

## How Workplace Ostracism and Bullying Influence Employee Outcomes: Evidence from the Education Sector

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explores how workplace bullying and ostracism affect employee performance within Pakistan's higher education sector, focusing specifically on administrative staff. It also examines whether supervisor support can reduce the negative impact of these harmful behaviours. The topic is important in the local context, where such issues often go unnoticed or unreported, and legal protections are either weakly enforced or absent in many institutions. A key gap in the existing literature is the lack of studies that connect these workplace issues with performance outcomes in Pakistani universities, especially using established theories like Social Cognitive Theory. The study follows a quantitative, time-lagged design and uses a convenient sampling method to collect responses from 220 administrative staff members working in private universities. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires based on validated scales and analyzed through SPSS software using correlation, regression, and moderated regression analysis. Results showed that workplace bullying significantly harms employee performance, while ostracism, although theoretically expected to be damaging, did not show a significant effect. Supervisor support was found to play a positive role overall and successfully weakened the link between ostracism and poor performance. However, it did not reduce the negative impact of bullying. The findings suggest that universities need to focus more on the role of supportive supervisors and implement strict anti-harassment policies to ensure a healthy working environment.*

**Keywords:** Workplace Ostracism, Bullying, Employees' Performance, Workplace law

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are often viewed as inclusive, intellectually enriching, and professionally supportive environments. However, recent studies challenge this idealised perception, revealing that workplace mistreatment, particularly in the forms of bullying and ostracism, is increasingly prevalent even in academic settings (Klein, 2009; Fatima & Malik, 2024). While workplace mistreatment has been widely studied in other sectors, its unique dynamics and consequences in HEIs, especially for administrative staff, remain significantly underexplored (Khurshid et al., 2024). Unlike faculty members, administrative personnel often operate in hierarchical, politically sensitive environments with limited access to grievance mechanisms or psychological resources.

Employee performance, defined as the efficiency, quality, and consistency with which individuals complete assigned responsibilities (Rusiadi, 2018), is central to organizational success. However, behaviours such as psychological aggression, social exclusion, and neglect, particularly when originating from colleagues or supervisors, can drastically impair focus, reduce motivation, and contribute to long-term mental health issues (Einarsen et al., 2003; Rehman & Aslam, 2024). This leads to disengagement, absenteeism, and reduced innovation. Consequently, such experiences not only lower individual productivity but also compromise institutional culture and service delivery (Rayner & Keashly, 2005).

Workplace bullying has been consistently linked to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and burnout (Kivimäki & Virtanen, 2003; Iqbal et al., 2024). Likewise, workplace ostracism, characterized by being ignored, excluded, or treated as invisible, elicits feelings of hopelessness, psychological strain, and identity threats, particularly when it disrupts fundamental needs such as belonging and self-worth (Ferris et al., 2008; Su, 2011). The emotional toll of these behaviors can be especially damaging in collectivist cultures where social inclusion is deeply valued.

In Pakistan, despite legal frameworks such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), the Industrial Relations Act (2012), and the Constitution's Article 14 (right to dignity), implementation remains weak across educational institutions. Institutional inaction has allowed a

toxic culture of silence to persist (Khan & Sadiq, 2024), further exacerbating the problem. Greater empirical scrutiny and context-sensitive interventions are therefore urgently needed to safeguard employee well-being in academic environments.

Although extensive literature exists on workplace mistreatment, limited empirical research has been conducted in Pakistan's education sector, especially involving administrative staff. Existing literature has largely excluded the administrative cadre, despite its critical role in institutional operations and its heightened exposure to systemic stressors and organisational neglect. These employees often face informal hierarchies, job insecurity, and limited access to support systems, further amplifying their vulnerability to mistreatment. Theoretical frameworks such as Conservation of Resources Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory are widely used globally to explain employee behaviour under stress, yet they remain underutilised in the Pakistani academic context (Howard et al., 2020; Awan & Fatima, 2023). There is also a lack of research exploring the legal dimension of workplace abuse in universities. Few studies have assessed the effectiveness of harassment legislation or investigated whether institutional compliance reduces negative workplace behaviour. Additionally, the moderating role of the supervisor, which serves as an essential buffer in toxic work environments, has not been adequately explored concerning employee performance.

