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WORKPLACE CHALLENGES AND EMPLOYEE SILENCE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR OF PAKISTAN: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AND MODERATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

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Workplace Challenges, Occupational Burnout, Employee Silence, Job Demands-Resources Theory, Employee Resilience.

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Abstract

*In the 21st century, escalating organizational competition has driven an increase in workplace challenges. These challenges are directly linked to negative organizational behaviors, specifically counterproductive work behaviors such as employee silence. While prior literature has predominantly examined workplace challenges in relation to job performance within the corporate sector—often overlooking the education sector and employee silence—this study investigates the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence within Pakistan's higher education sector. It elucidates how workplace challenges foster counterproductive work behaviors by introducing occupational burnout as a mediating variable. Workplace challenges generate occupational burnout, which subsequently drives employee silence. Additionally, employee resilience is examined as a moderating variable that buffers and weakens the positive relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. Quantitative, cross-sectional data were gathered from faculty and administrative staff across Pakistani universities using questionnaires, with the required sample size determined via G*Power software. Statistical analyses—including reliability, validity, descriptive, correlation, regression, mediation, and moderation analyses—were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). The empirical findings demonstrate that workplace challenges have a positive and significant relationship with both employee silence and occupational burnout. Furthermore, occupational burnout shows a positive and significant relationship with employee silence and fully mediates the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. Finally, employee resilience significantly moderates and buffers the impact of workplace challenges on employee silence. These insights provide actionable guidance for leaders and organizations to foster personal psychological resources, such as employee resilience, and establish supportive work environments to*

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mitigate counterproductive behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In this modern era, everyone wants to achieve more in less time. Businesses works on formula 'More Profit in Less Time'. Obviously, achieving targets before time requires a lot of efforts and more efforts increase stress (Abdullah & Al-Abrrow, 2025). Organizations now-a-days do not realize that more profits and achieving targets before time increase pressure on employees. Workplace Challenges are the stressors that is cause of modern organization working setup. Organization wants more profit and puts more pressure to employees for achieving targets before time (Afroze et al., 2025). This mindset increases Workplace Challenges.

Increasing pressure called Workplace Challenges, on employees creates a lot of psychological problem in employees (Hayes, 2018). All the psychological problems which are cause due to workplace challenges are dangerous for organization. Employees are the backbone of organization. When employees are not psychologically healthy than organization cannot survive in the market. Most dangerous psychological problem is Employee Silence. Workplace Challenges is the reason behind Employee Silence psychological problem (Ahsan & Tahir, 2025). Modern Era increase workplace challenges and workplace challenges cause employee silence psychological problem. Employee Silence is dangerous because employees do not share any information that is beneficial for organization. Employee Silence is a psychological problem and also counterproductive work behavior (Zhamshit, 2025). Modern Era is responsible for Employee Silence. Modern Era put pressure on organization for more profits and achieving targets before time and organization put pressure on employees and ultimately psychological problem increases like Employee Silence (Khan et al., 2026).

Specifically, Education Sector faces more psychological problems because of Workplace Challenges (De Clercq & Pereira, 2025). In order to survive in modern era, education sector also implement those changes which increases workplace challenges on employees (Akande & Furnham, 2025). Faculty and Administrative Staff face a lot of workplace challenges in this modern era like time pressure, workload pressure, job responsibility pressure. Such workplace challenges are the reason behind psychological problem like employee silence. Workplace Challenges causes Employee Silence problem then Faculty and Administrative Staff avoid to share any idea or opinion regarding organization benefits. Due to workplace challenges, employees show counterproductive work behavior like employee silence. Employee Silence is not good for organization because organization lose useful advice from employee's side (Taber, 2017).

