PSYCHO-ORGANIZATIONAL PREDICTORS OF MENTAL DISTRESS IN CALL

CENTER EMPLOYEES

A thesis
Presented to the Department of Professional Psychology,
Bahria University, Islamabad Campus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the
Degree of Bachelor of Sciences
(BS) Psychology

By
Ahmed Hassan
Arisha Abdullah

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Approved By

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Dedication

To all Team members, Ahmed Hassan and Arisha Abdullah

And dedicated to our loving parents and Dr. M.S. Ansari

For their moral support, strong motivation and Sympathetic attitude

And

To all teachers, friends and the participants

For taking out their time, supporting us and being cooperative through out

Abstract

This study aimed at exploring mental distress themes that arise as a consequence of organizational design elements and emotional labor in a call center landscape. Organizational design elements were postulated through Arnold Bakker's JD-R model in the form of Job Demands (Job Autonomy & Workload) and Job Resources (Peer Support & Supervisor Support). While Emotional Labor was conceptualized according to Prof. Dr. Dieter Zapf's work on Emotion Work through elements of Emotional Dissonance, Emotional Sensitivity & Emotional Interaction Control. A deductive approach was adopted for this study, that employed the questionnaire method of quantitative study, on a sample size of 269 individuals belonging to different call centers based out of Pakistan. Statistical tests of correlation, regression and mediation analysis were performed on the collected data. The results concluded that Job Demands positively and significantly impacted emotional labor and mental distress. While Job Resources significantly and negatively impacted on mental distress and not emotional labor. Emotional labor significantly mediated the relation between job demands and mental distress and not the relation between job resources and mental distress. The core findings of this study stress confirm mental distress as an occupational hazard in the Pakistani Call Center landscape and an avenue that will help in managing employee attrition and absenteeism.

Keywords: Job Demands, Job Autonomy, Workload, Job Resources, Peer Support, Supervisor Support, Emotional Labor, Emotion Work , Emotional Dissonance, Emotional Sensitivity, and Emotional Interaction Control.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

Mental health issues are surfacing as one of the most costly issues that businesses and governments around the world face. Psychological distress, defined as mental and physical symptoms associated with emotional strain, is a growing public health problem in Pakistan, with comparable social and economic consequences (De Brier, Stroobants, Vandekerckhove, & De Buck, 2020). Psychological distress is typically connected to poor mental health and increased healthcare expenditure, which has serious consequences for both employees and employers, including decreased job engagement, and higher absenteeism. Many businesses have started including mental health services for their employees as part of their benefits package, in order to promote better health, and in response, have made a variety of mental health support services and resources available, recognizing the importance of prevention of psychological distress (Baek, McCrory, Messer, & Mui, 2021). Despite the different options available, there is evidence that these resources are being underused by the very people who need them the most. Rather than just providing additional services and resources, it is necessary to investigate the impact different organizational design elements have on the psychological well-being of employees (Abubakar, Rezapouraghdam, Behravesh, & Megeirhi (2022).

Much of the research in the area of mental distress has focused on nations with abundant natural resources. As a result, there are significant gaps in what is known about this issue in low-and middle-income countries, where mental health knowledge and acceptability are significantly lower. Due to the distinctive cultural aspects that must be taken into account in this sample, it is critical to investigate mental wellness in the Pakistani context (Ali, Sun, & Ali 2017). Pakistan's

mental healthcare system is still in its early stages, with a scarcity of mental health professionals to serve the country's growing population (e.g., approximately 5 psychiatrists per 100,000 people in the capital), a disproportionate distribution of available services across the country, and no insurance coverage for mental health issues (El Alami, 2020). These factors, together with the stigma associated with seeking assistance or accepting treatment for mental illnesses, make treatment accessibility a major difficulty in this country (Twenge & Joiner, 2020).

According to another study based on the 2011 National Health and Morbidity Survey, Pakistani individuals with poor self-reported health were more likely to be sad and worried. Following investigations of Pakistani working persons, including school teachers and nurses, discovered that those experiencing musculoskeletal pain had poor psychosocial work characteristics as well as increased psychological distress, including severe anxiety and job stress(Abubakar et al., 2022). Depression and anxiety were also linked to a lack of resources and facilities in the workplace, as well as a lower job category and greater workplace responsibility among university teachers. The literature on the mental health of Pakistani working people is either scarce or limited to a few vocations (Colantone, Crino, & Ogliai, 2019). As a result, large-scale research is required to provide a more accurate picture and understanding of the complexities of health-seeking behaviors in this region when provided as an employee benefit. Employee understanding of available mental health solutions and how they are used is also lacking (Nwankwo & Moneme, 2021).

Call centers have grown in popularity in recent decades, attracting interest in a variety of sectors, including organizational psychology. The impact on mental well-being and work performance has clearly affected customer churn and profit (Holingue et al., 2020). Over the last decade, there has been a focus on worker productivity to support business development. Emotional

dissonance has a significant impact on the working personnel in the call center setting. It is characterized as a phenomenon in which emotions portrayed differ significantly from the feelings that are actually felt (Chovwen, 2021). Workers at call centers face a stressful work environment on a daily basis, and despite their frustrating inner selves, they are expected to be calm and motivated with their clients on call on a continuous basis. This, in turn, is expected to have an influence on call employees' work performance and well-being (Daghagh et al., 2019).

According to the literature, contact center employees regularly feel burnout (Brooks et al., 2018). Studies have also highlighted the main strain phenomenon at work, where it has been observed how emotions are suppressed due to unfriendly customers and repetitive job tasks, increased demands of workload, and impact of cognitive pressure due to increased pressure in time, inevitably decreasing in autonomy (Owolabi & Olowodunoye, 2019). All of this plummets into increased functional fixedness. In today's environment, contact centers are increasingly being used to increase client satisfaction through one-on-one connections. As a result, call centers are setups in which a work agency may contact clients via phone calls or other communication modalities with the assistance of given computerized support systems. Call centers are a type of business that aims to improve productivity while limiting workforce autonomy (Romeo et al., 2021). Call centers now feature archives of recorder calls, which may aid in the analysis of agency conduct during calls, their quality of speech during conversations, and overall performance and output (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021).

Emotional labor is the process of controlling feelings and sentiments as part of the job routine. Emotions are important in the interaction between staff and consumers. Many employers now expect employees to express their feelings accurately. Customer Service tasks are regarded as emotionally demanding since employees are required to portray specific emotions in contrast to

their own internal feelings (Balogun, 2019). Emotional dissonance occurs when an employee's voiced feelings are judged by the corporation yet contradict the employee's own sentiments.

Inbound and outbound calls are the two types of call directions at a call center. Inbound calls are majorly concerned with customer care/support roles where higher emotional labor is expected. Whereas, outbound calls are mostly sales calls in nature where revenue targets and their associated job-security threats take precedence as compared to emotional labor expectations. As a result, mental distress levels through stress levels can be expected to change across inbound and outbound calls (Oakman et al., 2020).

This established the foundation and main goal of this study, which is to find predictors of psychological distress among Pakistani Call center employees (Leng et al., 2021). We also wanted to see how different organizational designs, based on varying levels of Job demands and Job resources as per the Job-Demand-Resource model, impact the mental distress experienced by call center employees in Pakistan.

We are fast approaching a worldwide economy. Because of the increasing speed of this digitized world, an increasing number of enterprises are turning to outsourced call centers (Ali et al., 2017). Pakistan Software Export Board published a study in 2005. According to the report's statistics, there were more than 110 contact centers employing more than 2300 people. And this number has increased largely by now. But in any organization, it is very important to look deeply into psycho-organizational factors because they have a huge impact on an employee's productivity and mental well-being (Abubakar et al., 2022). All the jobs which involve customer care have emotional dissonance because workers are bound to control their emotions and show positivity which causes many problems such as burnout. Further, it makes people vulnerable to depression and anxiety (Baek et al., 2021). Thus, the main focus of the study is to find out whether these

psycho-organizational factors affect the emotional dissonance of the worker or to what extent it plays their role.

Problem Statement

Mental distress has been the most pressing issue for executives since it has been highly challenging for businesses to attain their common goals without properly managing employees' mental distress (Nwankwo & Moneme, 2021). Lack of understanding of mental distress or the inability of organizational management to handle mental distress appropriately generates problems for both management and the company (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021). The impact of varying levels of workload, job autonomy, peer support, and manager support on mental distress experienced in the form of psycho-organizational factors is yet to be explored. Furthermore, various academics have emphasized that psycho-organizational predictors are critical for businesses to improve the handling of mental distress (De Brier et al., 2020). There has been a lack of knowledge and understanding of the relevance of psycho-organizational predictors' role in affecting mental distress in Asian nations (Holingue et al., 2020). Due to a lack of information among business firms in Asian nations (such as Pakistan), business managers find it difficult to comprehend how mental distress may be reduced by managing psycho-organizational predictors (Ali et al., 2017).