Further, this study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasises that individuals learn behaviours by observing others in their environment. This theory posits that cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences interact to shape individual actions through a process of reciprocal determinism (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In workplace settings, when employees observe mistreatment being ignored or rewarded, they may internalize such behaviour as acceptable, thereby perpetuating a toxic environment. According to Bandura (1986), employees actively interpret and regulate behaviour based on personal and observed experiences. Therefore, exposure to ostracism or bullying not only affects the direct victim but also shapes organizational norms. Supervisor support, in contrast, may serve as a positive observational cue that counteracts these negative experiences and reinforces pro-social behaviour.

Likewise, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on organisational behaviour within developing countries, specifically focusing on Pakistan's education sector. By emphasising the influence of workplace mistreatment on administrative staff, often overlooked in academic literature, the research fills a crucial gap. It also broadens the understanding of psychosocial dynamics within hierarchical institutions and sheds light on how marginalised employee groups are disproportionately affected. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for educational institutions seeking to improve staff morale, performance, and retention. It highlights the importance of cultivating a supportive and inclusive work culture and the critical role of supervisory intervention in curbing workplace toxicity. Additionally, it reinforces the need for compliance with national harassment and labour laws to create legally safe and psychologically secure environments. The findings also offer a framework that can be expanded in future cross-cultural and sectoral studies by incorporating additional variables such as emotional exhaustion, job autonomy, and peer support. Finally, the study supports institutional efforts to reduce absenteeism, increase job satisfaction, and enhance employee engagement, key outcomes for sustaining academic excellence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Adaptive Leadership and Psychological Empowerment**

Workplace bullying is a pervasive issue that affects nearly all types of organizations globally (Farhan & Robert, 2018). It involves repeated, health-harming behaviours such as verbal abuse, intimidation, and work interference, perpetrated by one or more individuals against a target who finds it difficult to defend themselves (Einarsen & Hoel, 2000). Such hostile behaviours significantly diminish employee well-being, engagement, and performance. Victims of bullying often experience reduced concentration, low self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, and psychological strain, ultimately impairing their ability to perform effectively (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2023; Salin & Notelaers, 2020). Bullying is also associated with reduced job satisfaction, impaired cognitive functioning, and decreased motivation, which adversely affect both task performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (Kwan et al., 2022; Yildiz, 2022).

In high-intensity bullying environments, employees frequently adopt withdrawal strategies, leading to increased absenteeism and turnover intentions

(Berthelsen et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2021). Supportive supervision and well-implemented anti-bullying policies can serve as protective factors, buffering the negative effects on performance (Ariza-Montes et al., 2021; Iqbal & Shahid, 2024). However, bullying remains underreported due to fear of retaliation, particularly in hierarchical cultures (Nguyen et al., 2021). Research continues to emphasize the need for psychological safety, leadership training, and enforceable policies to combat bullying effectively (Tariq & Javed, 2024). Moreover, individual traits such as neuroticism, social anxiety, and low coping skills may exacerbate the effects of bullying, leading to feelings of helplessness and job dissatisfaction (Einarsen et al., 1994; Kivimäki et al., 2003). Persistent exposure often results in absenteeism or turnover, further disrupting organizational functioning (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Hauge et al., 2007).