Workplace Challenges is the reason behind producing counterproductive work behavior like employee silence (Zaman et al., 2025). But here is a question that how workplace challenges producing counterproductive work behavior like employee silence? The answer is, workplace challenges like time pressure, workload pressure, job responsibility pressure, increases Occupational Burnout means Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism and occupational burnout is the cause of producing Employee Silence (Kline, 2015). Continuous work-related stress produces occupational burnout and occupational burnout produces employee's silence. This is how workplace challenges produce employee silence by the addition of occupational burnout. In this modern era, education sector face occupational burnout problem due to workplace challenges which contribute towards employee silence. Faculty, Administrative Staff face workload pressure, time pressure, job responsibility pressure, in order to survive in this modern era (Al Shaikh Abubakar, 2025). Such pressures

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contribute occupational burnout in employees which further contributes employee silence.

Modern Era contributes in counterproductive work behavior of employees because employees facing more stress in order to achieve more targets in less time (Fornell, C., & Larcker, 1981). There are also psychological powers introduces in this modern era for reducing counterproductive work behavior. The psychological power which reduces counterproductive work behavior like employee silence is Employee Resilience (Ali et al., 2025). Resilience is the mental strength which helps to remain positive whatever situation is. Employee Resilience weakens the relation between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence. To reduce counterproductive work behavior in this modern era, training sessions related to employee resilience must be conduct. If employee is resilience, workplace challenges do not increase occupational burnout instead occupational burnout reduce due to employee resilience and ultimately employee silence reduces due to reduce in occupational burnout. In this modern era which increases stress on employees, Employee Resilience is the solution to reduce occupational burnout problem and ultimately reduces employee silence problem. In education sector, faculty and administrative staff face workplace challenges, resilience helps them to show productive work behavior whatever challenge is.

In existing literature, workplace challenges are discussed but specifically in western context. Furthermore, in existing literature, workplace challenges are discussed on corporate sector. Additionally, existing literature highlights that workplace challenges reduce employee performance, but, do not specifically indicate how employee performance reduce. In this study, workplace challenges are discussed on Pakistan Context because workplace challenges are less discussed or ignore in Pakistani Context. In Pakistan, employees face a lot of workplace challenges and that is why organization in Pakistan do not perform well. The reason is, workplace challenges produce counterproductive work behavior on employees and that is why organization do not meet their targets. In this study, Workplace Challenges are discussed on Pakistan Education Sector. The reason to discuss Pakistan Education Sector is, Faculty and Administrative Staff face Workplace Challenges like time pressure, workload pressure, job responsibility pressure and no one discuss this issue. In Pakistan, everyone ignores workplace challenges of Faculty and Administrative Staff. This study highlights workplace challenges of Pakistan Education Sector. In this study, workplace challenges are discussed with occupational burnout and employee silence. In this study, it is explained that how workplace challenges produce counterproductive work behavior. In this study, it is highlighted that workplace challenges increase occupational burnout and ultimately counterproductive work behavior like employee silence increase. In this study, specifically employee silence counterproductive work behavior is highlighted which is a value addition in literature. Also, in this study, it is highlighted that how workplace challenges produce counterproductive work behavior which is a value addition in literature. Most importantly, in this study, mental strength is discussed like Resilience. It is highlighted that mental strength weakens the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. This study guides organizations that workplace challenges cause counterproductive work behavior. Also, this study guides organizations to create a working environment that does not produce occupational burnout because burnout produce counterproductive work behavior. This study helps organizations that increase in mental strengths of employees like resilience, helps employees to face challenges. This study adds value in literature by giving valuable suggestions related to workplace challenges. Also, this study guides organizations about what are the outcomes of workplace challenges and how to overcome these outcomes.