Research Gap

Throughout the world, numerous researchers have given attention to exploring the role of psycho-organizational predictors in impacting mental distress with regard to business firms (Oakman et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the increasing interest of researchers in investigating mental distress and its relevant aspects has persuaded multiple researchers to explore the factors (job demands and job resources) that cause an effect on mental distress with regard to business firms in developed countries (Leng et al., 2021). Scholars in developed economies (Specifically the USA and the UK) were the first to acknowledge the possible coherence between psycho-organizational predictors and mental distress (Romeo et al., 2021). Thus, the experiences which can be derived from the role of psycho-organizational predictors in developed economies are of great concern from a Pakistani perspective. Hence, Pakistan can capitalize on such positive experiences from developed economies (Abubakar et al., 2022). Limited research work across developing countries (such as Pakistan) regarding this literature indicates that there has been a significant research gap concerning the role of psycho-organizational predictors in impacting mental distress (Ali et al., 2017). Referring to Twenge & Joiner (2020), emotional labor is yet to be used as a mediator while assessing the relationship between psycho-organizational predictors and mental distress. Hence, this study aims to investigate the impact of psycho-organizational predictors (job demands and job resources) on mental distress by mediating the role of emotional labor in call centers of Pakistan.

Research Question

Following is the research question of this study:

RQ: What is the impact of psycho-organizational predictors on mental distress in call center employees of Pakistan?

Research Significance

This study has focused on investigating the relationship between psycho-organizational predictors and mental distress in call center employees of Pakistan. Themes of emotional labor, in the form of Emotional Dissonance, Emotional Sympathy, and Sensitivity Requirement, have been explored through this study. An attempt is made to deduce the impact of different proportional combinations of job demand and job resources on depression, stress, and anxiety levels of the population.

Theoretical Significance

This study tests Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti's Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model in the Pakistani Call Center landscape. By means of model testing, this study attempted to establish a relation between psycho-organizational factors, emotional labor, and mental distress. These findings provide necessary assistance to the human resource management and organizational behavior pupils on theoretical and operational grounds, for a better understanding of the relationship between the variables and their varying demographic combinations.

Practical Significance

The booming call center industry is struggling with attrition and absenteeism management. The findings of this study provide a sustainable competitive advantage to these organizations for revamping their organizational structures in terms of the available job demand and job resources. So that employee mental distress is managed and attrition levels are ultimately reduced. These revamps will further allow the organization to be perceived by the employees as 'employee well-being centered' and job satisfaction levels consequently increase. Organizations will be inclined to invest in employee mental health and prioritize management of occupational hazards, as a long-term investment in their human resource for the sake of low turnover, high presentism, increased job satisfaction levels, and an overall boost in productivity.

Literature review

Operational Definitions

Psycho-Organizational Factors

This term is parallel to psycho-social factors in a work context. However, it is being coined in accordance with the Job Demands-Resources model. That is inherently an occupational stress model. Wherein, Job demands and Job resources are collectively referred to as Psycho-Organizational factors. Job and work environment factors such as the design and content of tasks, the associated work roles, and the interpersonal relationships cumulate into the psycho-social climate of any organization. Job demands and Job resource factors interact with one another and bring about either harmony or chaos in this climate.

Job Demands

In laymen's terms, Job Demands can loosely be defined as job task expectations. These expectations come at physical, psychological, and social costs that an individual has to pay while performing these tasks (Owolabi & Olowodunoye, 2019). Job demands are chiefly controlled by organizational design agents. In this study, workload and low job autonomy are the only constituents of job demands.

Workload

Workload is operationally defined as the amount, nature, and pace at which a task is expected to be performed in a workplace.

Job Autonomy

It refers to the degree of freedom an employee has in choosing how they do their assigned tasks.

Job Resources

These are the facilities and resources available to a person to accomplish the job obligations. These could be in the form of organizational characteristics or psychical, technological infrastructural tools that employees may utilize. We concentrated majorly on organizational characteristics as job resources in this study. In particular, manager and colleague support. As these factors are likely to bring about a difference in experience in mental distress in call center employees since physical and technological resources are almost the same in these organizations.

Peer Support

Peer support refers to a collective exchange, sharing, and support amongst individuals working at the same level in an organization of job knowledge, skills, experiential learnings, and social and psychological support.

Manager Support

Manager support on the other hand refers to the degree to which an employee perceives that their supervisor takes care of their job needs and provides social and psychological support in the process.

Emotional Labor

For the purpose of this study, we are limiting the scope of the definition of Emotional labor to mean the emotional masking expectations associated with a particular job role. In the present

context of a call center population, we are further narrowing emotion the definition down to only include emotional dissonance, emotional sensitivity requirement, and emotional interaction control.

Emotional Dissonance

Emotional dissonance is defined as the incoherence between the felt and expressed emotions an employee goes through while completing their job tasks.

Emotional Sensitivity

Emotional sensitivity refers to an individual's proficiency in perceiving the emotional state of others and adjusting their own emotional state expression accordingly.

Emotional Interaction Control

This refers to the influence one emotion has on another that ultimately might trigger an emotional behavior response or trigger it. In our study, this is important since the active suppression of emotions when dealing with customers impacts our overall emotion expression modalities.

Mental Distress

Mental distress is similar to psychological distress but the symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety are specific to a workplace context. Mental distress can potentially lead to a change of behavior, affect a person's emotions in a negative way, and affect their relationships with the people around them. Mental distress can usually be discerned from its symptoms (e.g. anxiety, depression, loss of ability to perform tasks, physical illness, etc.) (Daghagh et al., 2019).

Theoretical Evidence

In terms of job demands (workload and client verbal hostility), they may elicit unpleasant feelings that agents are unable to express, hence enhancing the sensation of emotional dissonance (Baek et al., 2021). Supervisor and colleague support may be key job resources because they establish a pleasant working environment in which employees are more likely to feel happy feelings. When working in customer service, when good feelings are anticipated, less emotional labor is required if interpersonal interactions are positive and helpful, and positive emotions are actually felt (Holingue et al., 2020). Furthermore, assistance and chances to learn from one another may give agents the skills and indicators they need to deal with stressful work conditions, reducing the risk of experiencing unpleasant emotions. For these reasons, supervisor and colleague support may have a negative link with emotional dissonance. Scholars discovered that job autonomy is adversely associated with emotional dissonance (Nwankwo & Moneme, 2021). Agents with more autonomy have more opportunities to select how to handle consumer calls, tailoring their responses and actions to the specifics of both the scenario and the customer. In this way, people have greater control over the situation, reducing the possibility of experiencing negative feelings that cannot be voiced and, as a result, perceived emotional dissonance (Owolabi & Olowodunoye, 2019).

Emotional dissonance is one aspect of emotional work that is seen as a stressor in client-driven work situations (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021). Although the underlying linkages between emotional dissonance and employee health remain unclear, it has been proposed that emotional dissonance may result in unfavorable health consequences due to the costs of managing emotions in order to show the intended feeling. So, in accordance with the health impairment process, modulating emotions to reflect a desirable display may be a laborious procedure that depletes mental resources and thus increases the strain. (Ali et al., 2017) In the workplace, the strain may

be characterized as a collection of psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses to job pressures. This description is consistent with previous research, which has shown that experiencing emotional dissonance increases the likelihood of feeling weary, mentally upset, and missing work (ElAlami et al., 2020). Emotional tiredness, a crucial component of burnout, was originally associated with client-work scenarios and has been extensively researched among health and social workers. Exhaustion is defined as a state of being psychologically and emotionally "tired," and some early research suggested that exhaustion might be caused by long-term exposure to high job demands and ongoing inconveniences (Oakman et al., 2020).

Collaboration between employees and the working environment provided by their organizations is highly important. This collaboration is mostly dependent on its direction, irrespective of the direction being pessimistic or optimistic (Twenge & Joiner, 2020). Environmental ambiguity has been considered as a crucial contingency factor fluctuating the behavior and structure of an organization from traditional to organic. Within such an organic and consistently fluctuating working environment, the prime focus within organizations is on the mental distress developed as a result of job characteristics (De Brier et al., 2020). A workplace which is highly competitive and develops significant pressure on employees to perform to their potential in any circumstance tends to create mental distress. When an organization and its environment are demanding more from an employee than his/her capability and potential, then there occurs a situation known as mental distress, which seriously influences the well-being of employees. Millions have been spent by organizations to handle the issue of mental distress (Colantone et al., 2019). Only in the United States, billions of dollars are spent in a year just for controlling mental distress. Thus, mental distress is recognized as an important aspect to be studied or explored in organizational research. Researchers throughout the world have been working on

identifying the factors which are significantly contributing to either increasing or decreasing mental distress (Brooks et al., 2018).

When employees of an organization are experiencing the issue of mental distress, there is no chance that such employees will be performing to their potential and meeting their work-related goals, hence resulting in decreased productivity (Daghagh et al., 2019). Amongst major factors, emotional labor is another important aspect that has the tendency or influencing mental distress both in positive and negative manner depending on the circumstances. Emotional labor is definitely a factor that could have a significant influence on mental distress, as organizations handling emotional labor could control mental distress (Romeo et al., 2021). Emotional labor lays a foundation for the employees in trying to work with creativity and look for new and innovative ideas. Mental distress is actually an evil communication between an employee and his/her working environment confining an employee for using their abilities at the determined level for reducing his/her well-being (Abubakar et al., 2022).

In this competitive business world, controlling of mental distress within changing work environment is an important objective for organizational management, as a failure of controlling could both have a severe impact on emotional labor and the mental distress experience of employees (Leng et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the considerable association between job characteristics and mental distress. The majority of research has focused on identifying the link and the magnitude of the correlation between two aspects. Furthermore, some researchers have concluded that job characteristics are the key element that has a valid role in negatively influencing mental distress (Chovwen, 2021). Organizations must manage their human capital properly in order to be more successful and competitive in their respective sectors. Researchers have put in a

lot of time and effort to comprehend the notion of job characteristics and their link to mental distress and well-being (Balogun, 2019). Depression and anxiety (mental distress) symptoms are not characterized as being tied to a specific setting, and they have received less attention in connection to emotional work than tiredness. However, research has shown that social and psychological job aspects enhance the likelihood of feeling mental distress (Baek et al., 2021).

