradshaw, Jo, & Ialongo, 2016). The attainment of these skills would translate into
22 significant changes in students' behaviour that, in turn, would have indirect positive
23 repercussions on the prevention of emotional exhaustion among teachers.

24

25

Conclusions

1 This study investigated the buffering role of teachers' professional development in the
2 health-impairment process postulated by the JD-R model. As expected, emotional exhaustion
3 mediated the association between workplace age discrimination and job performance.
4 Furthermore, professional development among teachers mitigated this association. The role
5 of professional development was supported by evidence that fewer learning opportunities are
6 associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion. However, this evidence is within the
7 framework of school contexts weakly characterised by workplace age discrimination. From a
8 theoretical point of view, the current study further validates the JD-R model in the context of
9 teachers' professional development and supports workplace age discrimination as a job
10 demand. From a practical perspective, school principals who are willing to create a healthy
11 school environment and promote the quality of learning processes among their students
12 should take steps to prevent age discrimination issues while also investing in their teachers'
13 professional development.

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1 **Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations between study variables

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. Gender (<i>0 = women; 1 = men</i>) | - | - | - | - | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 43.31 | 9.76 | - | -.02 | - | | | | |
| 3. Current Training (<i>0 = no; 1 = yes</i>) | - | - | - | -.17** | -.13* | - | | | |
| 4. Workplace Age Discrimination | 1.63 | .78 | .62 | .02 | -.33** | -.05 | (.93) | | |
| 5. Teachers' Professional Development | 2.64 | .51 | .30 | -.14** | .05 | .28** | -.02 | (.89) | |
| 6. Emotional Exhaustion | 12.16 | 7.33 | .59 | -.09 | .04 | -.06 | .18** | -.13* | (.87) |
| 7. Job Performance | 7.17 | 1.46 | - | -.01 | .10 | .10 | -.07 | .36** | -.16** |

2 **Notes:** *N* = 325. Cronbach's α in brackets along the diagonal. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. **p*
3 < .05; ***p* < .01

1 **Table 2.** Results of the moderated mediation model for job performance

| Variable | Emotional Exhaustion | | | Job Performance | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----|--------|-----------------------|-----|------|
| | B | SE | p | B | SE | p |
| Gender | -2.20* | .96 | .020 | -.03 | .20 | ns |
| Age | .00 | .00 | .050 | .00 | .00 | ns |
| Current Training | -.45 | .83 | ns | .26 | .16 | ns |
| Workplace Age Discrimination | 1.76** | .53 | < .001 | -.06 | .11 | ns |
| Teachers' Professional Development | -2.24** | .80 | .010 | | | |
| Workplace Age Discrimination X Teachers' Professional Development | 2.82** | .77 | < .001 | | | |
| Emotional Exhaustion | | | | -.03** | .01 | .010 |
| Model Summary | R ² = .11** | | | R ² = .04* | | |

Conditional indirect effect of workplace age discrimination (X) on job performance (Y) through emotional exhaustion (M) at values of teachers' professional development (W)

| | Effect | Boot SE | Boot 95% CI |
|-------------------------------------------|--------|---------|-------------|
| LOW Teachers' Professional Development | -.01 | .03 | -.07; .04 |
| MEDIUM Teachers' Professional Development | -.05 | .03 | -.12; -.01 |
| HIGH Teachers' Professional Development | -.09 | .05 | -.19; -.02 |

