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I, Hamad Al-Jorani, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

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Analysing the Correlation Between Worker Welfare and Organisational Efficiency at McDonald's UK and Global

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Employee well-being has become one of the most important issues in the fast-food, or quick-service restaurant (QSR) industry. Fast food jobs are fast-paced, low-paying, physically demanding and rely heavily on frontline workers who interact directly with customers. For this reason, the workplace treatment of employees can also influence their health and happiness, as well as the business's performance. The most obvious example of this is McDonald's. It has over 40,000 restaurants worldwide and is one of the largest private employers in the United Kingdom, so its employment practices impact a large number of individuals and standards throughout the entire restaurant industry. This dissertation explores the relationship between workers' welfare and organisational effectiveness at McDonald's in the United Kingdom and worldwide. It highlights the relationship between job stress, job burnout, staff turnover, customer satisfaction, and business performance. The study uses only secondary data, meaning it draws together and analyses existing published research and industry information rather than collecting new data. It aims to demonstrate that employee care can help McDonald's improve organisational efficiency and to suggest realistic ways McDonald's can enhance welfare without compromising performance. In this study, worker welfare covers both how employees feel, including their stress, burnout, and satisfaction, and the conditions that shape those feelings, such as pay, working hours, and managerial support. Organisational efficiency refers to the smooth and profitable operations of the business, including service delivery levels, customer satisfaction, and the cost of replacing staff members.

1.2 Background

McDonald's is in an industry with high pressure and an extremely high turnover rate. In fast food, turnover rates often reach or exceed 100% annually, and some observers argue that high staff turnover is even part of the fast-food business model (Economic Hardship Reporting Project, 2024). This turnover costs a lot of money. The hourly wage of one employee of the restaurant is estimated to be about \$2,000-\$5,000 in average, as the replacement costs (recruitment, onboarding, training, etc.) (Paytronix, 2025). The figures indicate that worker welfare is not only a moral issue, but also an economic one, as staff turnover-related expenses have become a reality and are an ongoing cost for McDonald's.

In the UK, a large proportion of employment in fast food establishments is insecure. In 2025, there were around 1.17 million people in the UK on zero-hours contracts – of which about 28.8% worked in the accommodation and food sector, and many were young (16–24 years) (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2025). This debate has been closely linked to

McDonald's. It has already offered around 115,000 of its workers in the UK the chance to move from zero-hour contracts to fixed-hour contracts; however, most reportedly chose to remain on flexible terms ("Young people," 2018). The business has also had significant welfare issues: In 2023, the business entered into a legally binding agreement with the UK equality regulator to address sexual harassment after receiving many complaints from workers in the workplace (Zero Hours Justice, 2023), and a number of restaurants have been subject to strike action, primarily regarding pay and conditions. In other parts of the world, similar tensions manifest themselves in other ways: in the USA, for example, in wage disputes, or in other markets, in terms of working conditions; McDonald's provides an illustrative example to explore the relationship between welfare and efficiency in both the UK and world markets.

This is a complex business problem with overlapping causes that feed into one another; it is a "messy" problem. The mix of low pay, irregular hours, challenging work schedules, challenging customers, and limited management support all influence employee attitudes and behavior in the workplace. The prevalence of the strain is supported by Ghazali et al. (2024), who reported that 72.7% of fast-food workers experienced high stress levels. Burnout and stress increase the likelihood of employee attrition, poor service, and disengagement, all of which negatively impact customer satisfaction and profitability. Understanding this relationship at McDonald's, the market leader, is therefore valuable for managers, employees, and policymakers alike.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

While McDonald's dominates the fast-food industry, its front-line employees are constantly under welfare pressure, which could threaten the efficiency McDonald's relies on. There is a high prevalence of insecure work: in 2025, approximately 1.17 million people in the UK were on zero-hours contracts, with a significant proportion working in the accommodation and food service industry (ONS, 2025). McDonald's has played a prominent part in this debate and has been the focus of significant welfare issues, including a legally binding agreement in 2023 with the UK equality regulator on sexual harassment (Zero Hours Justice, 2023), and numerous episodes of strike action over pay and conditions. The pressures are significant because stress and burnout are common in the fast-food industry: 72.7% of fast-food workers experienced high levels of stress (Ghazali et al., 2024). Stress has been shown to increase staff turnover and reduce service quality, which impacts customer experience and profitability. The problem, therefore, is that poor employee welfare and organisational efficiency appear to be linked at McDonald's, yet this relationship remains poorly understood in the fast-food context. Much of the evidence relating to well-being, turnover, and performance has been drawn from other sectors of the service industry, including hospitality and healthcare, and not specifically from the fast food sector, and few studies have considered the highly franchised nature of McDonald's organization. This creates a clear gap: there is a need to summarise the

current evidence to understand the links between worker welfare and efficiency at McDonald's in the UK and worldwide. This study aims to fill this gap.

1.4 Research Aim

This study aims to examine the relationship between employee well-being (job stress, burnout, and compensation) and organisational efficiency (operational performance, customer service, and employee turnover) at McDonald's in the UK and globally, using secondary data.

1.5 Research Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study sets four objectives:

1. To determine the main factors that influence the employees' well-being at work at McDonald's, including job stress, burnout, and job satisfaction.
2. To explore main activities and situations that lead to stress and burnout, including work environment, wages, and supervisor support.
3. To assess the effect of employee welfare on the organisational efficiency of McDonald's in relation to employee turnover and customer satisfaction.
4. To make evidence-based recommendations to McDonald's for employee wellness and stress/burnout reduction.

1.6 Research Questions

Three questions guide the research:

1. What are the major factors that influence employee well-being at McDonald's?
2. Which tasks and working conditions most contribute to stress and burnout among McDonald's employees?
3. How does employee well-being relate to McDonald's organisational efficiency, particularly staff turnover and customer satisfaction?
4. How can McDonald's improve staff well-being and reduce stress and burnout?

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the topic of research and why employee well-being is a serious business problem for McDonald's in the UK and globally. It established the context for the problem with high staff turnover, insecure contracts, reported concerns about welfare, and demonstrated how these can impact organisational effectiveness. It then set out the statement of the problem, the aim, objectives, and research questions that guide the study, and explained that the research is based on secondary data. The literature review for the next chapter describes the current state of the research regarding employee well-being, employee stress, employee burnout, and employee organisational performance, as well as the theories and gaps in the literature that guide this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing research on employee well-being and its links to organisational performance, focusing on the fast-food and wider service industry. It outlines the definition of employee well-being, the key stressors and factors that contribute to stress and burnout, and demonstrates the impact poor employee well-being has on pay, working hours, staff turnover, and service quality and profitability. It then introduces the theories guiding the study and the knowledge gap this research addresses.