Similar to numerous researchers, De Brier et al. (2020) stated that mental distress is critical to be handled by the organizational management for the development of employee productivity, and employees will eventually dedicate themselves to the organization if their efforts are recognized and rewarded. The variable that prevents the promotion of the employees' mental distress is job characteristics. Holingue et al. (2020) have found that increase in job autonomy results in decreased mental distress and vice versa. From the results, employees see mental distress as an aspect that reduces their efforts and hard work towards the completion of their job-related tasks. In addition, lack of confidence amongst employees is another reason for the negative effect on mental distress. Leng et al. (2021) have explained how emotional commitments play an important role between job characteristics and mental distress. Employees having full of emotional or passionate connections to the organization and are highly involved with the organization's goals and objectives have the tendency of being productive even when the conditions are not favorable, and they have to experience mental distress while performing their jobs.

According to Owolabi and Olowodunoye (2019), the effect of mental distress on humans is regulated by self-efficacy, and occupational stress is influenced by perceived self-efficacy. Employee well-being is influenced by self-efficacy behaviors (such as anger and sadness). When confronted with uncertainty, negative feedback, problems, and stress, highly efficacious and effective people are less likely to foresee a failure of confidence. When employees experience

mental distress while performing organizational activities, emotional intelligence helps employees in controlling negative behaviors. Based on the arguments of Nwankwo & Moneme (2021), emotional intelligence is negatively related to mental distress, as a high-performing employee having high emotional intelligence is believed to own the cognitive capability of self-confidence to compete with mental distress. Positive emotional intelligence helps employees to show productive behaviors and put their efforts to help the organization in accomplishing its goals. The probability of innovation or productivity among employees is low who possess negative behavior (such as aggression, frustration, depression, anxiety, etc.). Positive emotional intelligence is the potential that help people to get through a stressful period. Emotional intelligence is considered highly responsible for giving employees significant confidence to think positively and be creative and innovative irrespective of how much mental stress they have to face during their work (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2021).

Employees experience a significant amount of mental stress when it comes to time, according to Colantone et al. (2019). Working longer hours diminishes employees' motivation and drive to achieve better. Mental tension almost always has a negative impact. There's a fine line between mental stress and pressure. Pressure is regarded as a good factor that contributes to employee well-being (Oakman et al., 2020). Mental stress is a low-intensity deviant with questionable intent to injure the target, which violates workplace mutual respect rules. Mental stress can also be defined as uncivil, unpleasant, or discourteous behavior displayed by an employee on the job. Uncivil acts are often impolite and discourteous, demonstrating a disregard for others. Mental stress demonstrated by disrespectful behavior tends to influence perceptions of employees to be productive and highly committed to performing their jobs (Daghagh et al., 2019). Mental stress is a problem that is becoming highly important for employees and organizations.

With more and more cases reported of mental stress, organizations are concerned about handling such unpleasant incidents to smoothen their processes (Twenge & Joiner, 2020).

Mental stress can be described as persons or employees facing bad or annoying behavior that acts as an obstacle to their actual performance at the workplace. Depression in employees makes their perceptions and thoughts highly stressful, as they start feeling like they are mistreated by their colleagues or management at the workplace (ElAlami et al., 2020). Employees generally react negatively to physical gestures while acting and conducting their usual everyday tasks. Understanding the actions and attitudes that may jeopardize employees' well-being, safety, and job satisfaction is necessary for understanding how employees connect with their businesses (Brooks et al., 2018). According to Romeo et al. (2021), emotional intelligence is a multifaceted notion that includes a person's willpower to initiate and maintain efforts toward goals, as well as that person's capacity to identify various courses of action to achieve those goals. People with high emotional intelligence have a strong desire to achieve their goals and are capable of devising a variety of ways to do so.

Call Center Industry Deep-dive

As the globe has shrunk to the size of a town, everything has become more accessible with the click of a mouse. This has expanded the number of call centers throughout the world, and Pakistan is no exception. There are several call centers that employ a large number of individuals. On the one hand, it gives work, but it also has significant drawbacks (Chovwen, 2021). Emotional labor is one of the most significant drawbacks. Emotional labor is showing pleasant sentiments toward the customer on call, even if they insult them. They are not permitted to express their feelings, which can lead to staff burnout and tiredness. Call center personnel is required to greet the on-call client with excitement, acceptance, and cheerfulness (Balogun, 2019). Emotional sentiments develop when workers' expressed emotions are deemed acceptable by the organization but do not represent the individual's genuine feelings (Baek et al., 2021).

According to the literature, call center agents frequently suffer from burnout and emotional tiredness, and emotional dissonance (the mismatch between expressed and felt emotions) is the primary strain phenomena in call center jobs (Colantone et al., 2019). Indeed, there are substantial requirements in this type of work to conceal unpleasant emotions created by unfriendly or irate clients, as well as repeated job tasks, cognitive demands, increased time pressure, burden, limited autonomy, and performance monitoring. Given these considerations, it has been proposed that emotional dissonance may result in unfavorable health consequences due to the costs of modulating emotions to show the desired feeling (Brooks et al., 2018). This results in anxiety and despair. It is thought that by utilizing job resources such as supervisor support, job autonomy, and colleague support, one may overcome emotional dissonance; however, if the problem exists in both the job demand and job resources, difficulties will arise (Ali et al., 2017)

Literature Gap

Several pieces of research have focused on emotional dissonance as a mediator in the link between job characteristics and employee well-being, but few have specifically addressed contact center work. De Brier et al. (2020), for example, found that work characteristics, as manifested by perceived display rules, perceived performance monitoring, and perceived service culture, positively influenced strain only through emotional dissonance in their study of Chinese call center and retail-shop employees. In a study of incoming and outbound contact center agents, Holingue et al. (2020) discovered that emotional dissonance entirely mediated the association between emotional demands, defined by the obligation to exhibit positive emotions, and emotional weariness. Our study looked at the influence of job demands, job resources, and emotional labor in connection to mental discomfort, which is a component of well-being. Despite the use of emotional dissonance as a mediator, emotional labor has yet to be employed as a mediator when examining the association between job characteristics and mental distress. As a result, this study employs emotional labor as a mediator to examine its mediation in the association between work characteristics and mental distress in Pakistani call centers.

Theoretical Background

The JD-R theory is a heuristic model that describes how two distinct sets of working conditions might result in both health deterioration and motivation (Daghagh et al., 2019). The model's adaptability allows it to be applied to all work contexts and vocations, recognizing individual job needs and job resources. This research looked at two job needs that have been found in call center labor. The first is workload, which is a general demand studied in numerous studies that employed the JD-R model; it indicates the number of jobs and activities that agents must handle swiftly, processing calls as quickly as feasible (Ali et al., 2017). The second is job

autonomy, which refers to one's level of control over one's own responsibilities and conduct at work. The job resources investigated in this study are general resources investigated in the JD-R model: Supervisor support denoted the presence of good and supportive relationships between supervisors and agents; peer support denoted the presence of a collaborative atmosphere among call center agents (ElAlami et al., 2020). Employee well-being may suffer as a result of high levels of job-related pressures and a lack of employment resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). This study looked at their association with effective discomfort, or the strength of emotions felt at work: particularly, high levels of negative emotions are connected with poor levels of well-being (Nwankwo & Moneme, 2021). Furthermore, the study looked at the role of emotional labor as a moderator in the JD-R model. The current study looks at emotional labor as a moderator of job characteristics (job demands and job resources) and mental distress.

Theoretical Framework
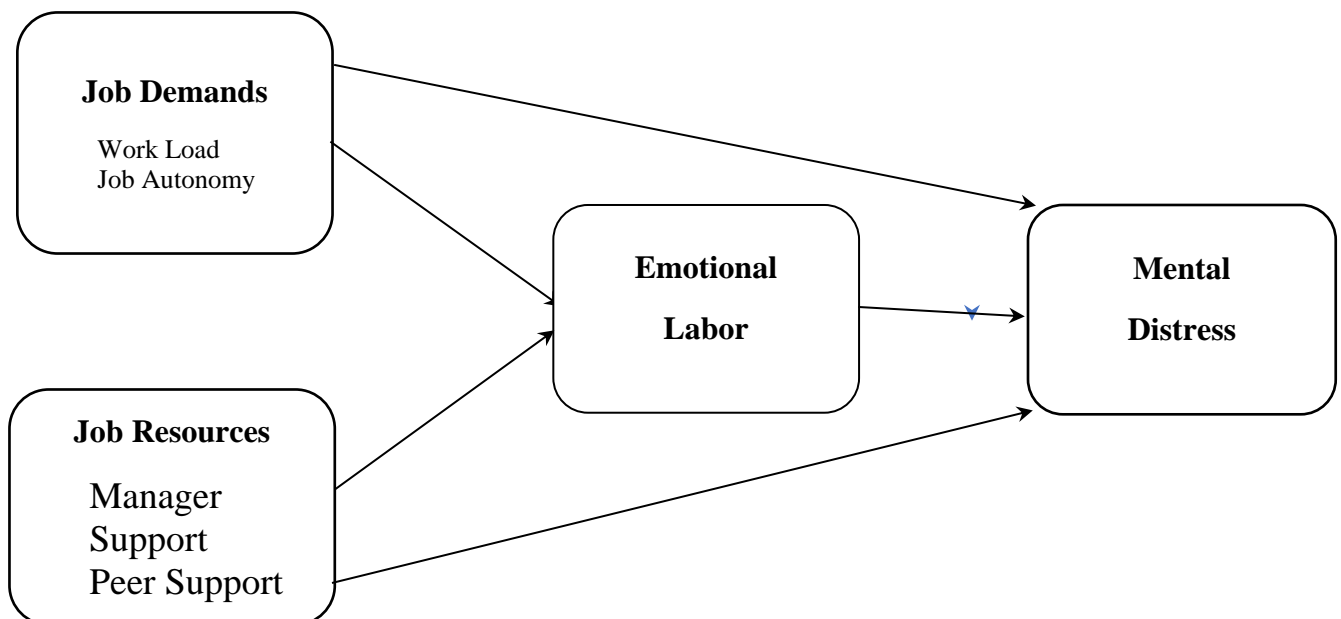
Research Hypotheses

Following are the research hypotheses of this study:

H1: There is likely to be a positive relationship between Job Demands and Mental Distress.