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Broad Problem Area

Organization demands from employees increasing day-by-day, but resources to facilitate employees decreasing day-by-day (Zeshan et al., 2025). Organization demands create workplace challenges like workload pressure, time pressure and job responsibility pressure. These workplace challenges increase psychological syndrome like Occupational Burnout. Occupational Burnout is the reason behind producing counter productive work behavior like employee silence, but, researchers did not highlight psychological syndrome like occupational burnout and employee silence. Existing Literature discussed Workplace Challenges and their Outcomes on Corporate Sector but ignore the Education Sector. This study discusses the Relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence by considering Education Sector of Pakistan because Education Sector of Pakistan is ignored which needs attention. Faculty and Administrative Staff of Education Sector face Workplace Challenges and due to Workplace Challenges, Counterproductivity is the outcome. Occupational Burnout and Employee Silence are the serious psychological issue of employees which needs to address and this psychological syndrome is due to workplace challenges (Akhtar at al., 2022). One more point which needs attention that with the help of psychological resources like Employee Resilience, the psychological syndrome like occupational burnout and employee silence can be overcome. Broad problem area is, dynamic environment of organization increases workplace challenges. With the increase in workplace challenges, occupational burnout and employee silence is the outcome which needs discussion. Also, mental strength like employee resilience helps to cope such psychological syndrome like occupational burnout and employee silence cause due to workplace challenges which is ignore or overlook.

Specific Problem Statement

Workplace Challenges increases counterproductive work behavior among employees in the organization. Employee Silence is one of the counterproductive work behaviors which is dangerous or harmful among all counterproductive work behavior. The reason why Employee Silence is dangerous or harmful among all counterproductive work behavior is, when employee intentionally withhold ideas or suggestions, it stops company or organization progress. Organization cannot move towards best when employee is silence. Organization only show progress when their employees share their opinion in each and every situation. One reason of Employee Silence Behavior is Workplace Challenges and Second reason of Employee Silence Behavior is Occupational Burnout. Researchers ignore the psychological syndrome like occupational burnout which produces employee silence behavior. Organizations demand from employees are so high that organization wants to meet targets in-time but ignore that these workload pressure, time pressure, job responsibility pressure, increase Burnout problem which is the root cause of Employee Silence.

Existing Literature discussed Workplace Challenges and their Outcomes on Corporate Sector but ignore the Education Sector. This study discusses the Relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence by considering Education Sector of Pakistan because Education Sector of Pakistan is ignored which needs attention. Faculty and Administrative Staff of Education Sector face Workplace Challenges and due to Workplace Challenges, Counterproductivity is the outcome. In this study, it is proposed that Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence, so, when Faculty and Administrative Staff face Workplace Challenges then Employee Silence is the outcome. When Faculty of any Education Institute shows silent behavior, it is not good for Nation because Faculty builds the Nation. Faculty and Administrative Staff of Education Sector must provide pleasant working environment so that counterproductive behavior decrease and Faculty

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focus on building Nation rather than remain silent.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Reflections: Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) is all about Workplace Challenges and Resources. Workplace Challenges increase counterproductive work behavior and Resources helps in converting counterproductive work behavior into productive work behavior. Job Demands-Resources (JDR) Model explain that workplace challenges like time pressure, workload pressure, job responsibility pressure, urge employees to show counterproductive behavior. Workplace Challenges is directly proportional to counterproductive work behavior. Increase in Workplace Challenges, increases counterproductive work behavior, but, there is another interesting concept in Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, that is, increase in mental strength, decreases counterproductive work behavior means that when employee is mentally strong than workplace challenges do not increase counterproductive work behavior. Strong Mind decreases counterproductive work behavior. Increase in Mental Strength is inversely proportional to counterproductive work behavior. Resilience is the resource that increase mental strength and ultimately counterproductive work behavior decreases. When employees are resilient, workplace challenges become the opportunity to learn from it and stay strong. Resilience increases productivity in employees. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model gives two concepts, one is, workplace challenges increase counterproductive work behavior and second concept is, Mental Strength like Resilience, overcome counterproductive work behavior, so, workplace challenges are directly proportional to counterproductive work behavior and employee resilience is inversely proportional to counterproductive work behavior.

Operational Definition of Study Variables

Workplace Challenges: Time pressure, workload pressure and job responsibility pressure is called workplace challenges (Cavanaugh et al., 2000).

Employee Silence: Intentionally with-holding ideas, suggestion is called Employee Silence (Brinsfield, 2013).

Occupational Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Physical Exhaustion due to continuous unrelieved stress is called Occupational Burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005).