2.2 Conceptualising Employee Well-Being in Fast Food

Employee well-being refers to the physical, mental, and emotional health of workers and how satisfied and supported they feel at work. Well-being typically encompasses a variety of dimensions, such as physical health, psychological or mental health, and workplace social relations. Dumitriu et al. (2025) highlight that all of these are shaped by the environment employers create, meaning that well-being is not a purely personal concern but, to a certain extent, under the employer's control. The fast-food industry is a highly demanding field with limited resources, which often leads to poor well-being. Ghazali et al. (2024) conducted an examination of fast food workers and found that job stress was most strongly linked with the environment of the jobs and not job insecurity, person–organisation fit, or pay. The results of their study showed that **72.7%** of employees reported experiencing high levels of stress, making the scale of the problem in the industry clear. The broader workplace context is also important: Dumitriu et al. (2025) noted that physical and psychosocial working conditions are key determinants of overall well-being. Job satisfaction is also closely related to well-being. Satisfaction among service employees is influenced by several factors, such as pay, recognition, and good working relationships, which are also important for boosting well-being, according to Sibanyoni et al. (2024). Beyond the personal aspect of well-being, taking care of workers' mental health is one of the most critical aspects of the sustainability of any business, according to Cinar and Bilodeau (2022). All of these studies indicate that well-being in fast food is strongly dependent on the environment provided by employers. For a big restaurant like McDonald's, this matters because it can influence those conditions across many restaurants.

2.3 Determinants of Stress and Burnout

A substantial body of research examines what causes stress and burnout among service workers. In a study of 494 hotel employees, Üngüren et al. (2024) demonstrated that work stress contributes to burnout and that burnout serves as a mediator between work stress and intention to leave the job. They also discovered that perceived job security moderated the relationship between stress and burnout, indicating that more secure jobs could buffer workers against the impact of stress on their burnout. Üngüren et al. (2024) also found that financial

dependence influenced behavior: **when financial dependence was high, the link between burnout and the intention to leave was weaker**, even among burnt-out employees. This implies that discontented staff who cannot afford to move may stay on while remaining unhappy and disengaged. For a low-wage employer such as McDonald's, this is important because low turnover figures could hide high levels of stress and disengagement among workers who cannot afford to quit. Another significant trigger is customer behaviour. Dangaiso and Mukucha (2024) concluded that rude or uncivil customer behaviour in the fast-food industry increased **employee stress**, staff turnover intentions, and actual employee turnover. A similar effect was observed for workplace conflict among team members: Campos and Campos (2024) found that employee conflict and work stress were directly correlated with increased turnover intention among food-service workers. These pressures can be helped or hindered by leadership. Choi et al. (2026) found that burnout was higher when restaurant employees were treated uncivilly by customers or supervisors, and lower when supervisors treated employees in a transformational manner, which involves actively encouraging and inspiring employees. The findings suggest that the potential causes of stress and burnout at McDonald's are likely multiple: a challenging work environment, customer pressure, workplace conflict, and managerial behaviour. This indicates that solutions must be multifaceted, impacting more than a single cause.

2.4 Pay, Working Hours and Work-Life Balance

In fast food, pay and working conditions are key components of well-being. The study by Ghazali et al. (2024) identified low income and workplace insecurity as major stressors. Zero-hours contracts are of particular concern in the UK, where they are most prevalent in the food sector (Office for National Statistics, 2025). However, the relationship between pay and well-being is not simple. Wong et al. (2024) found that satisfaction with pay did not seem to shield burned-out personnel from the desire to quit, indicating that higher pay alone cannot repair the damage caused by poor working conditions and burnout. This is an important point for McDonald's, where pay is a common grievance, though not the only one. Work hours and flexibility are also big factors. Gerlach et al. (2025) found that rigid and unfair scheduling led to greater stress and employee turnover, whereas fairer and more transparent scheduling helped to retain employees. Work-life balance is closely related to engagement. In their study, Žnidaršič and Bernik (2026) confirmed that a positive work-life balance increased employee engagement, whereas a negative balance decreased it. The results of these analyses indicate that, for McDonald's, fair hours and predictable shifts can be as essential as pay to promoting employee well-being, especially when shift patterns can change at a moment's notice. It thus seems that fair compensation, stable hours, and improved scheduling are needed to improve conditions.

2.5 Well-Being, Turnover and Retention

One of the strongest relationships in the literature is between poor well-being and employee turnover, as revealed by Üngüren et al. (2024), who found that the pathway from stress to burnout to turnover intention was confirmed, and by Wong et al. (2024), who identified the relationship between burnout and high job demands (work overload and work-family conflict) and employees' desire to quit. Wen et al. (2026) noted a similar finding: burnout predicted the intention to leave, and part of the relationship between burnout and intention to leave was mediated by job satisfaction. These studies demonstrate that burnout is a major indicator of staff attrition. Retention depends on many factors rather than any single one. Gelencsér et al. (2023) built a model suggesting that a number of well-being factors, when combined, are determinants of employee retention in an organisation. This is the key element of job satisfaction: Kim et al. (2025) reported that satisfied restaurant staff have a lower intention to quit and a higher probability of providing good service. High turnover is harmful because it is expensive, disruptive, and permanently removes those with experience and knowledge of the work. For McDonald's, these findings suggest that reducing turnover will require improvements in pay, working conditions, management, and overall well-being, rather than relying on a single quick fix. They also agree that the earlier burnout prevention begins, the better, and that it is less expensive than replacing employees after they burn out. This is a very obvious monetary trend. The high hourly employee turnover burden is costly to McDonald's (Paytronix, 2025), and fast food turnover is already very high (Economic Hardship Reporting Project, 2024), so even a modest decrease in unnecessary turnover has the potential to generate significant savings for McDonald's, making the business case for investing in well-being.

2.6 Well-Being and Organisational Performance

Employee wellness goes beyond turnover; it also impacts business performance. The service-profit chain describes this linkage: it suggests that satisfied, supported, and loyal staff provide superior service, which leads to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, and higher profitability (Hogreve et al., 2022). Hogreve et al. (2022) also argue that employee well-being, not just satisfaction, should be treated as a key part of this chain, which is directly relevant to the present study. There is empirical support for the connection between well-being and performance. In a study of 1,092 employees, **Lee and Jo (2023)** found that job resources such as autonomy and psychological well-being enhanced in-role and extra-role performance when employees were engaged. In a customer service environment, such as McDonald's, it will be important as stressed or disengaged employees are likely to be less service-oriented, and thus less likely to ensure that the customer is happy with the service. Kim et al. (2025) also note that unhappy employees tend to deliver poor-quality service, **which weakens the customer experience that drives repeat business**. In addition, poor welfare can negatively

impact a company's reputation: Elshaer et al. (2025) demonstrate that a company's reputation can suffer real economic and reputational consequences if public trust is lost. At a national level, the financial cost of poor mental health is large. The economic burden of mental ill health on UK employers is estimated to be between £33 billion and £42 billion annually, with millions of working days lost as a result of work-related stress, depression, and anxiety (van der Feltz-Cornelis et al., 2023). The results indicate that enhancing employee welfare at McDonald's could help to improve the quality of service, reduce unnecessary expenses, and boost the company's reputation, thereby reinforcing the theory that there is a direct link between welfare and efficiency. The service-profit chain is particularly helpful for a high-contact business such as McDonald's, in which most of the value is added during short, direct encounters between employees and customers. If those interactions are handled by tired, stressed, or inadequately supported staff, service quality is compromised precisely where the company makes its profits, **linking employee welfare directly to the company's revenue.**