H2: Job Resources will be negatively correlated to Mental Distress.

H3: Emotional Labor mediates the relation between Job Demands and Mental Distress.

H4: Emotional Labor mediates the relation between Job Resources and Mental Distress.

H5: Job Nature will have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

H6: Call Direction will have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

H7: Age, education, monthly income, and work experience are likely to have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

Research Design

The core aim of this study was to test the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and superimpose the findings of foreign literature regarding call center operations, emotional labor, and mental distress, so as to increase the generalizability of the findings in a Pakistani context. The quantitative research strategy was used accordingly. This study was carried out as a correlational study aimed at investigating the relationship between psycho-organizational predictors (job demands and job resources), emotional labor, and mental distress. It followed a cross-sectional research design since the deductions that are to be sketched from the collected data are meant to be a valid snapshot of the relationship for the present time. This study employs a deductive approach for the formulation of its hypotheses based on the existing literature on the topic. (Flick, 2015). The current study employs a non-contrived setting since it incorporates data collecting from Pakistanis via distributed questionnaires in a natural setting. The data collection medium was survey questionnaires through Google Forms and hardcopy printed surveys since most of the call centers were operating remotely.

Participants

The minimum sample size of 190 participants for this study was calculated through the G-Power sample size calculator tool. The researchers were able to engage a sample population of 269 individuals. These individuals were employees who were currently working in call centers throughout Pakistan.

Inclusion criteria

All call center employees who are of legal age to work were eligible to be a part of this study. This study was inclusive of people of all genders, academic backgrounds, work experience duration, socio-economic class, and all levels of English language proficiency.

Exclusion criteria

Individuals who did not have a functional grip on the English language were excluded from this study since the study was carried out in English. Dual-nationality holders were requested not to be a part of this study. Individuals with a physical or mental health conditions were not included in the study.

Procedure

Conceptualization

The key researcher has been involved with the call center industry for half a decade and based on personal observation postulated the rationale of the study. The research strategy was conceptualized and the research question was poised. A systematic literature review was done accordingly and hypotheses were sketched along with the conceptual framework backed by theoretical shreds of evidence. The study variables were measured using already published scales by different authors. The researchers sought permission from these authors and adapted their scales into their research questionnaires for data collection.

Data Collection

Since most call centers were either partially or fully operating remotely, the major mode of data collection was through digital e-forms. The researchers initially relied on their public relations in order to get access to the call center employee population. The e-form version of the survey was sent out via WhatsApp to the reference personnel and they were requested to share the forms with other employees in their organization. The researchers then used their own social media spaces to get in touch with the relevant population. The e-form was shared with these individuals and they were requested to pass along the survey to other individuals who were presently working at call centers in Pakistan. Thereby, adding characteristics of snowball sampling to this study.

A few call centers were operating from their office spaces. The researchers contacted their HR departments and shared the research permission letter issued from the parent institute the researchers belonged to. The researchers were permitted to visit the office premises and collect the

required data. The hardcopy surveys were distributed on the production floor. Ethical declarations were announced and respondents were encouraged to fill the forms as accurately as possible.

Data Analysis

The collected data was reviewed by the researcher and survey forms with missing information were excluded from the analysis repository. A total of 287 responses were collected. 18 surveys were discarded due to missing information. Therefore, the functional sample size for this study was 269 individuals. This data was analyzed using SPSS software and AMOS software.

Instruments

1. Informed Consent

2. Demographic Sheet

3. Health and Safety Executive-Management Standards Indicator Tool (HSE-MSIT)

4. Frankfurt Emotion Work Scale (FEWS)

5. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21)

Informed Consent

The informed consent was included as the title page for the survey questionnaire. It declared the research objective, data collection sensitivity, and the extent of distribution of the analyzed results. It stressed on the respondent's autonomy to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data was assured. All relevant ethical declarations were made and respondents were given the choice to either proceed with the next section of the survey or withdraw from being a sample of this study.

Demographic Information

The demographic sheet asked the respondents to specify their personal and job-specific data through a total of 12 items. Personal characteristics were assessed through 8 items including age, gender, academic qualification, English language proficiency, monthly income, work experience, and socio-economic class. 4 items cataloged job-specific characteristics in terms of shift type, shift start time, call direction, and job nature.

Health and Safety Executive-Management Standards Indicator Tool (HSE-MSIT)

The HSE-MIT is a 35 items scale with 6 constructs encompassing demands, control, support, relationships, role and change of work design. This scale is an open-source scale present on the internet for free usage but the authors were contacted nonetheless and their permission was obtained for using items from this scale. The internal consistency of the different adaptations of this scale ranges between .60 to 0.85. In our study, the alpha reliability of the adopted subscales ranges from .75 to .85.

This scale has been used in several publications to assess psychosocial factors as per the Job Demands-Resources model. 23 items out of the total 35 items were adopted from this tool. The adopted items were from the demand, control, and support constructs. The adaption was aimed at collecting data for the independent variables of this study, Job Demand, and Job Resources. That is collectively referred to in this study as Psycho-organizational factors.

Job Demand was assessed through 7 items regarding workload and 7 items for low job autonomy. The job Demand subscale has an internal consistency of 0.75 in this study. While Job Resources included Colleagues Support assessed through 5 items and Manager Support was observed through 4 items. The alpha reliability of job resources in this study is .85.

Each of these 23 items required respondents to score their responses against the poised question on a five-point Likert scale, indicating the strength of their agreement/disagreement or frequency of occurrence against each item. Wherein, 1 equates to either strongly disagree or never and 5 indicates strongly agree or always. Scores between 3-5 for each item on the workload and job autonomy scale would indicate high job demands. The same is true for scores in the 3-5 range for manager and colleague support scales, indicating high job resources.

Frankfurt Emotion Work Scale (FEWS)- Version 5

This scale has a total of 47 items distributed between 6 subscales covering emotions at work through themes of Positive Emotions, Negative Emotions, Emotional Dissonance, Sensitivity Requirements, Routineness, and Interaction Control. The author granted permission for the use of this scale for the present research study. The reliability of FEWS ranges between 0.7 to 0.8. In our study, the internal consistency of FEWS subscales is .70.

11 items out of the total 47 were adopted for this study. 2 items were from the Interaction control subscale. 4 items were from the Sensitivity requirement subscale. 5 items were from the Emotional Dissonance subscale. These three themes are integral elements to our operational definition of Emotional Labor. Emotional Labor is the mediating variable in our study and is postulated to mediate the relation between psycho-organizational factors and mental distress.

All these items were scored on a 5-items Likert scale. Wherein, the respondents indicated the frequency of occurrence of the statements poised through the adopted items, ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 equated to very rarely and 5 indicated very often. Score ranging between 3-5 for each item corresponded to high Emotional Labor.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21)

The 21 item version of the Depression Anxiety Stress scale was used for this study. The scale has an excellent internal consistency ranging between .81 and .89. The scale's author permitted the use of this scale for the present research study. In our study, the Cronbach alpha value for this scale was .89.

The items of this scale require responses on a 4-item Likert scale. Where the respondents specify how closely the situation poised through the item applied to them in the past 7 days, where 1 equated to 'Did not apply to me' and a score of 4 implied that the situation 'Always applied to me'. The score range of 3-4 of each item indicated higher depression, anxiety and stress scores.

4 out of these 21 items measured psychosomatic symptoms. Collectively, depression, stress, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms are operationally defined in this study as mental distress. Which is the dependent variable of this study.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 and SPSS Analysis Of a Moment Structures (SPSS-AMOS). SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics, bivariate correlational analysis and t-tests. While SPSS-AMOS was used for Structural Equation Modeling, and direct and indirect mediation analysis.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used on the demographic data of this study. Scale reliability analysis was run to confirm the internal consistency of the scales used in data collection. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to deduce the significance of the postulated correlations between the items mentioned in

H1, H2, H3, H4, H5 and H10. Simple T-tests were run to test H8 and H9. All these analyses were done through SPSS. Model fit indices were run as part of Structural Equation Modeling in order to test H8 and H9.

Ethical Consideration

- This study followed all ethical guidelines to maintain the validity and usefulness of the research.

- Permission was sought before the use of each scale for research from the scale authors.

- Any and all guidelines provided by the authors were fully adhered to while administering the scales.