Employee Resilience: The ability of employee to stay positive in any circumstances, ready to face challenges, recover from setbacks and learn from challenges is called Employee Resilience (Näswall et al., 2019).

Hypothesis Development

Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence

Workload pressure, time pressure and job responsibility pressure are the obstacles which increases workplace challenges. Workplace Challenges increases in this modern era due to competition. Organizations want to achieve more in less time which increase pressure on employees. Intentionally with-holding ideas, suggestion due to burnout is called Employee Silence. Achieving more in less time put pressure on employees which have negative consequences on employees. Employees show counterproductive work behavior due to workplace challenges (Akhtar, 2024). Increase in workplace challenges increases counterproductive work behavior.

H_1: *Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence.*

Workplace Challenges and Occupational Burnout

Workload pressure, time pressure and job responsibility pressure are the obstacles which increases workplace challenges. Workplace Challenges increases in this modern era due to competition. Organizations want to achieve more in less time which increase pressure on employees. When employees face long, un-

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relieved stress than Emotional Exhaustion, Physical Exhaustion increases which is called Occupational Burnout. Occupational Burnout increases in employees due to workplace challenges. Workplace Challenges is directly proportional to Occupational Burnout.

H_2: Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Occupational Burnout.

Occupational Burnout and Employee Silence

When employees face long, un-relieved stress than Emotional Exhaustion, Physical Exhaustion increases which is called Occupational Burnout. Intentionally with-holding ideas, suggestion due to burnout is called Employee Silence. Occupational Burnout increases counterproductive behavior in employees. Achieving more in less time put pressure on employees which have negative consequences on employees. Employees show counterproductive work behavior due to occupational burnout.

H_3: Occupational Burnout has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence.

Occupational Burnout as a Mediator in the Relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence

Occupational Burnout as Mediator is, the variable which explains how workplace challenges increase employee silence. Workload pressure, time pressure and job responsibility pressure, are the obstacles which increases workplace challenges. Emotional Exhaustion, Physical Exhaustion due to continuous long unrelieved stress is called Occupational Burnout. Intentionally with-holding idea, suggestion due to burnout is called Employee Silence. Workplace Challenges increase stress on employees. Workplace Challenges is the reason behind producing occupational burnout which further contribute in counterproductive work behavior like employee silence.

H_4: *Occupational Burnout mediate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence.*

Employee Resilience as a Moderator in the Relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence

Employee Resilience as a Moderator is, the variable which explains how employee resilience weakens the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. Employee Resilience is, the ability to stay positive in any challenge or circumstances is called Employee Resilience. Resilience is the only resource that reduces the occupational burnout and ultimately reduce the counterproductive work behavior like employee silence.

H_5: *Employee Resilience moderate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence such that the relationship is weaker for employees with high resilience.*