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks

Two main theories frame this study, with support from the service-profit chain. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a framework that captures the interaction between job demands (workload and time pressure) and job resources (team support, autonomy, and fair compensation) in affecting well-being and performance. This model was tested by Claes et al. (2023) on 1,859 workers, and they concluded that an increase in job demands reduced well-being, while an increase in job resources increased well-being, with the latter having a stronger effect. Job satisfaction mediated the relationships between job demands, job resources, and well-being. Demerouti (2025) adds that when employees lack sufficient resources, they cannot protect themselves from stress, which can lead to burnout. For McDonald's, the JD-R model implies that increased demands and fewer resources (e.g., low pay or weak managerial support) negatively affect both well-being and performance, whereas increased resources (e.g., higher pay or stronger managerial support) positively affect them. The **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991)** explains employees' decisions. It suggests that a person's attitudes, others' opinions, and the sense of control they feel over their situation all influence behaviour, including their willingness to quit. This is why some employees are willing to resign even when others are not in the same situation with McDonald's. Lastly, the service-profit chain (Hogreve et al., 2022) brings these concepts together and links them to business outcomes, illustrating the relationship between the employee experience and customer satisfaction and profitability. These frameworks are combined to validate the focus of the study, the link between worker welfare and organisational efficiency, and inform the analysis of the evidence provided in the following chapters. They also complement each other well. The JD-R model helps to explain the conditions that foster or harm well-being, the Theory of Planned Behaviour explains how employees then make

decisions about staying on or leaving, and the service-profit chain explains how those decisions and behaviours relate to the customer and profit. When used in combination, they give a lucid thread of reasoning, starting with working conditions, then employee well-being and behaviour, and finally organisational efficiency, the core issue of this dissertation.

2.8 Gaps in the Literature

Although there is growing research on employee well-being, significant gaps remain. Much of the strongest evidence comes from hospitality and healthcare settings, such as hotels and hospitals (Üngüren et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2024), rather than from fast food, and very few studies focus specifically on McDonald's. The majority of research also focuses on short-term results in a single country, with few studies investigating well-being across the UK and within a company's overseas operations. Furthermore, the relationship between pay and turnover is poorly understood in the fast-food industry, even though it is the most common complaint among workers (Wong et al., 2024). The purpose of this study is to fill these gaps by targeting McDonald's in the UK and globally and examining the impact of stress, burnout, and pay on organisational efficiency as a whole, rather than in isolation.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on employee well-being and organisational performance. It highlighted how stress and burnout in fast food are caused by multiple overlapping factors, such as workplace culture, compensation, irregular working hours, customer behaviour, and management style. It explained that poor health increases turnover and leads to declines in service quality, customer satisfaction, and profitability, and that additional compensation might not be sufficient to address these issues. It presented the Job Demands-Resources model, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the service-profit chain, and the gaps to be addressed in this study. The systematic literature review methodology employed in this study to collect and analyse secondary data is described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a structured, transparent, and repeatable method for finding, selecting, and analysing existing studies on a clearly defined topic. It is based on steps and rules that allow the review to be checked and repeated by different people, minimising bias and improving reliability (Page et al., 2021). It is frequently employed in business and management research because it provides more reliable evidence than a single study or an informal review. As the study does not require primary data collection and the researcher intends to draw clear conclusions from a vast body of existing research on worker welfare and organisational efficiency at McDonald's, an SLR is appropriate for this dissertation (Chigbu et al., 2023). The method can also facilitate the management of the vast amount of available research and help clearly see patterns emerging across many studies.

3.2 Search Strategy

The search strategy was based on the PRISMA 2020 model, which outlines a four-part process for selecting studies: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). For the identification phase, the search was conducted across various academic databases to collect all records potentially relevant to the study, followed by the removal of duplicates. The titles and abstracts of the remaining records were screened against the inclusion/exclusion criteria, and studies that were obviously irrelevant were excluded. At the eligibility stage, the full texts of all other reports were read in detail and evaluated against the criteria, and reasons for excluding each study were recorded. Studies were selected for the final review if they satisfied all the criteria. This process and the number of studies at each stage are presented in Figure 1. This way, the selection is transparent, and another researcher could replicate it and obtain the same result. The number of studies at each step is documented as required by the PRISMA model, and the final sample is clearly described, thereby reducing the risk of including only convenient results.

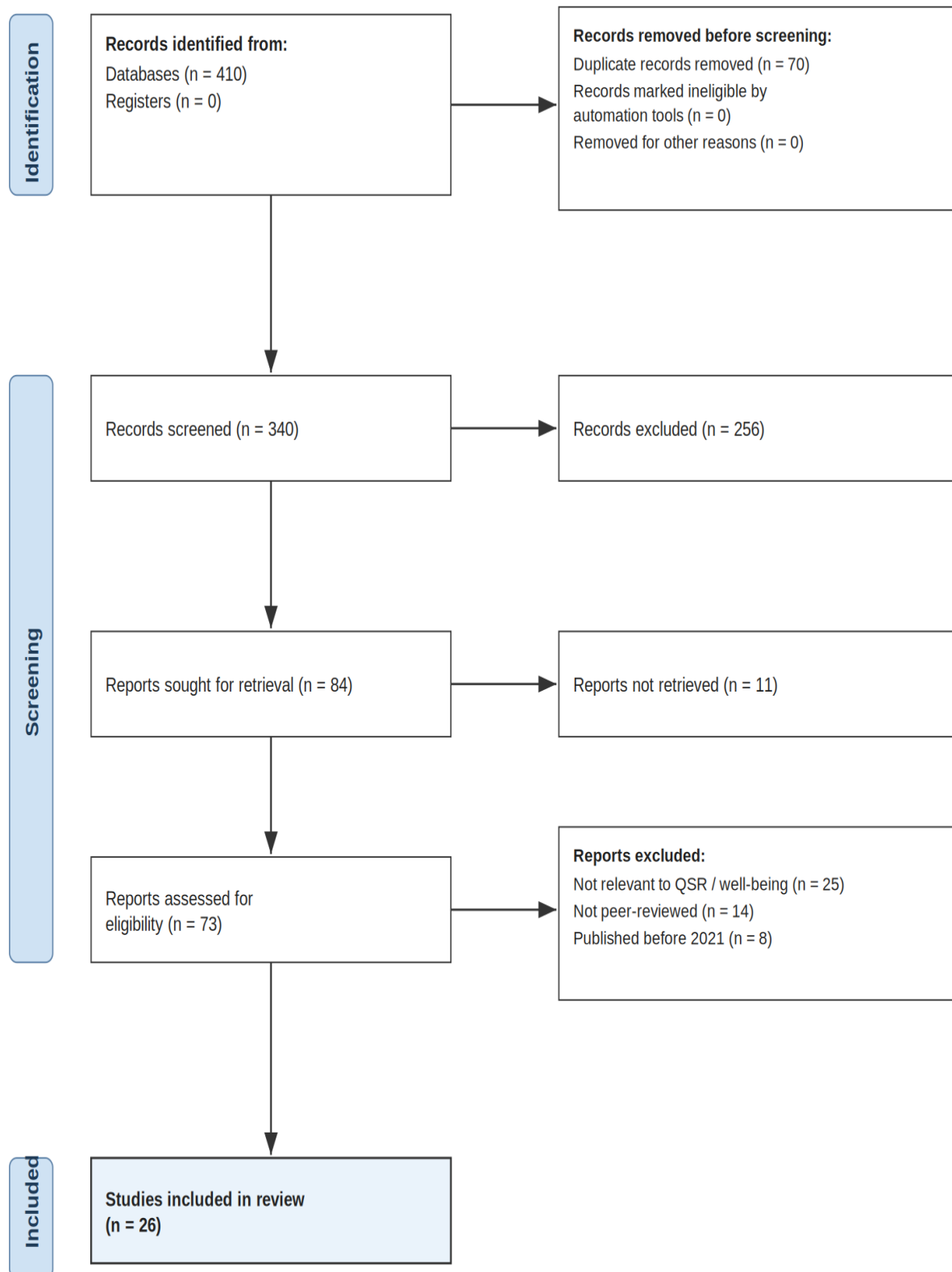


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process (adapted from Page et al., 2021).