2 **Notes:** N = 325; *p < .05; **p < .01

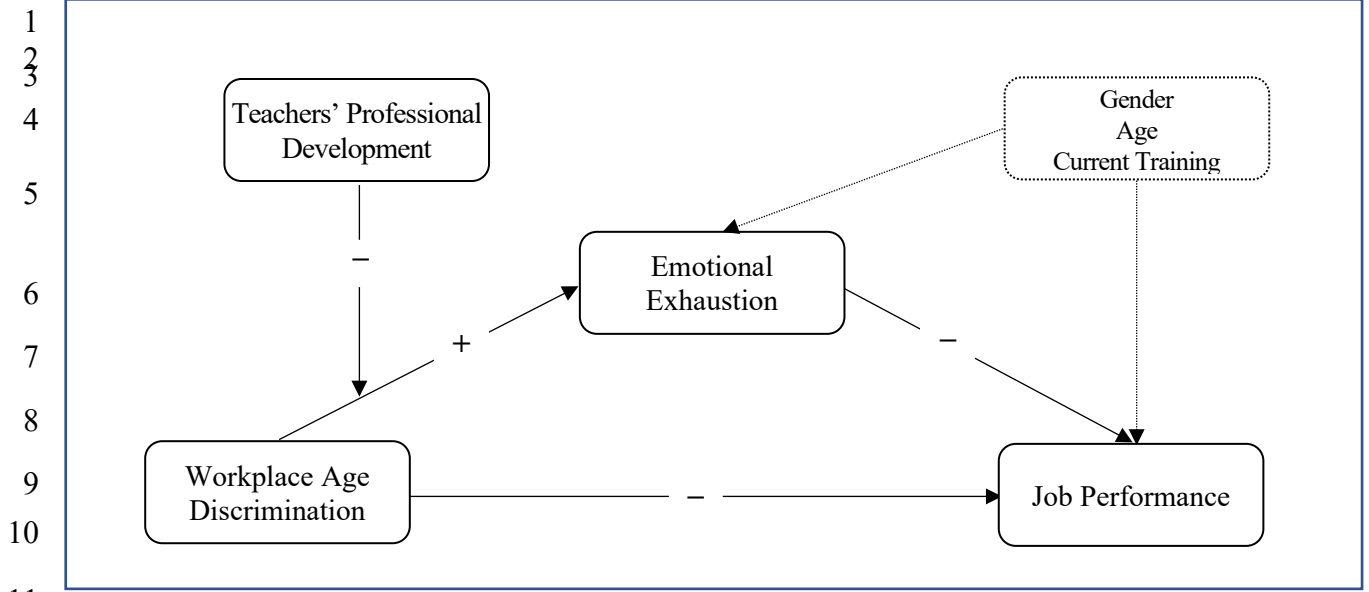
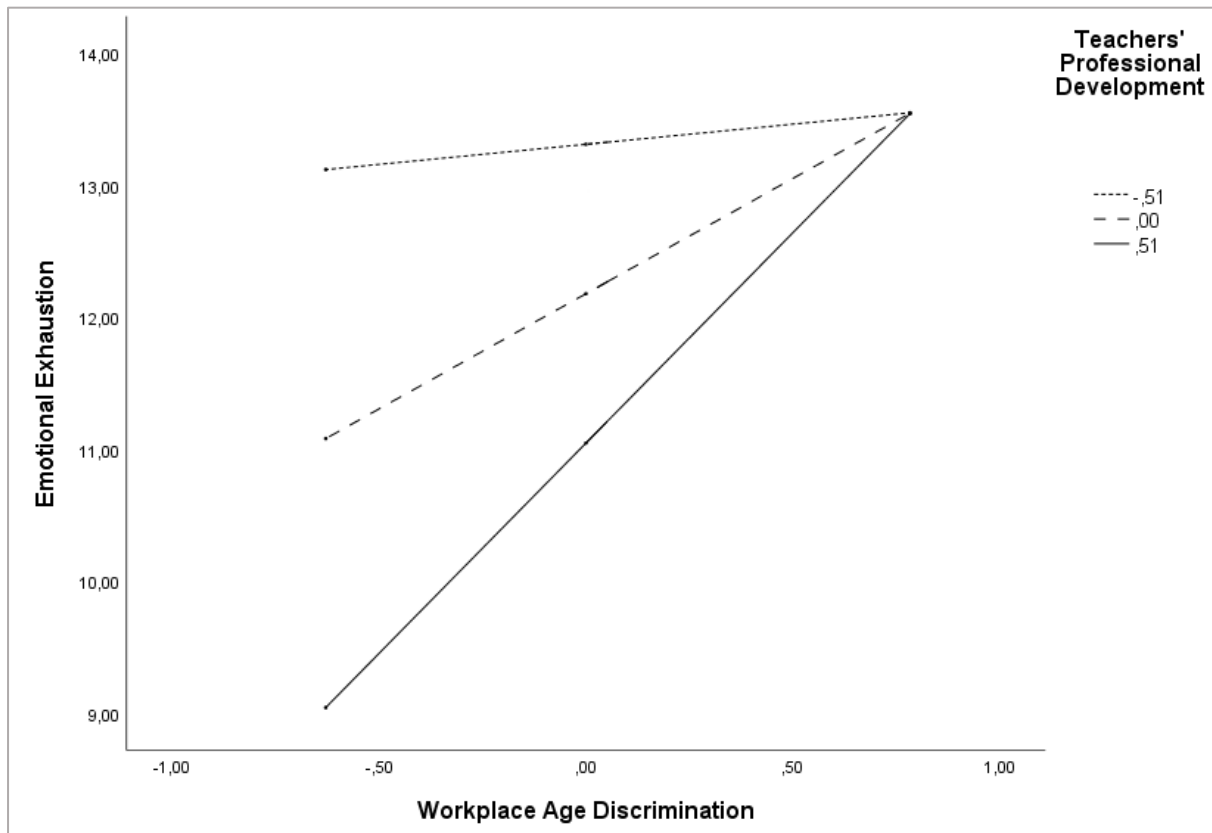


Figure 1. The hypothesized moderated mediation model

- 1 **Figure 2.** Workplace age discrimination with teachers' professional development interaction
- 2 effect for emotional exhaustion
- 3



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