- The participants were fully informed about the research aim and were debriefed about the use of the research findings; therefore, informed consent was taken from the respondents.

- They were informed that they have the free will to opt-out of the study at any time, should they choose.

- They will not be forced into completing their participation in this study till the term. The integrity and confidentiality of the data collection, data analysis, and data reporting phases of this research was assured to the participants.

- It was ensured that no one was physically or mentally harmed throughout the course of this research study.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The data was analyzed in four key steps, in step I descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics, also descriptive statistics and reliability analysis of job demands, job resources, emotional labor, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees were calculated. In step II, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between job demands, job resources, emotional labor, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees. While Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was also conducted to determine the relationship between age, education, income, job experience and mental distress.

In step III, structural equation modeling (SEM) was carried out through AMOS to investigate the mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between job demand, job resources and mental distress in call center employees. Lastly, an independent sample t-test was employed to investigate the differences in gender, job nature, and call rotation in mental distress in call center employees.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics (N = 269)

Characteristics	Categories	f	%	M	SD
Age				27	7.61
Gender	Male	134	49.8		
	Females	135	50.2		
Education	Matriculation/O Levels	14	5.2		
	Intermediate/A-Levels	66	24.5		
	Undergraduate	97	36.1		
	Graduate degree	88	32.7		
	Post-graduate degree	4	1.5		
ELP	Beginners	0	0		
	Intermediate	104	38.7		
	Advance	165	61.3		
Pay Scale	35,000- 50,000	9	3.3		
	50,000- 100,000	137	50.9		
	More than 100,000	123	45.7		
Experience (Months)				35.48	33.79
Socio-Economic Class	Lower Class	3	1.1		
	Lower-Middle Class	37	13.8		
	Middle Class	187	69.5		
	Upper Middle Class	41	15.2		
	Upper Class	1	0.4		
Shift Type	Rotational	186	69.1		
	Fixed	83	30.9		
Shift Start Time	5AM-8AM	8	3		
	9AM-12PM	8	3		
	1PM- 4 PM	70	26		
	5PM-8PM	96	35.7		

	9PM-12AM	70	26
	Graveyard (1AM-4AM)	17	6.3
Call Direction	Inbound	185	68.8
	Outbound	84	31.2
Job Nature	Sales	31	10.8
	Customer Support/Success	238	89.2

Table 1 represent the demographic characteristics of the study sample. The sample compromised of 269 subjects. The Average Age of the respondents was 27 with a standard deviation of 7.61. Out of the total sample, 135 participants (50.2%) were females and 134 participants (49.8%) were males. 14 individuals (5.2%) had an academic qualification of Matriculation/ O Levels or less, 66 participants (24.5%) had their Intermediate/A levels qualification completed or continued, 97 survey respondents (36.1%) were enrolled in undergraduate degrees or had completed them, 88 individuals (32.7%) had completed their Graduate Degrees or were in the process of doing so and 4 individuals (1.5%) had Post-Graduate qualification. 9 survey respondents (3.3%) had a monthly pay scale of PKR 35,000-50,000, 137 individuals (50.9%) had a pay scale of PKR 50,000-100,000 and 123 participants (45.7%) were making more than PKR 100,000 per month. The mean Voice operations Work Experience in months of the study sample was 35.48 with a standard deviation of 33.79. 3 individuals (1.1%) were from a Lower Class socio-economic background, 37 individuals (13.8%) were from Lower-Middle Class background, 187 individuals (69.5%) were Middle Class, 41 respondents (15.2%) were Upper Middle Class and there was 1 individual (0.4%) from the Upper Class. 186 respondents (69.1%) had rotational shifts while 83 individuals (30.9%) had fixed shifts. 8 individuals (3%) had Early Morning shifts, 8 respondents (3%) were from the Morning shifts, 70 individuals (26%) had Afternoon shifts, 96 individuals (35.7%) had Evening shifts, 70 participants (26%) had Night shifts and 17 individuals had (6.3%) had Graveyard shifts. 185 individuals (68.8%) catered to inbound

calls while 84 participants (31.2%) had an outbound calls direction. 29 respondents (10.8%) worked in Sales and 240 individuals (89.2%) worked in Customer Support/Sales.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of study variables (N=269)

Variables	k	M	SD	Range	α
Job Demands	14	36.16	5.43	22-60	0.75
Job Resources	9	31.54	8.14	16-45	0.85
Emotional Labor	11	42.29	6.35	21-55	0.70
Mental Distress	21	39.62	10.28	21-81	0.89
Stress	6	12.08	3.27	6-24	0.69
Anxiety	7	13.26	3.87	7-27	0.73
Depression	8	14.28	4.43	8-30	0.80

Note: k number of items, M = mean, SD = Standard Devastation,

The above table showed the descriptive statistics, inclusive of the items count for each scale along with their mean and standard deviation values. The potential score range along with the actual score range generated through the collected data is also mentioned in this table. Internal consistency scores for each scale by using Cronbach's alpha of job demands, job resources, emotional labor, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees is also specified here. The reliability evaluation exhibited an excellent alpha coefficient ranging from 69-89 for the constructs.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between job demands, job resources, emotional labor, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a relationship between job demands, job resources, emotional labor, and mental distress in call center employees.

Table 3:

Pearson Correlation between Job Demands, Job Resources, Emotional Labor, and Mental Distress (Depression, Anxiety and Stress) in Call Center Employees (N=269)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job Demands		-0.12	.25***	.29***	.23***	.34***	.21***
2. Job Resources			-0.09	-.40***	-.37***	-.33***	-.37***
3. Emotional Labor				.16*	.15*	.17**	0.10
4. Mental Distress					.89***	.86***	.91***
5. Stress						.65***	.75***
6. Anxiety							.65***
7. Depression							

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

The results of Pearson product moment correlation analysis showed that there was a significant positive correlation between job demands, emotional labor, and mental distress including the sub-scale, i.e., depression, anxiety and stress. Moreover job resources were found to be significantly negatively associated with mental distress including the sub-scale, i.e., depression, anxiety and stress. Simultaneously, emotional labor was also found to be significantly positively correlated with mental distress including the sub-scale, i.e., depression, anxiety and stress. However job

resources were found to be non-significantly correlated with emotional labor in the presently collected data of the call canter employees of Pakistan.

Pearson product moment correlation analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between age, education, monthly income, work experience, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a relationship between age, education, monthly income, work experience, and mental distress (depression, anxiety and stress) in call center employees.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation of Age, Education, Monthly Income, Work Experience, and Mental Distress in Call Center Employees (N=269)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age (years)		.61***	.19**	.57***	-.24***	-.21***	-.28***	-.14*
2. Education			0.11	.30***	-0.02	-0.03	-0.09	0.06
3. Monthly Income				0.1	0.01	0.09	-0.08	0.02
4. Work Experience					-.17**	-.16**	-.18**	-.13*
5. Mental Distress						.89***	.86***	.91***
6. Stress							.65***	.75***
7. Anxiety								.65***
8. Depression								

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

The results of Pearson product moment correlation analysis showed that age and work experience were found to be significantly negatively correlated with mental distress including depression, anxiety and stress. Whereas education and monthly income were non-significantly associated with mental distress in call center employees.

Structural Equation Model

Structural Equation Model (SEM) was employed through AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structure) to examine mediating role of, emotional labor between the relationship of psycho-organizational factor (job demands, job rescores) and mental distress (anxiety, stress and depression) in call center employees. Model fit is presented in table 5.

Model Fit

Table 5:

Fit Indices for Psych-Organizational Factors (Job Demands, Job Resources), Emotional Labor and Mental Distress among Call Centre Employees (N = 269)

Model	χ^2	Df	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Initial Model	115.71	3	38.57	.72	.66	.67	.18	.16
Model Fit	9.23	2	4.5	.92	.91	.90	.09	.08

Note. All changes in chi-square values are computed relative to the model, χ^2 >.05. GFI= Goodness of fit index, CFI=comparative fit index, NFI = normed fit index; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation, SRMR=Standardized root mean square

The model fit indices were indicated for psycho-organizational factors (job demands, job rescores), emotional labor, and mental distress (anxiety, stress, and depression) in call center employees in table 7.

Since it is viewed as that the chi-square test for absolute model fit is sensitive to the size of the sample, and the number of estimated parameters in the SEM model, so, the investigators often recommended the varied range of fit indices to assess data consistency with the tested model, i.e., model fit. Hence, to evaluate the model fit suggested fit indices including GFI, CFI, NNFI, RMSEA, SRMR were analyzed.

Theorists recommend that χ^2/df ought to be in the middle of 0 and 5, RMSEA and SRMR indices should be .08 or lesser. In, compression CFI, and NFI indices of .90 or higher are considered excellent.9 ≤ .8 is viewed as passable in some cases (Hair et al. 2010; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

So, the χ^2/df was 38.57 of the modified model whereas the RMSEA and SRMR were .18 and .16. However, GFI, CFI, and NNFI indices were .72 .66, .67, respectively. So, the sample variance-covariance and population variance-covariance were variant.

Therefore, the modification of the model was carried out to make the models consistent with the data. A covariance was drawn between the error terms. An in-built function of AMOS, i.e., modification indices, suggested adding covariance between the error terms of the of sub-factors of mental distress. Arbuckle, (2012) suggested that the difference in chi-square value should be reduced by at-least 4.0, if the parameter added in the model. So that covariance were added within the error terms, which chi-square change was 4.0 or above.