3.3 Search Terms / Search Queries

Boolean operators were used to create search terms to connect the key points in the research question. The words were connected by the operator “OR” to find words that share a similar meaning and by the operator “AND” to find words that represent the different concepts in the topic. One search string was: (“fast food” OR “quick-service restaurant” OR “McDonald's”) AND (“employee well-being” OR “job stress” OR “burnout”) AND (“staff turnover” OR “organisational performance” OR “customer satisfaction”). The combination of these search groups is presented in Figure 2.

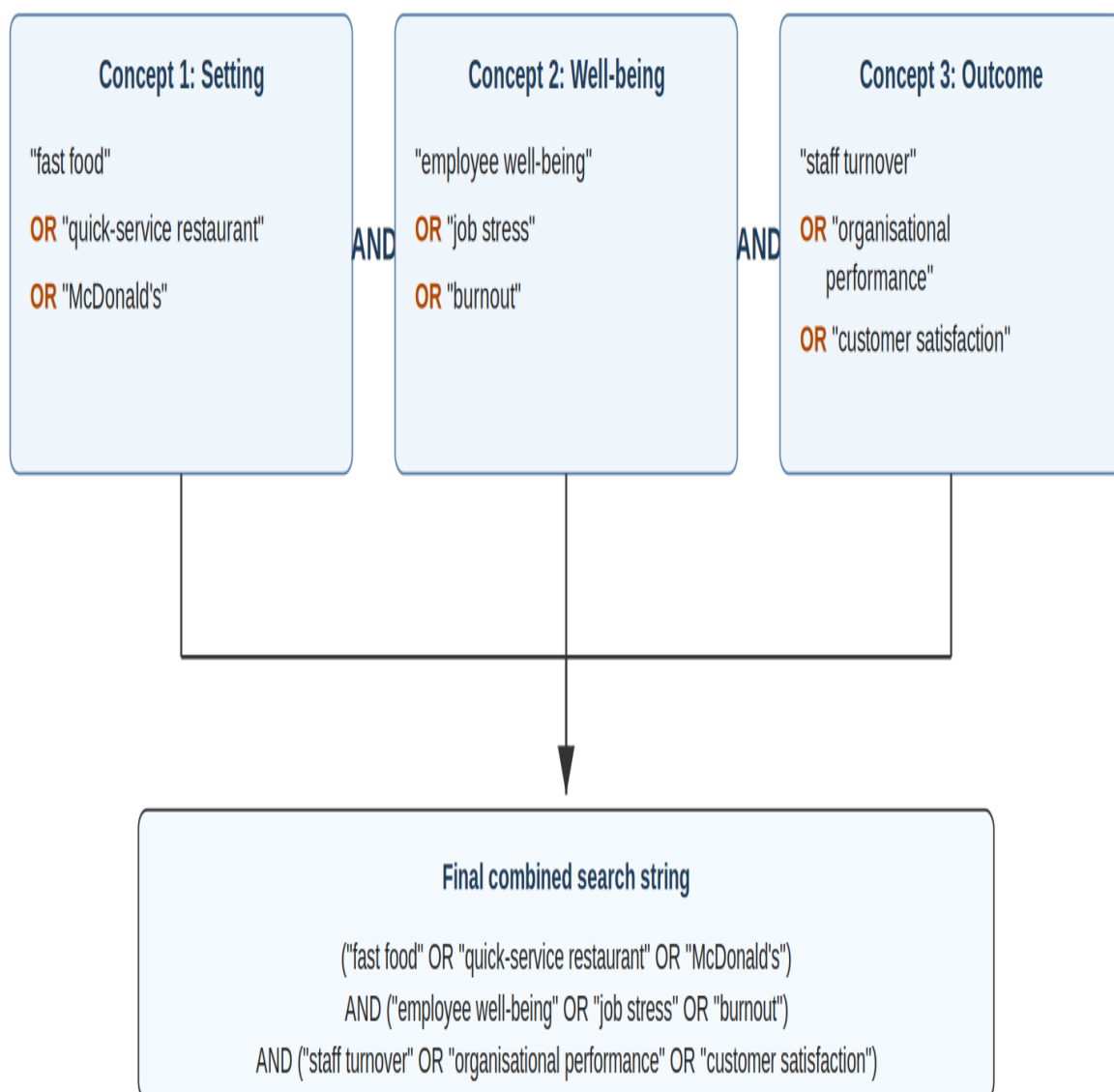


Figure 2: How the search terms were combined using Boolean operators.

3.4 Keywords

The main keywords used in the searches were: employee well-being, worker welfare, job stress, burnout, fast food, quick-service restaurant, McDonald's, staff turnover, customer satisfaction, organisational performance, and compensation. These keywords were used in various combinations to broaden or restrict the results to meet the requirements.

3.5 Databases

Academic databases and library sources were searched for reliable information, including Google Scholar and the open-access libraries of trusted publishers (MDPI, Frontiers, Taylor & Francis), as well as the library at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). The sources were selected because they offer well-researched, high-quality, peer-reviewed research and are freely accessible. Multiple databases reduced the risk of missing critical studies and yielded a broad, balanced search. Citation tracking was also employed to identify additional relevant studies cited in the initially selected articles, where applicable.

3.6 Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

The criteria were established to include relevant, good-quality studies in the review. These criteria ensured that the review was confined to more recent, reliable, and directly relevant evidence on McDonald's and the broader fast-food industry.

3.6.1 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they were published in English between 2021 and 2026, were peer-reviewed, were open access, and were relevant to employee well-being, stress, burnout, or organisational performance in either the fast-food or wider service industry.

3.6.2 Exclusion Criteria

Studies were not included if they were not written in English, published prior to 2021, not peer-reviewed, not of high quality, behind a paywall, or not relevant to the research topic.