**H1:** Workplace bullying is negatively related to Employees' Performance.

### **Workplace Ostracism and Employees' Performance**

Workplace ostracism is defined as the perception of being ignored or excluded by others in a professional setting (Williams, 2001). It is a subtle yet damaging form of mistreatment that significantly undermines employees' psychological and behavioural outcomes. Ostracism triggers a range of negative emotional responses, including frustration, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, ultimately leading to reduced performance (Grutter & Masters, 1986; Chow et al., 2008). Research indicates that social exclusion provokes emotional states such as rage, despondency, and emotional instability (Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Zadro et al., 2004). These responses often translate into job dissatisfaction, impaired concentration, and a decline in overall workplace engagement (Ferris et al., 2008; O'Reilly & Robinson, 2009). Studies further reveal that the adverse effects of ostracism are moderated by individual resources. For instance, higher levels of psychological capital encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism can buffer the impact of ostracism on stress and turnover intentions (Haq, 2014; Tariq & Javed, 2024). Similarly, organisation-based self-esteem has been found to fully mediate the relationship between ostracism and workplace behaviours (Chung, Yang, & Yang, 2017). Ostracism also negatively influences family satisfaction through increased work-to-family conflict (Fatima & Mehmood, 2024). From a legal perspective, Pakistan's Protection Against

Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) and Section 509 of the Penal Code mandate institutional mechanisms for addressing workplace mistreatment. However, due to cultural stigma, many victims refrain from reporting such incidents, limiting the law's effectiveness (Ahmed & Rauf, 2024).

**H2:** Workplace Ostracism is negatively related to Employees' Performance.

### **Supervisory support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying & Employees' performance**

Bullying is less common in workplaces that assists. The likelihood of overcoming the impacts of bullying increases if victims can participate in and sustain relationships with social networks that offer support. (Malin & Parzefall, 2010). Systematic, directed, unethical communication and aggressive behaviour by one or more persons is characterised as "mobbing," which encompasses several forms of workplace terrorising, such as pressuring, threatening, ridiculing, and psycho-terror. Actions that occur repeatedly for a long time are the most serious and effective causes of workplace stress. (Aytolan Yildirim, Dilek Yildirim, 2007). One way in which bullying affects people is through their level of performance. Likewise, the impact of social support on strain was direct and positive, and supervisor support may reduce the dominance of negative behaviours at work. (Dianne Gardner et al., 2013). Workplace bullying that is encountered in the workplace negatively impacts on individual professional, personal, and social lives (i.e., forced resignation, dismissal, for that reason often using sick leave or receiving reports and their health. (Ornero, 2005). Among the victims' physical ailments are stress, hypertension, gastrointestinal issues, and an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease. According to Yamada (2008), it can also cause victims to have psychosomatic disorders and physical health concerns (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996).

**H3:** Supervisory support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying & Employees' performance, in such a way that it strengthens the relationship when supervisory support is high.

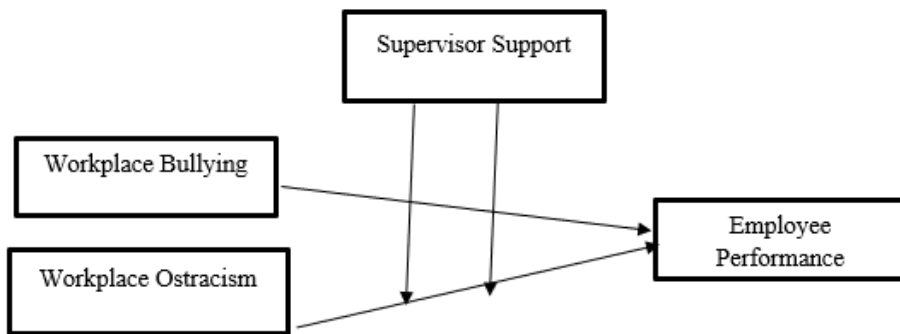
### **Supervisory support moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism & Employees' performance**

When people in an organisation see that their coworkers, peers, or even management are ignoring them, it's known as workplace ostracism. (Wu, Yim,

Kwanand, and Zhang, 2012; Ferris et al., 2008). An interpersonal stressor and a distressing event, osteoarthritis can cause stress-related health problems (Williams, 1997, 2001). Research into the causes and effects of social exclusion in the workplace is, thus, pressing (Wu et al. 2012). Strategies for coping with social exclusion can help mitigate the negative effects of this form of bullying on one's professional performance (Williams, 2007). Employees' emotional and physical well-being may be affected by social exclusion at work (Heaphy and Dutton, 2008).