So, after the modification the estimates of absolute fit and relative fit once again analyzed. The χ^2/df was 4.57 of the modified model whereas the RMSEA and SRMR were .09 and .08. However GFI, CFI, and NNFI indices were .92 .91, .90, respectively. Hence, the sample variance-covariance and population variance-covariance were invariant.

After done with the model fit, the estimates to be analyzed for direct, and indirect effects for psycho-organizational factors (job demands, job rescores), emotional labor, and mental distress (anxiety, stress and depression) in call center employees with 5000 bootstrapped sample (Hayes, 2013)

Figure 1: Psycho-Organizational Factor (Job Demands, Job Rescores), Emotional Labor, and Mental Distress (Anxiety, Stress and Depression) in Call Center Employees. (N = 269)

Direct Effect

Direct effects of psycho-organizational factor (job demands, job rescores), emotional labor, and mental distress (anxiety, stress and depression) see table 8.

Table 6

Direct effect of Psycho-Organizational factor (Job Demands, Job Resources), Emotional Labor and mental Distress (Anxiety, Stress and Depression) in a Call Center Employees (N=269)

Variables	Emotional Labor		Anxiety		Depression		Stress	
	B	*SE*	β	*SE*	B	*SE*	B	*SE*
Predictors								
Job Demands	-.22**	.12	.29**	0.014	0.17*	0.07	.18*	.09
Job Resources	-.06	.08	-.29**	.018	-0.35**	.019	-0.34**	0.18
Mediator								
Emotional Labor	-	-	.21**	.16	.08	0.09	.18*	0.07
Total R²	.10***		.32***		.27***		.30***	

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

The direct effect results showed that job demands were found to be a significant positive predictor of emotional labor, and mental distress including, stress, anxiety, and depression. However, job resources were found to be a non-significant predictor of emotional labor. While job resources were found to be a significant negative predictor of mental distress i.e., stress, anxiety, and depression. Meanwhile, jab labor was also found to be a significant positive predictor of anxiety and stress.

Indirect Effect
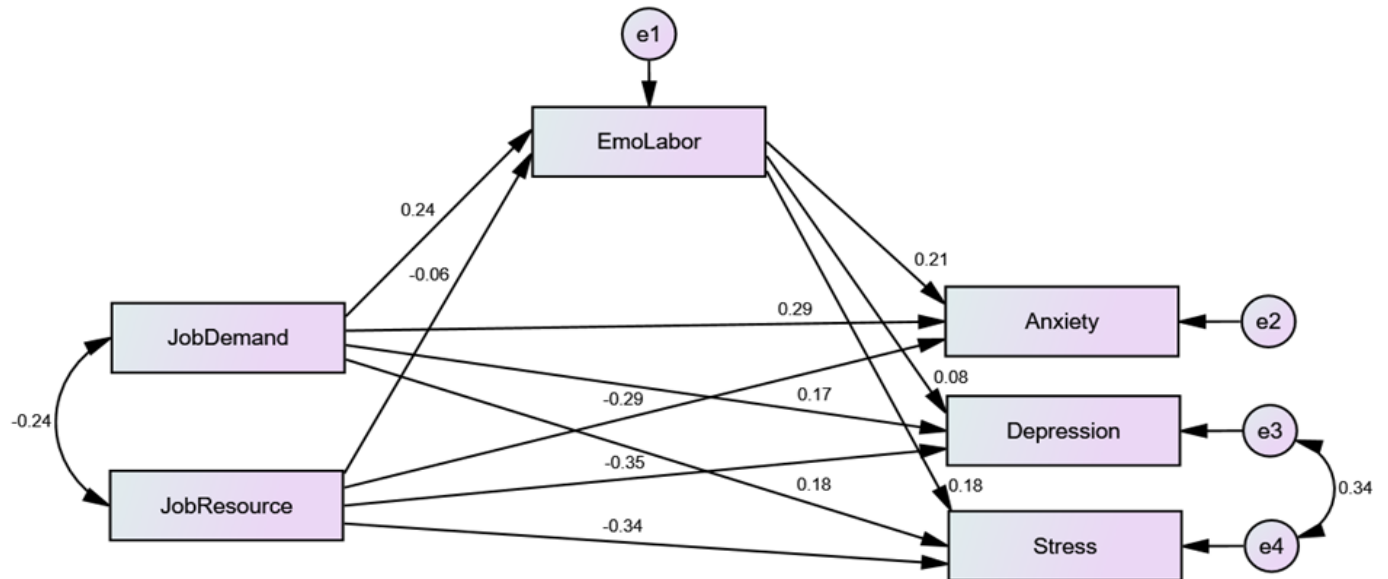
Table 7

Indirect Effects of Emotional Labor between the relationship of Psycho-Organizational Factor (Job Demands, Job Rescores), and Mental Distress (Anxiety, Stress and Depression) in Call Center Employees (N = 269)

Variables	Anxiety		Depression		Stress	
	B	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*
Job Demands	.19*	0.11	.07	0.07	.14*	.09
Job Resources	-.09	.07	-.03	.09	-0.04	0.08

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

The results of the indirect effect showed that emotional labor was found to be a significant positive mediator between job demands and mental distress including anxiety and stress in call center employees, which showed that an increase in job demands increases emotional labor. In comparison, an increase in emotional labor, in turn, increases anxiety and stress. However, the indirect effect of emotional labor was found to be non-significant between the relationship of job resources and mental distress.

Independent Sample t-test

Independent sample t-test was carried out to investigate the difference of call directions and job nature in mental distress in call center employees. It was hypothesized there is likely to be differences of call directions and job nature in terms of mental distress in call center employees.

Table 8:

Independent sample t-test comparing Call Direction in Mental Health (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) Call Center Employees (N=269)

	Inbound (n = 185)		Outbound (n = 84)				95% CI		
Variable	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*t(267)*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*	*Cohen's d*
Mental Distress	40.38	10.83	37.95	8.76	1.80	.013	-0.23	5.08	0.22
Stress	12.46	3.39	11.24	2.84	2.89	.011	0.39	2.06	0.35
Depression	14.63	4.74	13.50	3.53	1.95	.051	-0.01	2.27	0.24
Anxiety	13.29	3.92	13.21	3.77	0.14	.894	-0.93	1.08	0.02

Note: CI confidence intervals, LL = Lower limit, UL upper limit.

The results of independent sample t-test showed that there were significant differences of call direction in terms of mental distress, and stress, which showed that the employees who were working in inbound call direction had a high level of mental distress and stress with medium effect size.

Table 9:

Independent sample t-test comparing Job Nature in Mental Health (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) Call Center Employees (N=269)

| Variable | Sales (n = 31) | | Customer Support (n = 238) | | | | 95% CI | | |
	M	SD	*M*	SD	t (267)	p	*LL*	*UL*	*Cohen's d*
Mental Distress	40.86	8.37	39.47	10.49	0.69	0.49	-2.59	5.37	0.08
Stress	12.48	3.00	12.03	3.31	0.70	0.49	-0.82	1.72	0.09
Depression	13.72	2.96	14.34	4.57	-0.71	0.48	-2.33	1.10	-0.09
Anxiety	14.66	3.54	13.10	3.88	2.06	0.04	0.07	3.05	0.25

Note: CI confidence intervals, LL = Lower limit, UL upper limit.

The results of the independent sample t-test showed that there were non-significant differences of job nature in terms of mental distress, stress, and depression. However, a significant difference was observed between job nature and anxiety.

Summary of Findings

As per the aforementioned statistical analysis, it was observed that the postulated relation of H1, H2, H3, H6 & H7 was statistically significant. However, for H4 and H5, this was not true. The discussion of these findings is mentioned in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was met through the interpretation of the collected data in two-folds. The first fold was aimed at exploring the relationship between the variables of the study in terms of demographic characteristics, psycho-organizational factors, emotional labor, and mental distress. The second fold was a mediation analysis of these factors. The findings of both folds were coherent with the existing literature and pave the ground for discussing the postulated hypothesis.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is likely to be a positive relationship between Job Demands and Mental Distress.

Firstly, it was hypothesized that the job demands will positively relate with mental distress in call center employees of Pakistan. Job Demand consisted of Workload and Job Autonomy. The higher the workload and the lower the job autonomy, the higher the likelihood of experiencing mental distress by Pakistani call center employees. From the Pearson correlation bivariate analysis in table 3, it can be referenced that a positive correlation exists between job demand and mental distress, inclusive of the subscales of stress, anxiety, and depression. This reinstates the empirical findings of Schaufeli, W. B's work on job demand and burnout that ultimately leads to mental distress. High job demand leads to increased performance stress and job anxiety. This is because high levels of job demands by means of workload and low job autonomy require individuals to devote more effort towards sustaining performance expectations.(Hakanen et al., 2006). Under high job demands, employees' physical strength, and mental and emotional energies are consumed (Demerouti et al., 2001), ultimately resulting in these individuals feeling that the job exceeds their capabilities (Hakanen et al., 2005), which could lead to low job control (Parker, 1998).

Accordingly, employees feel uncertain and worried over whether they can complete tasks and successfully achieve goals, and anxiety eventually emerges.

H2: Job Resources will be negatively correlated to Mental Distress.