3.7 Search Results

In the initial database searches, 410 records were identified. After 70 duplicate records were removed, 340 records remained for screening. Of these, 256 were eliminated by title and abstract evaluation since they were not appropriate. The full texts of 84 reports were sought, and 11 were unavailable, leaving 73 reports to be assessed for eligibility. Following detailed reading, 47 reports were excluded, of which 25 were not related to fast food or well-being, 14 were not peer-reviewed, and 8 were published prior to 2021. This resulted in 26 academic studies being included in the review, as indicated in Figure 1. A handful of grey literature and industry sources (such as official statistics and company reports) were utilised individually to provide current context on McDonald's. Together, these included studies and context sources gave a strong evidence base for the analysis in Chapter 4. The relatively small number of final studies is a result of the narrow scope of the studies included in the review (recent, open-

access, and directly relevant), which increases the quality of the evidence but limits its quantity.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

In this case, although the study relied solely on secondary data, ethical concerns were still taken into account. Studies were selected using predetermined criteria for the study rather than personal preference to reduce bias, and findings were reported truthfully, even when evidence did not support them. In the absence of human participants, there were no concerns regarding anonymity or consent for data collection, since all data was published and openly available. Only publicly available information unrelated to personal data was used, and no private information was collected or stored about individuals, in accordance with data protection rules, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All sources were duly cited to avoid plagiarism, and efforts were made to ensure accurate representation of each author's findings in the text and not going out of context. These measures ensured that the research was done responsibly and in accordance with accepted academic standards.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the systematic literature review method and how the PRISMA 2020 model was used to search, screen, and select studies. It defined the search terms, keywords, databases, and inclusion and exclusion criteria, and demonstrated how the final 26 selected studies arrived. It also explored the ethical issues for secondary data study. The results of these studies are presented and discussed in the next chapter in relation to McDonald's.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the systematic literature review described in Chapter 3. A total of 26 peer-reviewed studies were included and analysed in conjunction with a focused collection of McDonald's-specific documents and grey literature. The aim is not to summarise each source individually, but to bring the sources together to answer the research question: how does worker welfare relate to organisational efficiency at McDonald's in the United Kingdom and globally? The discussion uses the themes from the thematic synthesis as the framework. Section 4.2 provides an overview of studies and a summary table, section 4.3 considers the major causes of poor worker welfare, section 4.4 examines the relationship between worker welfare and labour turnover and its cost, section 4.5 considers the relationship between worker welfare and service quality, customer satisfaction and profitability through the service-profit chain, and section 4.6 considers the gap between what McDonald's state in terms of their policies and what is reported as the reality by independent bodies, as well as the franchise structure behind it. The company's claims are balanced throughout by independent evidence, ensuring that the discussion remains critical rather than descriptive.

4.2 Overview of the included studies

The twenty-six studies in the review span from 2021 to 2026 and are from various countries and service contexts such as hospitality, fast food, retail, and more frontline service roles. McDonald's is part of the informal eating-out market, the segment in which this spread competes, and it shares the most important labour characteristics of that market: a young workforce, high customer contact, shift work, and cost control (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). For instance, Lee and Jo (2023) used responses from 1,092 employees, Claes et al. (2023) analysed 1,859 responses, and Üngüren et al. (2024) surveyed 494 hotel employees. A smaller number of studies employed qualitative or mixed methods, providing valuable insights into workers' lived experiences of stress and mistreatment. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model was the most prominent theoretical perspective, viewing well-being as a result of a trade-off between the demands imposed on employees and the resources provided to them (Bakker et al., 2023; Lee and Jo, 2023; Deemerouti, 2025). Since many studies adopted the same structure, their results could be compared and synthesised rather than listed.

The studies are not of equal quality, but the consistent use of validated scales and, in many cases, large sample sizes indicates that the overall body of evidence is reasonably robust for a review of this type (Page et al., 2021). Findings shared across countries and services were given greater weight, while findings based on just one study were treated with greater caution. Table 4.1 summarises the studies most central to the discussion, showing the focus, method,

and main finding of each. The patterns reported here are supported by multiple studies and complemented by McDonald-specific evidence, ensuring the discussion is grounded in the case organisation.

One feature of the evidence base should be noted before the themes are discussed: the review deliberately combined global and UK-specific material. The global sources, which include the company's annual report and its purpose-and-impact reporting, outline the scale and the global welfare strategy, while the UK sources, which include the people report and the regulator's action, explain how that strategy comes to life in one key market. These are complemented by academic studies that articulate the broad mechanisms connecting demand, resources, stress, and engagement, which the company then evidences and maps out for one large employer. This combination enables the discussion to consider both sides of the research question: McDonald's in the United Kingdom and McDonald's internationally.

Table 4.1: Summary of key included studies

Study	Focus	Method/sample	Key finding
Ghazali et al. (2024)	Work stress in food service	Survey, food-service workers	72.7% reported high stress; the working environment was the leading stressor
Üngüren et al. (2024)	Stress, burnout, turnover	Survey, 494 hotel employees	Stress → burnout → turnover; job insecurity and financial dependence strengthen the path
Lee and Jo (2023)	Job resources and engagement	Survey, 1,092 employees (JD-R)	Work engagement mediates the link between job resources and positive outcomes
Wong et al. (2024)	Demands and quit intention	Survey study	Burnout mediates demands → turnover; pay satisfaction did not moderate the link
Choi et al. (2026)	Incivility, burnout, and leadership	Survey study	Incivility drives burnout; transformational

Study	Focus	Method/sample	Key finding
			leadership buffers the harm
Hogreve et al. (2022)	Service-profit chain	Conceptual/empirical review	Employee satisfaction → service quality → customer satisfaction → profit
Elshaer et al. (2025)	Reputation and performance	Empirical study	Firm reputation shapes organisational performance
Claes et al. (2023)	Demands vs resources	Survey, 1,859 employees (JD-R)	Resources matter more than demands for positive well-being outcomes

4.3 Determinants of poor worker welfare at McDonald's

The first theme is about the harm to worker welfare that happens in places such as McDonald's. The evidence reviewed indicates multiple related demands. The first is work-related stress, which is consistently high among frontline food service workers. According to Ghazali et al. (2024), the working environment (the pace, pressure, and conditions of work) was the most commonly reported stressor, cited by 72.7% of food-service workers who participated in the study. Campos and Campos (2024) also associate demanding service conditions with lower well-being, and Dangaiso and Mukucha (2024) demonstrate that employee stress in service work extends to attitudes and behaviour. This is important for McDonald's because it has a large number of young workers on the front line. The company has approximately 155,000 people in its UK system, with an average employee age of 20, most on zero-hours contracts, and nearly 40% of UK employees are teenagers (McDonald's UK, 2025; Lacey, 2025). The younger workers in their first jobs lack many of the resources measured in the JD-R model that are considered to be protective, including job security, experience, and a sense of control (Claes et al., 2023), and earlier commentary has consistently highlighted the heightened vulnerability of young service workers to poor work conditions (Young people, 2018).

The second factor is interpersonal mistreatment. Choi et al. (2026) showed that workplace incivility drives burnout, and that leadership quality either deepens or buffers this effect: transformational leadership reduced the harm, while weak supervision worsened it. The point

that the immediate social environment affects the success or failure of frontline workers is reinforced by Wen et al. (2026). This evidence directly pertains to McDonald's, where independent sources report on "recurrent and serious harassment." Over 450 branches of the UK were involved in claims of harassment, racism, ableism, homophobia and discrimination, prompting the Equality and Human Rights Commission to write to the entirety of 1,400 branches in the UK after a legally binding agreement was signed in February 2023 (Lacey, 2025; Richardson, 2025). Through the lens of JD-R, harassment is an extreme demand that takes away psychological safety, and the youth of the workforce increases both the likelihood and severity of the event (Choi et al., 2026). A large portion of McDonald's front-line leadership is done by managers at independently owned stores, and the quality of local leadership is inconsistent and difficult to manage, the very thing that Choi et al. (2026) argue is crucial.