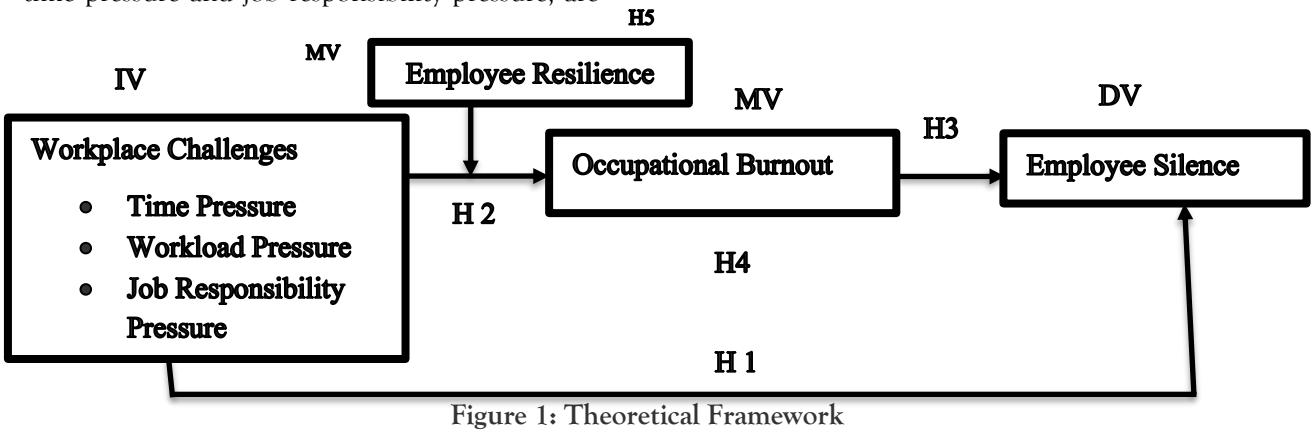

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

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METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

This study is Quantitative, Explanatory and Cross-sectional in nature. The population in this study is, Education Sector Employees like Faculty and Administrative Staff. Convenience Sampling Technique is used. Individual employee is the unit of analysis for this study. Questionnaire is distributed directly to Employees of Education Sector of Pakistan like Faculty and Administrative Staff.

G Power Software (Faul et al., 2007) is used for Sample Size out of Total Population. Total Sample Size recommend by G Power is 77, but researcher collect data from 200 Education Sector Employees for more accurate analysis. Effect size in G Power is 0.15, Statistical Power is 0.8, Significance level is 0.05 and number of predictors is 03.

Instrumentation

- **Workplace Challenges:** Measured using 06 items adapted from Cavanaugh et al. (2000), covering time pressure, workload pressure, and job responsibility.
- **Occupational Burnout:** Measured using 07 work-related burnout items adapted from Kristensen et al. (2005) (Copenhagen Burnout Inventory).
- **Employee Silence:** Measured using 09 items adapted from Brinsfield (2013).
- **Employee Resilience:** Measured using 09 items adapted from Näswall et al. (2019).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was done by distributing questionnaires among Faculty and Administrative Staff of different Universities. 80 Faculty and Administrative Staff of different Universities were asked to fill questionnaires to check the reliability of the scale. Cronbach Alpha of Workplace Challenges Scale is $\alpha = 0.925$, Occupational Burnout Scale is $\alpha = 0.729$, Employee Silence Scale is $\alpha = 0.876$ and Employee Resilience Scale is $\alpha = 0.930$.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographics

Table 1: Demographics of the Study Variables (N = 200)

Details	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	173
	Female	27
Age	20-29	58
	30-39	81
	40-49	52
	50+	9
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's	35
	Master's	70
	MPhil/PhD	95
Job Position / Designation	Faculty	96
	Administrative Staff	104
Work Experience (Years)	Less than 1	2
	1-5	43
	6-10	75
	11+	80

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Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Reliability of the Study Variables (N = 200)

Variables	Reliability of Scale Cronbach α
Workplace Challenges	0.933
Occupational Burnout	0.767
Employee Silence	0.931
Employee Resilience	0.902

Validity Analysis

Table 3: Validity Statistics of Study Variables

Variables	Factor Loadings	Communalities	CR	AVE
Workplace Challenges (06 items)	0.8666	0.803	0.9479	0.7527
Occupational Burnout (07 items)	0.6187	0.723	0.9061	0.7227
Employee Silence (09 items)	0.782	0.805	0.940	0.6538
Employee Resilience (09 items)	0.750	0.728	0.922	0.572

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Workplace Challenges	1.00	5.00	3.5733	.97736	-.909	-.134
Occupational Burnout	1.43	4.14	3.1057	.89338	-.185	-1.314
Employee Silence	1.00	4.67	3.4256	1.05622	-.287	-1.035
Employee Resilience	1.44	5.00	3.6761	.73642	-.703	.180

Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Correlation Analysis Between Study Variables

Variables	Workplace Challenges	Occupational Burnout	Employee Silence	Employee Resilience
Workplace Challenges	1			
Occupational Burnout	.646**	1		

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Employee Silence	.568**	.820**	1	
Employee Resilience	.052	-.265**	-.284**	1

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Regression and Mediation Analysis

Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence having beta = 0.614, t = 9.718, p < 0.05. Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Occupational Burnout having beta = 0.590, t = 11.90, p < 0.05. Occupational Burnout has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence having beta = 0.970, t = 20.17, p < 0.05. In multiple regression, it is proved that direct effect of workplace challenges on employee silence becomes non-significant because occupational burnout mediates the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence (B = 0.111, t = 1.863, p = 0.060). Occupational Burnout shows full mediation between workplace challenges and employee silence.