Secondly, it was postulated through this study that the job resources will negatively correlate with mental distress experience in call center employees of Pakistan. This hypothesis was confirmed through table 3 of the Pearson bivariate correlation of scales. Job resources were highly negatively correlated with mental distress and its scales of stress, depression, and anxiety. Job resources in the form of Peer Support and Manager's Support dilute the impact of the psychological cost of job demands and facilitate personal growth and learning. (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011). Employees' self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, and optimism get boosted due to an increase in the level and nature of job resources available. This consequently leads to better coping strategies against job stress and performance anxiety and decreases employees' burnout symptoms (Babakus et al., 2010).

H3: Emotional Labor mediates the relation between Job Demands and Mental Distress.

This speculation was confirmed through the bivariate analysis in Table 3. Wherein, emotional labor and job demand were very highly positively correlated. Lee and Ashforth (2008) in their metanalysis study on dimensions of burnout confirmed that job demand is positively correlated with emotional labor, which is in consensus with the findings of this study. Customer satisfaction is a major performance indicator in call center employees. Performance matrices are a central theme of workload. Emotional sensitivity is core to customer satisfaction and is a key component of emotional labor. The job autonomy is generally low for call center employees, especially in terms of controlling how they interact with the customers or when they take their

break. This requires them to undergo high levels of emotional dissonance. Thereby, conceptually connecting job demand with emotional labor.

This speculation is confirmed in Table 7. Wherein, emotional labor positively mediates the relation between job demand and stress and anxiety. Increasing job demands in the form of workload or a reduced job autonomy bring about a sense of emotional exhaustion that ultimately morphs into job-based stress and a sense of incompetence to manage the job demands surfaces that gradually turns into performance anxiety. This rationale is in line with Hülsheger & Schewe, (2011) study findings that established that the amount and pressure of work bring about a negative feeling that employees have to mask and cannot actively express. This suppression of negative feelings overtime leads to emotional exhaustion which is a core agent of mental distress. All of this validates the mediation role of emotional labor on mental distress in call center employees.

H4: *Emotional Labor mediates the relation between Job Resources and Mental Distress.*

Fourthly, it was postulated that job resources negatively impact emotional labor. There was no significant difference between job resources and emotional labor in the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis in table 3. The employee will have to meet the emotional dissonance and emotional sensitivity requirements as part of their job function even if the colleagues and managers are supportive. As per Frederickson (2001), when health care workers reported high job resources in the form of emotional support from colleagues and supervisors, the experience of emotional labor reduced. However, this was only true for specific emotional job demands, i.e. confrontation with awkward and aggressive patients or clients. Job resources seem to be effective only in case of more specific emotional labor demands, and not in case of more general types of emotional labor demands. In a call center context, emotional labor demands are generalized in

nature, therefore, accounting for the insignificant correlation between job resources and emotional labor.

Interpreting table 7 invalidates this hypothesis. Even if job resources in the form of colleagues and managers' support are high, an individual still has to perform call center tasks independently (Moradi et al., 2014). The support is instantaneous and has high perishability. The emotional tax the individual has to pay due to the job demands in the call center context is still very high and ultimately leads to mental distress. However, the findings of this study do confirm that job resources are negatively correlated with mental distress but the role of emotional labor in this equation is insignificant.

H5: Job Nature will have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

Table 9 invalidates this hypothesis since a significant difference did not exist between sales or customer support job nature and mental distress, depression and stress. However, it was observed that a significant difference does exist between job nature and anxiety. Individuals having a sales job nature are likely to have higher levels of anxiety.

H6: Call Direction will have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

Interpreting Table 8 allows us to deduce that there are a positive significant difference between mental distress and stress for the two call directions, inbound and outbound calls. The significant difference was greater for inbound call direction for both these items as compared to outbound call directions. The same inference was confirmed through Zapf (2003) study where it was found that inbound call direction service agents had to stay more vigilant since the call could

land at any time. There was a higher level of stress reported by these individuals. Agents who have outbound call directions set the pace of their dials themselves and were consequently less stressed.

H7: Age, education, monthly income, and work experience are likely to have a positive correlation with Mental Distress.

The relation of these demographic variables with mental distress and the associated stress, anxiety, and depression can be deduced from the interpretation of table 4. A positive correlation between age, education and work experience with mental distress, stress, anxiety and depression was observed. There was no significant correlation of mental distress, stress, anxiety and depression with monthly income. With age and experience, employees tend to adopt better-coping strategies against workplace stress and the associated mental distress. However, with time the same aged and tenured individuals tend to experience burnout and become vulnerable to mental distress. All individuals are expected to perform the same task with standardized performance metrics irrespective of their educational qualifications. However, educational qualification is ultimately required for growth within most organizations and low educational status would result in an employee being stuck at the same job level. This will further bring about a sense of incompetence that ultimately progresses into mental distress. Likewise, monthly income is a reward of the labor input and does not acts as a buffer to mental distress. Therefore, validating the insignificant association between monthly income and mental distress.

Conclusion

The study aimed at exploring the impact of psycho-organizational factors on mental distress in call center employees of Pakistan. It was observed that job demand positively correlated with mental distress. While job resources are negatively associated with mental distress.

Additionally, emotional labor was positively linked with job demands but there was no link between emotional labor and job resources. Emotional labor itself positively correlates with mental distress. Regarding Emotional labor as a mediating agent between psycho-organizational factors (job demands and job resources) and mental distress (stress, anxiety and depression), it was observed that there's a significant positive correlation in the job demands, emotional labor and mental distress pathway. However, there was no significant correlation in the job resources, emotional labor and mental distress pathway. Individuals having sales job nature experience more anxiety as compared to people having customer support jobs. Furthermore, individuals catering to inbound call directions reported higher levels of mental distress and stress relative to individuals having outbound call directions. Finally, it was inferred that age, education and work experience positively correlated with mental distress.

Limitations

- This study was a cross-sectional study and therefore we can only deduce relationships between the variables.

- Causation cannot be inferred from this study.

- Task complexity was not factored in as an agent for this research since sufficient literature was not present.

- The employees were asked to respond regarding their organizational design in terms of the workload and job autonomy, they may have regarded this as a sensitive topic and ultimately would have undergone social desirability bias.

- This study categorized call direction as inbound and outbound only, individuals who cater to both directions were not represented in this study.

- Phone calls was the only medium of communication regarded in this study, chat and email mediums were not factored in this study.

- Shift duration was not regarded as a demographic variable in this study.

Recommendations and future implications

- The rapidly booming call center industry is at the mercy of high attrition rates. This attrition is stemming from high mental distress. Organizations can reference the findings of this study to revamp their organization design in order to reduce the impact job demand factors have on employees' mental health.

- The role of job resources in diluting the impact of job demands and significantly reducing mental distress experienced by the call center employees can be stressed upon.

- This study paves the ground for establishing call centers responsibility for psychological safety of their employees.

- Future studies can be conducted to explore this theme further so that sufficient empirical proof is generated for the legislative regulation of organizational designs in call centers.

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Appendices

Annexure A

Informed Consent

Psycho-Organizational factors and their impact on Mental Distress experienced by Call Center Employees in Pakistan

Dear Respondent,

This research study is aimed at exploring the impact of Psycho-organizational factors in terms of Job Demands and Job Resources on the mental distress experienced by Call Center Employees in Pakistan. The study is part of the matriculation requirement for the Bachelors in Science of Psychology at the Department of Professional Psychology, Bahria University, Islamabad. This research project is being supervised by the institutes Lecturer, Mr. Shaf Ahmed.

Your response to this survey will remain confidential and anonymous. All possible measures shall be taken to uphold your confidentiality and anonymity. All and any identifying information shall be strictly kept confidential. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, which maintains that the individual has the right to withdraw, quit or discontinue from this study at any time.

In order to be a part of this research, you must be presently employed in a customer-facing role at a Voice-Operations department in Pakistan. Non-Pakistani or Dual-National citizens are requested to not be a part of this study. Moreover, department managers who take part in customer facing activities may volunteer to be a part of this study. Individuals with physical or mental disabilities are requested to not be a part of this study.

Your participation in this study will be highly appreciated and valued. For queries pertaining to this study, feel free to contact us.

Regards,

Ahmed Hassan

I agree to participate in this study: ☐Yes ☐ No

Respondent's Signature: _____ ____

Date:_____

Annexure B

Demographic Sheet

Demographic Sheet

Age: _____

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Academic Qualification:

☐ 10 years or less (Matriculation/O Levels)

☐ 10-12 years (Intermediate/A-Levels)

☐ 12-16 years (Undergraduate degree)

☐ 16-18 years (Graduate degree)

☐ 18+ years (Post-graduate degree)

English Language Proficiency

☐ Beginner

☐ Intermediate

☐ Advance

Pay Scale per month (PKR)

☐ Less than 35,000

☐ 35,000- 50,000

☐ 50,000- 100,000

☐ More than 100,000

Work Experience (in Months): _____

Socio-Economic class

☐ Lower Class

☐ Lower-Middle Class

☐ Middle Class

☐ Upper Middle Class

☐ Upper Class

Shift type

☐ Rotational

☐ Fixed

Shift Start time (PKT)

☐ Early Morning (5AM-8AM)

☐ Morning (9AM-12PM)

☐ Afternoon (1PM- 4 PM)

☐ Evening (5PM-8PM)

☐ Night (9PM-12AM)

☐ Graveyard (1AM-4AM)