**H4:** Supervisory support moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism & Employees' performance, in such a way that it weakens the relationship when supervisory support is high.

**Figure 1. Perceived Model**



## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, time-lagged survey-based research design to examine the impact of workplace ostracism and bullying on employee outcomes in Pakistan's education sector, with supervisory support as a moderating variable. A time-lagged design was selected to reduce common method bias and to enhance the causal inference between predictors and outcomes.

The target population consisted of administrative staff working in public and private higher education institutions across major cities in Pakistan. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation

of non-academic personnel. The sample size comprised 220 respondents, selected based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table.

The data collection for this study was conducted in time lags, following the approach used by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010). In their research, data were collected at two points: Time 1 for inclusive leadership, and Time 2 for psychological safety and employee involvement. Similarly, in the current study, data were collected at two stages: at Time 1, data on employee performance and workplace ostracism were gathered, and at Time 2, after a one-week interval, data on workplace bullying and supervisor support were collected.

Employees' performance is measured through an adopted and adapted questionnaire scale developed by Tessema, M., Soeters, J, 2006) using 8 items. Workplace bullying (WB) is measured using a scale developed by Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, 2009, having 22 items. Workplace ostracism (WO) is measured using a 10-item scale developed by Ferris, D. L., Brown, D. J., Berry, J. W., & Lian, 2008. Supervisor Support (SS) is measured using a scale developed by (McGilton (2005).

## **RESULTS ANALYSIS**

### **Demographics**

The analysis demonstrates that from the population, 48.6% of participants were Female and 51.4% were Male participants from a total sample size of 220. The respondents varied in terms of work experience. A total of forty-one participants (18.6%) reported having less than one year of experience. The majority, one hundred forty-nine participants (67.7%), had between one and five years of experience. Meanwhile, twenty-nine participants (13.2%) reported six to ten years of experience. Cumulatively, this distribution shows that 86.4% of respondents had up to five years of experience, with nearly all participants (99.5%) having ten years or less.

Demographic variables were controlled during regression analysis using ONE-WAY ANOVA. All the values are non-significant i.e., ( $p > 0.05$ ) except designation ( $p < 0.05$ ) which has a significant influence on employees' performance, thus controlled ahead for better outcomes.



## Correlation Analysis

**Table 2.** Correlation

	EP	EI	WI	WO
EP	1			
SS	.536**	1		
WB	-.480**	-.395**	1	
WO	-.119	-.124	.327**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 2. Presents the Pearson correlation matrix. Employee performance (EP) is positively and significantly correlated with supervisor support (SS) ( $r = .536, p < .01$ ), and negatively and significantly correlated with workplace bullying (WB) ( $r = -.480, p < .01$ ). However, EP shows a positive but insignificant correlation with workplace ostracism (WO) ( $r = .119$ ). SS is negatively and insignificantly associated with WB ( $r = -.395$ ) and positively but insignificantly correlated with WO ( $r = .124$ ). WB and WO are significantly correlated ( $r = .327, p < .01$ ). Most relationships are significant at the 0.01 level.

## Regression Analysis

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression analysis for determinants of Employees' Performance

Predictors	Employees' Performance		
	B	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Control Variables		.018	
<b>Step 2</b>			
Supervisor Support	.616***		
Work Bullying	.010ns		
Workplace Ostracism	-.479***	.294	.276

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,

**H1: Workplace Bullying is negatively related to Employees' Performance.**

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. In Step 1, demographic variables (age, gender, education, qualification, and experience) were controlled. In Step 2, workplace bullying (WB) was found to be negatively and significantly associated with employee performance (EP) ( $\beta = -.479$ ,  $t = 8.058$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis H1. The  $R^2$  value of 0.294 indicates that 29.4% of the variance in employee performance is explained by workplace bullying. These findings suggest that higher levels of workplace bullying significantly reduce employee performance. H2: Workplace ostracism has a significant negative impact on Employees' Performance

***H3: Supervisor Support has a significant positive impact on Employees' Performance***

Table 4 further indicates that supervisor support (SS) has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (EP) ( $\beta = .616$ ,  $t = 9.234$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis H3. This implies that a one-unit increase in supervisor support leads to a .616-unit improvement in employee performance. The model's overall significance is confirmed by an F-statistic of 30.038 ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a good model fit.