Relationship	B	β	t	p
Workplace Challenges → Employee Silence	.614	.568	9.718	<.001
Workplace Challenges → Occupational Burnout	.590	.646	11.902	<.001
Occupational Burnout → Employee Silence	.970	.820	20.17	<.001
Workplace Challenges + Burnout + Resilience → Employee Silence	.111 / .861 / −.138	.103 / .728 / −.096	1.863 / 12.72 / −2.199	.060 / <.001 / .02

Moderation Analysis

To check whether Employee Resilience moderate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence, Barron & Kenny (1986) and Cohen et al. (2003) recommendations are followed and it is proved that Employee Resilience moderate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence having beta = -0.483, t = -8.538, p < 0.05.

Table 6: Moderation Conditional Direct Effects Across Resilience Levels

Employee Resilience Level	Conditional Effect of Workplace Challenges	SE	t	p
3.111 (Low)	.8960	.0590	15.1919	.0000
3.8889 (Moderate)	.5202	.0519	10.0299	.0000
4.3333 (High)	.3055	.0631	4.8428	.0000

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DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 is accepted because the results support that Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence. Workplace Challenges like Time Pressure, Workload Pressure and Job Responsibility increase counterproductive work behavior like employee silence among employees.

Hypothesis 2 is accepted because the results support that Workplace Challenges has a positive and significant relationship with Occupational Burnout. Workplace Challenges like Time Pressure, Workload Pressure and Job Responsibility increase occupational burnout among employees.

Hypothesis 3 is accepted because the results support that Occupational Burnout has a positive and significant relationship with Employee Silence. Occupational Burnout like Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Lack of Personal Accomplishment increase Employee Silence among employees.

Hypothesis 4 is accepted because the results support that Occupational Burnout mediate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence. Workplace Challenges increase Occupational Burnout, and Occupational Burnout increase Employee Silence among employees.

Hypothesis 5 is accepted because the results support that Employee Resilience moderate the relationship between Workplace Challenges and Employee Silence such that the relationship is weaker for employees with high resilience. Employee Resilience buffer the effect of Workplace Challenges on Employee Silence.

Theoretical Implications

Education Sector in Pakistan is ignore for Workplace Challenges. This study fulfills gap in literature by studying workplace challenges in Education Sector of Pakistan. Workplace Challenges is the antecedent of Employee Silence which needs attention. This study discusses workplace challenges with occupational burnout, employee silence and employee resilience, which is a value addition in literature. Occupational Burnout as a mediating variable and Employee resilience as moderating variable between workplace challenges and employee silence are value additions in literature.

Managerial Implications

First of all, managers must reduce time pressure, workload pressure, job responsibility pressure on employees because the result of workplace challenges is counterproductivity like employee silence, so, managers allow employees to do work according to their way of doing work.

Secondly, managers launch mental strength training programs for employees to increase employee's mental strength for increase productive work behavior and employees never show burnout and silence behavior.

Last, managers should create work environment in which employees can share their opinion and ideas and employees only share their opinions and ideas when employees are mentally strong and workplace challenges are at minimum level.

Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on several significant findings. Firstly, workplace challenges were found to have a positive influence on employee silence. Secondly, occupational burnout was identified as a crucial mediator in the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. Workplace Challenges produces occupational burnout which produce employee silence behavior. Furthermore, the study uncovered the moderating role of employee resilience in the relationship between workplace challenges and employee silence. Employee Resilience buffer the effect of workplace challenges on employee silence. By increasing employee resilience, organizations can buffer the effect of workplace challenges on employee silence in the Education Sector in Pakistan.

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