Call directions

☐ Inbound

☐ Outbound

Job Nature

☐ Sales

☐ Customer Support/Success

Annexure C

Health & Safety Executive-Management Style Indicator Tool (HSE-MSIT), subscales

For each of the following prompts, please tick a box that best describes your situation.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
I can decide when to take a break	1	2	3	4	5
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine	1	2	3	4	5
I have unachievable deadlines	1	2	3	4	5
If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	1	2	3	4	5
I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	1	2	3	4	5
I have to work very intensively	1	2	3	4	5
I have a say in my own work speed	1	2	3	4	5
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	1	2	3	4	5
I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	1	2	3	4	5
I am unable to take sufficient breaks	1	2	3	4	5
I am pressured to work long hours	1	2	3	4	5
I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	1	2	3	4	5
I have to work very fast	1	2	3	4	5
I have unrealistic time pressures	1	2	3	4	5
I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I get help and support I need from colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
I have some say over the way I work	1	2	3	4	5
I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	1	2	3	4	5
My working time can be flexible	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	1	2	3	4	5
I am supported through emotionally demanding work	1	2	3	4	5
My line manager encourages me at work	1	2	3	4	5

Annexure D

Frankfurt Emotion Work Scale (FEWS), subscales

	Very Rarely	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Very Often**
How often do you have to show **understanding** towards the client?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you have to show **sympathy** towards the clients?	1	2	3	4	5
How often in your job do you have to **suppress emotions** in order to appear 'neutral' on the outside?	1	2	3	4	5
How often in your job do you have to display emotions that do not agree with your actual feelings towards the client?	1	2	3	4	5
How often in your job do you have to display pleasant emotions (i.e. friendliness) or unpleasant emotions (i.e. strictness) on the outside while you feel indifferent on the inside?	1	2	3	4	5
How often do you have to display emotions that do not agree with your true feelings?	1	2	3	4	5
How often in your job is it necessary to empathize with your clients?	1	2	3	4	5
How often is it of importance in your job to know how the clients are actually feeling at the moment?	1	2	3	4	5
How often is it necessary in your job to put yourself into your clients' place?	1	2	3	4	5

	Exactly like that of A	Similar to that of A	in between A and B	Similar to that of B	Exactly like that of B
For Person A's job, it is very important to hide any personal feelings that may arise from the clients For Person B's job, it is of less significance to hide such feelings from the clients. Which one of these two jobs is most similar to yours?	1	2	3	4	5
In Person A's job, it is important to know of the current feelings of the client in order to handle tasks of the job successfully. In Person B's job, tasks can be handled successfully regardless of whether or not one knows about the feelings of the client. Which one of these two jobs is most similar to yours?	1	2	3	4	5

Annexure E

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21)

	Did not apply to me	Applied to me sometimes	Applied to me a lot	Always applied to me
I found it hard to wind down	1	2	3	4
I was aware of dryness of my mouth	1	2	3	4
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	1	2	3	4
I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	1	2	3	4
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	1	2	3	4
I tended to over-react to situations	1	2	3	4
I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)	1	2	3	4
I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	1	2	3	4
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	1	2	3	4
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	1	2	3	4
I found myself getting agitated	1	2	3	4
I found it difficult to relax	1	2	3	4
I felt down-hearted and blue	1	2	3	4
I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	1	2	3	4
I felt I was close to panic	1	2	3	4
I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	1	2	3	4
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	1	2	3	4
I felt that I was rather touchy	1	2	3	4

I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	1	2	3	4
I felt scared without any good reason	1	2	3	4
I felt that life was meaningless	1	2	3	4

Annexure F

DASS- Usage permission letter

DASS usage request-Ahmed Hassan `External` `Inbox ×`

Ahmed Hassan <ahmed.hassan16@nixorcollege.edu.pk>   Thu, Apr 7, 4:11 AM ☆ ↩ ⋮
to p.lovibond, shaf.ahmed05 ▾

Hi Professor Lovibond,

Hope this email finds you well. I am an 8th semester undergraduate student of BS Psychology at Bahria University, Islamabad. My undergraduate degree has a requirement of a final year research project. My proposed research topic is:

"Mapping the impact of Psycho-Organizational factors on Mental distress experienced by Call Center employees of Pakistan".

This research project is being supervised by Mr. Shaf Ahmed. I intend to use theDepression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) for this study, if the author is kind enough to grant permission to do so.

Being from a developing third-world country, we have limited means of conducting academic research in terms of availability of research tools/scales. If you would be kind enough to grant me access to the scale you have developed, I'd be highly obliged. The study is being done for academic purposes and the findings will be shared with you along with due acknowledgment whenever the research project concludes.

Looking forward to hearing back from you. Should you have any follow-up questions, kindly respond back. I'd be more than happy to address them.

--

Ahmed Hassan

+92 334 1129791

Peter Lovibond <p.lovibond@unsw.edu.au>   📎 Fri, Apr 8, 1:51 PM ☆ ↩ ⋮
to me ▾

Dear Ahmed,

You are welcome to use the DASS in your research. You can download the questionnaires (including translations in certain languages) and scoring key from the DASS website www.psy.unsw.edu.au/dass/ . I've attached a copy of the original publication for the DASS in case this is helpful. Please also see the FAQ page on the website for further information.

Best regards,
Peter Lovibond

•••

Annexure G

HSE-MSIT- Usage permission letter

Ahmed Hassan <ahmed.hassan16@nixorcollege.edu.pk>
to hseorders

Apr 7, 2022, 9:03 AM

Hi Team,

Hope this email finds you well. I am an 8th-semester undergraduate student of BS Psychology at Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan. My enrollment number is 01-171172-026. My undergraduate degree has a requirement of a final year research project. My proposed research topic is:

"Mapping the impact of Psycho-Organizational factors on Mental distress experienced by Call Center employees of Pakistan".

This research project is being supervised by Mr. Shaf Ahmed, Lecturer at Bahria University, Islamabad. The JD-R model is pivotal to our study. We'd appreciate it if you could grant us permission to use the HSE-MSIT scale, developed by your organization.

Being from a developing third-world country, we have limited means of conducting academic research in terms of the availability of research tools/scales. The study is being done for academic purposes and the findings will be shared with you along with due acknowledgment whenever the research project concludes.

Looking forward to hearing back from you. Should you have any follow-up questions, kindly respond back. I'd be more than happy to address them.

--
Ahmed Hassan
+92 334 1129791

Andy Kinn <hseorders.tso.co.uk>
to me

Apr 12, 2022, 1:40 AM

Hi Ahmed,

Thanks for reaching out. We don't essentially give out the scale, free of charge but since you mentioned in your email that this is for an academic non-commercial research project, we will make an exception. Please be sure to acknowledge this in your study.

Regards,
Andy W. Kinn
Program Officer
HSE-UK

Annexure H

FEWS- Usage permission letter

FEWS usage request-Ahmed Hassan `External` ▸ `Inbox ×`

Ahmed Hassan <ahmed.hassan16@nixorcollege.edu.pk>
to d.zapf, shaf.ahmed05 ▾

Tue, Apr 5, 3:16 AM ☆ ↩ ⋮

Hi Dr. Zapf,

Hope this email finds you well. I am an 8th semester undergraduate student of BS Psychology at Bahria University, Islamabad. My undergraduate degree has a requirement of a final year research project. My proposed research topic is:

"Mapping the impact of Psycho-Organizational factors on Mental distress experienced by Call Center employees of Pakistan".

This research project is being supervised by Mr. Shaf Ahmed. I intend to use the Frankfurt Emotional Wellness Scale (FEWS) for this study, if the author is kind enough to grant permission to do so.

Being from a developing third-world country, we have limited means of conducting academic research in terms of availability of research tools/scales. If you would be kind enough to grant me access to the scale you have developed, I'd be highly obliged. The study is being done for academic purposes and the findings will be shared with you along with due acknowledgment whenever the research project concludes.

Looking forward to hearing back from you. Should you have any follow-up questions, kindly respond back. I'd be more than happy to address them.

--
Ahmed Hassan
+92 334 1129791

D.Zapf@psych.uni-frankfurt.de
to me, shaf.ahmed05 ▾

Wed, Apr 6, 12:55 AM ☆ ↩ ⋮

Dear Ahmed Hassan,

the FEWS instrument is on emotion work and not on emotional
well-being. I send you the instrument and some literature.

You are free to use the FEWS for research purposes.

Kind regards,

Dieter Zapf

Annexure I

Plagiarism Report

PSYCHO-ORGANIZATIONAL PREDICTORS OF MENTAL DISTRESS IN CALL CENTER EMPLOYEES

Annexure J

Permission Letters

April 21, 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

It is stated that **Mr. Ahmed Hassan** Enrollment No. <u>01-171172-026</u> is a student of BS Psychology (8th Semester) Bahria University Islamabad Campus conducting research on **"Psycho-organizational factors of mental distress in call center employees"** under kind supervision of Mr. Shaf Ahmed. It is requested that kindly allow him to collect the data from your esteemed institution.

Regards,

Dr. Rizwana Amin
Head of Department
Professional Psychology
Bahria University
Islamabad

Bahria University
Discovering Knowledge

April 21, 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

It is stated that **Ms. Arisha Abdullah** Enrollment No. <u>01-171182-002</u> is a student of BS Psychology (8th Semester) Bahria University Islamabad Campus conducting research on **"Psycho-organizational factors of mental distress in call center employees"** under kind supervision of Mr. Shaf Ahmed. It is requested that kindly allow her to collect the data from your esteemed institution.

Regards,

Dr. Rizwana Amin
Head of Department
Professional Psychology
Bahria University
Islamabad