**Table 4.** Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis

Predictors	Employees' Performance		
	B	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Control Variables		.027	
<b>Step 2</b>			
Workplace Bullying	.017ns		
Supervisor Support	.613***	.290	.263
<b>Step 3</b>			
WB*SS	-.123ns	.306	.016ns

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

***H4: Supervisor Support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and Employees' Performance, in such a way that an increase in Supervisor Support weakens the said relationship.***

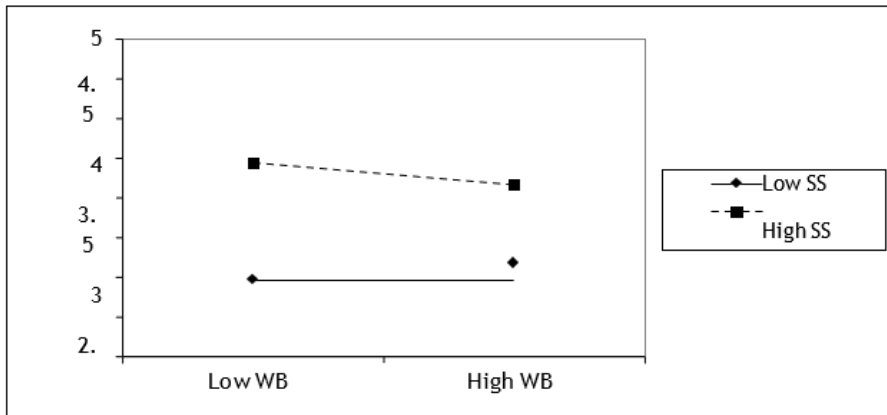
**Figure 2.** Moderation Hypothesis 4

Figure 2 presents the results of the moderation regression analysis. In Step 1, demographic variables were controlled. Step 2 shows that workplace bullying (WB) had a positive but insignificant effect on employee performance (EP), whereas supervisor support (SS) had a significant positive effect. In Step 3, the interaction term ( $WB \times SS$ ) was introduced. The results indicate that the interaction effect was negative and insignificant ( $\beta = -0.123$ ,  $t = -1.234$ ), suggesting that supervisor support does not moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and employee performance. Consequently, Hypothesis H4 is not supported. This is further illustrated in Figure 4.7, which confirms that high supervisor support does not buffer the negative impact of workplace bullying on employee performance.

**Table 5.** Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis

Predictors	Employees' Performance		
	B	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			
Control Variables		.027	
<b>Step 2</b>			
Workplace Ostracism	-.336***		
Supervisor Support	.611***	.294	.267
<b>Step 3</b>			

WO*SS	-.687*	.341	.047*
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\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

***H5: Supervisor support moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and Employees' Performance, in such a way that increases in supervisor support weaken the said relationship***

The results of moderation regression analysis show that after incorporating the interaction term of Workplace Ostracism (WO)\* Supervisor Support (SS) (WO\*SS), It is observed that interaction term has a negative and insignificant impact on Employees' Performance (EP) with beta value of  $B = -.143$ ,  $t = -.583$ . It means that the presence of Supervisor Support (SS) moderates the association between Workplace Ostracism (WO) and Employees' Performance (EP), leading towards the acceptance of hypothesis H5 that Supervisor Support moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and Employees' Performance, in such a way that increases in Supervisor Support weakens the said relationship.