The third factor is insecure and unpredictable employment. The data suggest that zero-hours work is heavily skewed towards the food-service sector (ONS, 2025), and advocates have long pointed to the risk apportioned to the worker as a problem with zero-hours contracts (Zero Hours Justice, 2023). Inconsistent and erratic work scheduling is correlated with lower well-being (Gerlach et al., 2025) and lower work-life balance (Žnidaršič and Bernik, 2026). An important addition by Üngüren et al. (2024) is that financial dependence and weak job security further amplify the curve from stress to burnout and to turnover, meaning that the same amount of stress can be more harmful for people who are less able to absorb lost income and who are less likely to be able to leave a poor job. This is particularly damaging to a young workforce, many of whom are on zero-hours contracts. Importantly, the answer does not lie just in the pay. The results reveal that pay satisfaction did not moderate the relationship between job demands and intention to leave, indicating that, in addition to enhancing pay, it is also important to address job demands and build job resources such as security, voice, and supportive management to improve welfare.

Poor work-life balance is another related demand, as it reduces well-being (Žnidaršič and Bernik, 2026), and such shifts are difficult to schedule in the fast food industry at night and on weekends, as well as at the last minute (Gosine, 2021). For a workforce that is nearly 40% teenagers, many of whom are balancing work with education, unpredictable hours are a particular strain (McDonald's UK, 2025). McDonald's has introduced some positive measures here, including its Makin' it youth initiative and a Young Workers' Policy for under-18s (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b; McDonald's UK, 2025), which show that the company recognises the issue. However, the literature indicates that such interventions are only effective in welfare protection when they reach the frontline and affect daily scheduling practices (Gerlach et al., 2025).

Overall, the evidence suggests that poor welfare at McDonald's is caused by a combination of high demands, including stress, mistreatment, insecurity, and a loss of work-life balance,

rather than by any one factor. This aligns with the conservation-of-resources perspective in much of the JD-R literature, which states that a lack of resources hampers workers' ability to handle demands and renders them more vulnerable to burnout (Demerouti, 2025). These are the same needs that later become signs of turnover and poor performance.

4.4 Worker welfare and labour turnover: the cost case

The second theme connects the welfare of the worker to labour turnover, where the human and financial aspects of the argument intersect. The path described by the reviewed studies is clear: high demands are followed by stress, stress by burnout, and burnout by intention to leave, which was followed by Üngüren et al. (2024) in a sample of hospitality workers and was proven by Wong et al. (2024) between job demands and turnover intention. From a resource perspective, Lee and Jo (2023) found that job resources are antecedents of work engagement and mediate the relationship between job resources and positive outcomes. A decrease in resources leads to reduced engagement, and withdrawal ensues. Kim et al. (2025) and Gelencsér et al. (2023) also find that salaries do not influence the turnover, but the way workers are treated; supportive practices and positive climate reduce the risk of workers leaving.

The chain is quite costly, given the turnover in fast food. According to the Economic Hardship Reporting Project (2024), turnover rates exceed 100% in parts of the sector, meaning the turnover of the entire workforce can be achieved within 12 months. Every departure carries a cost. The estimated cost of replacing a frontline worker is about \$2,000 to \$5,000 (Paytronix, 2025), if recruitment, onboarding, and lost productivity are included. Even a small turnover reduction can save an employer of McDonald's size, such as the more than two million employees in its system, a significant amount of money (McDonald's Corporation 2025a). So, the goal of minimising turnover is not just a soft goal for welfare; it is actually an efficiency improvement. These numbers are also low, as they only reflect the direct cost of recruiting and training, not the indirect cost the broader literature points to, including knowledge loss, increased strain on the remaining workforce, and substandard service as new employees train to perform their job (Kim et al., 2025; Dumitriu et al., 2025). The actual cost of high turnover is actually even greater.

With the company's development, the retention argument becomes increasingly acute. McDonald's plans to reach 50,000 restaurants worldwide by the end of 2027 and opened over 2,000 new restaurants in a single year (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). In addition to the impact of increased recruitment, training, and retention of new workers, there is evidence that the first years of work are when workers are most prone to welfare issues and to leaving their jobs. Without addressing the demands outlined in section 4.3, growth will only exacerbate turnover costs, as every new restaurant will be burdened by the same worker attrition factors.

This interpretation is supported by McDonald's own filing. The company has reported that at times it has been unable to provide adequate staffing for some restaurants, which negatively impacts operations, such as speed of service and customer satisfaction, and is another business risk (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). In JD-R terms, the company is describing a resource shortage that the academic literature predicts will raise turnover and weaken performance (IBRAHIM, 2021). The independent occupational-safety viewpoint makes this connection explicit: the expert who cited Lacey (2025) explains that among the effects of inadequate working conditions or harassment are turnover, absenteeism, low morale, reduced productivity, and legal expenses. Therefore, the welfare problem is not independent of the efficiency problem but is one of its driving forces. The correlation also extends to attendance and not only the decision to quit: Dumitriu et al. (2025) attribute unfavourable conditions to a health-related strain, which impacts day-to-day functioning, and van der Feltz-Cornelis et al. (2023) estimate that mental ill-health costs UK employers between £33 billion and £42 billion a year - a large part of which is through lost productivity, absence, and turnover.

A note of caution is needed on causation. The majority of the reviewed studies are cross-sectional and therefore provide only associations; in some studies, mediation and other factors, such as local labour market conditions, may contribute to turnover (Page et al., 2021). Despite this, the relationship between welfare and retention remains consistent across different samples, sectors, and countries, reinforcing the argument that welfare and retention are strongly linked and that a positive impact on the former is likely to have a positive impact on the latter.

4.5 Worker welfare, service quality and profitability

The third theme is an extension of the argument put forward in the topic of retention: the service-profit chain. The model is based on the assumption that happy and supported workers provide better service, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, thereby improving revenues and profitability (Hogreve et al., 2022). The reviewed evidence is provided for each link. Engaged employees generate better results (Lee and Jo, 2023), whereas burned-out and mistreated employees generate worse results (Choi et al., 2026). Cinar and Bilodeau (2022) and Sibanyoni et al. (2024) reiterate that in highly contact situations, the worker's state becomes the customer's state, as the employee is actually the service being delivered. The theory of planned behaviour also accounts for the role of attitudes and perceived behavioural control in employees' behaviours towards customers, meaning that workers who feel unsupported are less likely to expend the extra effort that pleases customers (Ajzen, 1991).

The impacts on McDonald's are enormous, making it a good example to study, as it is large. It serves about 70 million customers daily and reported systemwide sales of over \$130 billion in 2024, as well as net income of about \$ 8.2 billion (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). This

volume can affect money in a tangible way when service changes occur incrementally. The company's mission places a heavy emphasis on speed, convenience, and a uniform customer experience, all of which are heavily reliant on the frontline team. This is, in effect, a statement by the company that understaffing slows service and reduces customer satisfaction, which is a break in the service-profit chain related to the company's welfare and retention problem (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). The logic of the chain implies that the welfare of crew members is not a side issue but a condition of the efficiency the company seeks.