**Figure 3.** Moderation Hypothesis 5

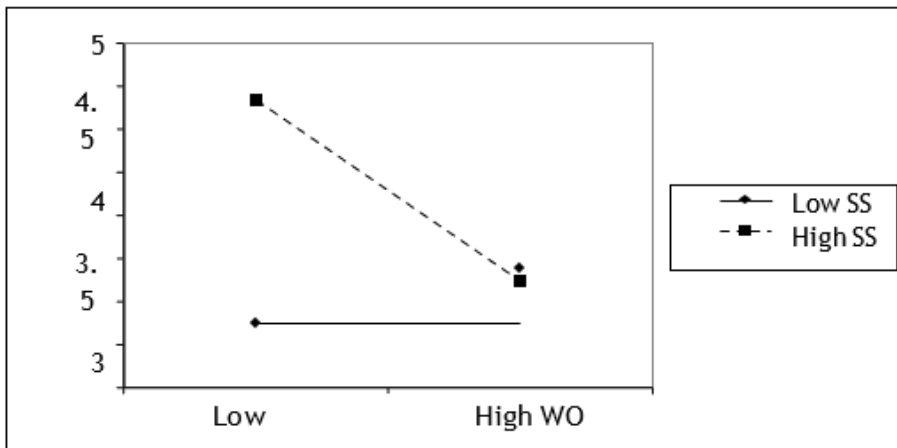


Figure 3. shows the moderation graph, which also explains that high Supervisor Support (SS) weakens the relationship between Workplace ostracism (WO) and Employees' Performance (EP), leading to acceptance of the proposed hypothesis.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study explores the impact of workplace bullying and ostracism, with supervisory support as a moderating factor. Ethically and within the Islamic context, fairness and justice are fundamental at all organizational levels. When universities adopt respectful and inclusive policies, they enhance employee loyalty, performance, and a culture of mutual respect. To maintain a positive work environment, institutions should conduct regular workplace surveys and act on the findings. Engaging employees in decision-making and recognizing their contributions fosters trust and commitment. However, many private academic institutions still lack key committees, such as grievance, harassment, and planning committees, restricting employees' ability to report and resolve issues.

Under Pakistan's Protection Against Harassment at the Workplace Act (2010), educational institutions are legally obligated to establish investigation committees and enforce codes of conduct. Non-compliance endangers employee well-being and exposes institutions to legal and reputational risks. Raising awareness of these laws is essential for fostering a safe and compliant work environment.

This study specifically examines the moderating role of supervisor support in the relationship between workplace bullying and ostracism in private educational institutions across major cities in Pakistan. The findings emphasize the need for academic staff to recognize and report workplace incivility. Empowering employees in this way enhances institutional performance, which is critical for national development.

## CONCLUSION

In Pakistan's educational institutions, addressing workplace bullying and exclusion requires aligning organizational practices with constitutional principles of human dignity and labor protections outlined in national laws. Failure to do so risks violating fundamental employee rights. Retaining administrative staff in the education sector remains challenging due to intense competition. Findings indicate that while bullying is prevalent, workplace ostracism is less commonly reported. Moreover, supervisor support does not significantly moderate the relationship between ostracism and employee performance.

This research contributes to the limited literature on workplace mistreatment in educational settings, offering new insights into the roles of bullying, ostracism, and supervisory support in shaping employee outcomes.

### **Limitations and Future Direction**

Researchers are encouraged to expand the scope by collecting data from other high-pressure sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, and tourism, where employee performance and organizational climate are critical (Khan & Yousaf, 2024). Future studies could also investigate additional variables influencing performance, including person–job fit, work–family balance, flexible work arrangements, and emotional exhaustion as a mediating factor. Furthermore, co-worker support may serve as a valuable moderating variable alongside supervisor support (Ahmed & Rauf, 2024).

An increased sample size is also advised, as this study was constrained by time and yielded only 220 valid responses. Replicating this model using mixed methods or longitudinal designs could strengthen the validity of results. Additionally, given the cultural specificity of this research, applying the model across diverse cultural and organizational contexts would improve generalizability. Comparative studies in other countries using the same or slightly modified variables could provide richer cross-cultural insights (Fatima & Mehmood, 2024).

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