McDonald's strategy shows the customer side of the value chain. The firm has one of the world's largest loyalty schemes, with more than 175 million customers across 60 countries, and the programme's main goal is to create repeat custom and service consistency to fuel sales (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). A consistent, stable staff delivers consistent, high-quality service, which leads to loyalty. If the service is inconsistent due to high turnover and poor quality of care, the marketing benefits of the loyalty programme and the brand are eroded at the service level. While technology, marketing, and convenience are often the key elements of a company's growth plan, the first-line worker is the very backbone of that plan.

The second channel through which welfare affects profitability is reputation. Elshaer et al. (2025) indicate that the reputation of a company has a direct proportion to the performance of the company, and the damage to reputation as a factor of working conditions is a material risk in the filing of McDonald's Corporation (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). The harassment case is one of the clearest examples of why the brand is important and why the company is in danger due to negative media attention, the UK CEO's summons to parliament, and the fact that over 700 mainly young employees launched a legal battle (Lacey, 2025). A welfare failure is not limited to a single restaurant; it can extend to the brand and the balance sheet. This theme makes the correlation at the centre of the dissertation visible: worker welfare and organisational efficiency are linked through two main routes — retention and performance — , and both run through the frontline worker, who turns the company's resources and demands into either good or poor service. This synthesised relationship is set out in Figure 4.1.

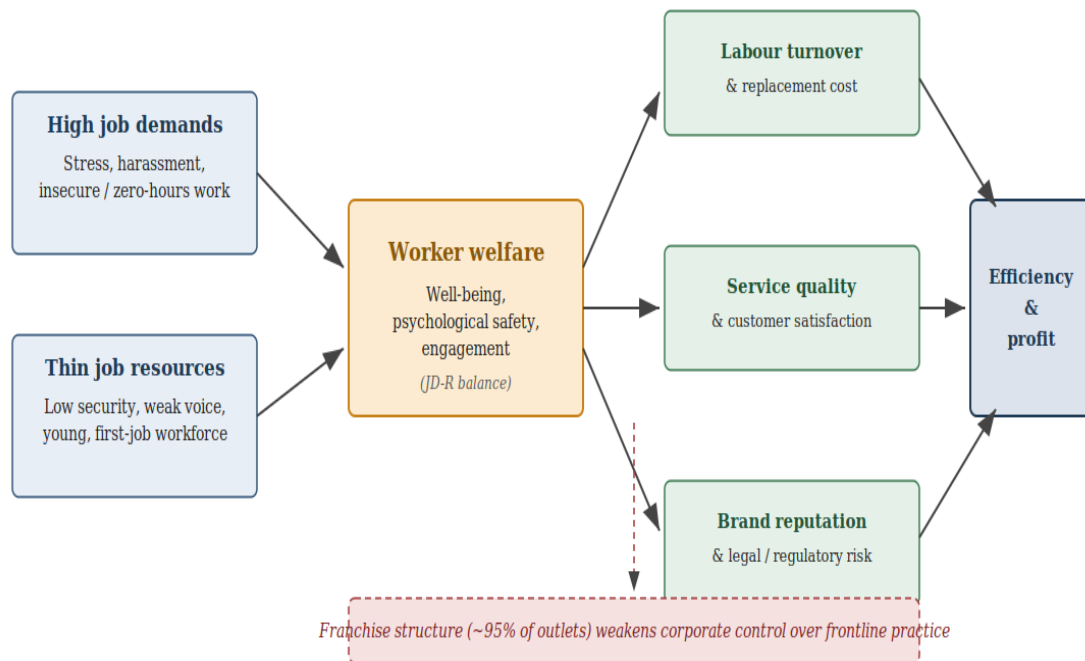


Figure 4.1: Synthesised model of the relationship between worker welfare and organisational efficiency at McDonald's

4.6 The policy–practice gap and the franchise-accountability problem

The fourth theme focuses on the greatest conflict in the evidence, the difference between the claims made by McDonald's about the benefits it brings to workers and the reports from independent bodies about the reality on the ground. The company's response on paper is good and well-resourced. People Brand Standards globally were developed and focus on four areas: protecting employee health and safety, preventing workplace violence, preventing harassment and discrimination, and listening to employee feedback, and its safe-and-respectful-workplace training is offered in more than 50 markets and over 40 languages and must be completed within 14 days of a worker's first shift at McDonald's (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b). The company also states that it pays women at its company-operated restaurants an average of 99.93 cents on the dollar compared to men, and offers over 20 million training courses to its employees in one year, with over \$230 million spent on tuition assistance via its Archways to Opportunity programme (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b). In the UK, it publishes a comprehensive Cultural Action Plan with its 155,000 employees, including a new Investigation Handling Unit with HR and legal experts; an in-person SafeSpace+ training course for managers, co-designed with the language of younger workers, and the largest round-the-clock AI-powered reporting platform in the UK and Ireland (McDonald's UK, 2025). It also states that 95% of staff are aware of how to speak up, 93%

think management will take action, and that safeguarding research is being implemented in partnership with Durham University (McDonald's UK, 2025).

Judged on their own, these measures look strong. However, the discussion should consider them in light of independent evidence, and that picture changes. Despite the legally binding agreement signed in February 2023, the regulator received 300 more reports of harassment, more than 450 branches were implicated, and more than 700, most of whom were under the age of 20, began legal action (Lacey, 2025). The difference is dramatic: the company's own survey suggests they are 93 per cent sure the management would have acted, but hundreds of recorded complaints show the management did not act in many cases. That is exactly the loophole that the occupational-safety specialist cautions against when he states that merely having a policy is no longer sufficient, and the true test is whether an employer can show proactive prevention, which is contained in the tribunal question, whether the employer could have done more. (Lacey, 2025). Academic studies support this. Wong et al. (2024) have demonstrated that there is no assurance of welfare in formal arrangements, and Choi et al. (2026) have shown that the results are not necessarily the product of centrally enforced policies but rather of the behaviour of restaurant leaders. A good policy framework does not necessarily lead to a safe workplace.

The franchise model is a good explanation for this continued disparity. About 95 percent of McDonald's restaurants are franchised, and a McDonald's Corporation filing to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission makes it clear that the corporation provides its franchisees the liberty to be their own employers and have authority over employment matters (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). This is also reinforced by the Purpose and Impact report, which indicates that restaurants owned by the corporation are within the corporation's direct sphere of influence, whereas franchise owners are independent and the corporation cannot dictate the solution in their case (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b). This leaves an accountability gap: while the corporation sets the central welfare policy, most welfare is delivered by independent franchisees who are not directly accountable to the corporation. The regulator pointed out that the original 2023 agreement did not apply to franchises and that incidents were expected to be linked to franchised restaurants, as they account for the vast majority of outlets (Lacey, 2025). The company's filing confirms the same risk from the other side, noting the risk of reputational damage due to the workplace conditions of the independent franchisees it operates (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a). So three different viewpoints — the corporation's filing, the regulator's, and the occupational-safety profession's — all point to the same structural issue.

This franchise problem reinstates the welfare–efficiency relationship. In a highly franchised model, the service-profit chain is less tightly coupled than in a more traditional chain because it is harder for the employer to control service on the ground in the restaurant. The

generalisation of the warning to all franchise-model firms stems from the occupational safety analysis, which has focused on the difficulty of achieving uniformity in health, safety, and conduct across many dislocated, independently owned units (Lacey, 2025). For McDonald's, improving welfare is not just about developing new policies; it is about getting between the corporation and franchisee and changing behaviour at the restaurant. The specialist recommends participative, peer, and bystander training (Lacey, 2025) and says that traditional 'box-ticking' training is ineffective at changing harassing behaviour. This critique comes in conjunction with the emphasis on course completion (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b) and suggests that progress depends on reported results rather than on the rate of progress.

It would be unfair to dismiss McDonald's efforts entirely. The company's opportunity-employment record is real: it offers first jobs to thousands of young people and places a high priority on training and progression (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b). The Cultural Action Plan is more detailed and resource-rich than the responses of many other similar employers, and external safeguarding researchers have been engaged, indicating serious intent (McDonald's UK, 2025). The challenge is that intent and investment to date have yet to be consistently reflected at the restaurant level, as reflected in the independent figures.

The kind of evidence on either side of the gap is also important. The company's best numbers, such as the 93% survey result, are self-reported; the annual report, which includes more conservative risk disclosures, is the only audited one. The most compelling evidence is external, from the regulator, a parliamentary committee, national television and radio, and the occupational-safety profession. It is good practice to give more weight to independent and verifiable evidence than to self-reported evidence (Page et al., 2021). The documented incidents and the legal action are also more than the internal survey, justifying the conclusion that there is a real policy – practice gap. This does not render a company's efforts useless; rather, the success of its efforts should be evaluated by outcomes measured independently of the company's self-report.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has synthesised the academic and company evidence to answer the research question. The findings indicate a clear, two-way relationship between worker wellbeing and organisational effectiveness. The poor welfare experienced at McDonald's is caused by a combination of high demands (stress, harassment, insecure ZS work, and loss of work-life balance) and low resources, particularly for a young workforce, often in their first job. These demands contribute to labour churning, which is expensive at McDonald's scale, and to a reduction in service quality and brand image, both of which directly impact profitability through the service-profit chain. The company has established a strong welfare and safeguarding response, especially in the UK. However, independent regulators and occupational safety evidence reveal a significant disconnect between policy and practice, and the company's

heavily franchised nature makes that gap hard to bridge. The results from these serve as the foundation for the recommendations, conclusions, and limitations presented in the final chapter. In short, the evidence treats worker welfare not as a cost that competes with efficiency but as one of its foundations.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION, AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the implications of the research. It provides practical recommendations for McDonald's based on the findings, revisits the aim and objectives to draw an overall conclusion, recognises the study's limitations, and recommends areas for further research. Recommendations are based on the evidence presented in Chapter 4 and not on consensus. For each one, it is connected to a specific finding so that the reasons are clear and traceable to the sources.

5.2 Recommendations

Five recommendations follow from the findings.

1. Tighten up franchise accountability. About 95% of restaurant establishments are franchised, and the majority of reported incidents involve franchised establishments (McDonald's Corporation, 2025a; Lacey, 2025). Corporate welfare and standards protection will only be brought to the front line if they become a contractual condition of the franchise agreement and are audited with clear consequences. The enhanced independent restaurant reviews outlined in the UK report (McDonald's UK, 2025) are a positive development and should be rolled out across the board.
2. Evaluate training results, not training volume. Conventional training, which involves ticking a box, does not make much difference to changing harassing behaviour (Lacey, 2025); the 'box to bystander' and 'box to peer' approach, with the aim of reducing incidents and resolving them quicker, is the way to do it (McDonald's Corporation, 2025b).
3. Improve resources that are available to secure a young and insecure workforce. Because financial dependence and weak job security intensify the path from stress to turnover (Üngüren et al., 2024), more predictable scheduling and greater job security would reduce a key demand identified across the literature (Gerlach et al., 2025; ONS, 2025). Fair pay is not enough to ensure welfare (Wong et al., 2024), so this should be done in addition to, not instead of, fair pay.
4. Invest in restaurant-level leadership. Improving frontline welfare is a direct route to improving service quality, and one of the most direct ways to do this is to develop managers as supportive, transformational leadership buffers against incivility and burnout (Choi et al., 2026), and as the UK SafeSpace+ programme aims to do for managers at McDonald's UK (2025).
5. Consider welfare as an efficiency investment and communicate it clearly. The independent verification of reports on turnover, incident resolution, and well-being would both enhance practice at the restaurant and ensure that the brand's reputation, which

the company considers to be a material risk (Elshaer et al., 2025; McDonald's Corporation, 2025a), is maintained.

5.3 Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to analyse the relationship between worker welfare and organisational efficiency at McDonald's in the UK and globally, using secondary data and a systematic review method. The results clearly indicate a positive link between workers' well-being and organisational efficiency, and that organisational efficiency, in turn, positively influences workers' well-being. The stress, harassment, and employment insecurity among young people, and thus poor welfare, increase labour turnover, decrease service quality and reputation, and reduce efficiency and profitability; better welfare increases engagement, retention, service quality, and reputation, which in turn increase efficiency and profitability. The following goals of the study have been accomplished: The review identified the most important determinants of welfare in service occupations; The review developed the mechanisms relating to welfare and turnover, service quality and profitability, using the JD-R model and the service-profit chain; The review applied these findings to the McDonald's case by comparing the organisation's own statements with independent evidence. The most specific finding for McDonald's is that its generous welfare policies are not reflected in practice due to a highly franchised structure, which weakens the company's control at the front line and creates a tangible discrepancy between the company's welfare policies and workers' experience. Efficiency—changing the way McDonald's does things through its employees—is not about creating new policies but about ensuring they stick to the ones that already exist across its independently owned restaurants. The business case is compelling: any small increase in welfare and retention would have a significant impact on the company's cost/ service and reputation at scale.

5.4 Limitations of the research

There are some limitations in this research. Firstly, it was entirely secondary, meaning it did not report on the first-hand, current experiences of McDonald's employees, and it did not assess the quality and veracity of the sources it relied upon. Some of the sources cited by the companies were self-reported and not independently audited, and for that reason, were used with great care in the context of the independent evidence. Secondly, the academic research papers included were mostly cross-sectional studies, suggesting associations rather than cause-and-effect relationships (Page et al., 2021). Thirdly, the studies were not primarily conducted on McDonald's or on fast food per se; they were conducted on other industries (such as hospitality) and were transferred by reasoning to fast food, especially in the form of McDonald's. Lastly, only English-language publications from the 2021-2026 timeframe were considered, potentially missing other evidence in languages other than English or in earlier years.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

There are three ways that these limitations could be addressed in future research. First, primary studies (surveys or interviews with the crew and managers at McDonald's locations, including franchised restaurants) would test the patterns identified here with firsthand evidence. Secondly, longitudinal studies would enable conclusions to be drawn about the impact of poor welfare on turnover and on poor performance over time, rather than just following it. Third, comparative studies between restaurant chains—both franchised and company-owned—and among various franchise-model firms would directly test the franchise-accountability argument. Combined, this evidence would take the field from demonstrating that welfare and efficiency are correlated, as this review has done, toward demonstrating the efficiency price that a large franchised firm would have to pay for a given increase in welfare.

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