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Analyzing the Impression of COVID-19 through Job Stress on Burnout and Organizational Commitment: The moderating effect of Perceived Organizational Support

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic affected many dimensions of humanity and the healthcare professionals including the medical doctors and support staff at hospitals were declared as the front-line warriors during this outspread of virus. The staple aim of the study was to examine the moderating effect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), under unprecedented pandemic situation, among Job Stress (JS) and Job Burnout (JB) as well as among JS and Organizational Commitment (OC). In addition, relationship of JS with JB and OC was also analyzed therein.

Design/Methodology: Five well-established private hospitals in Lahore, a major city of Pakistan where diversity meets contemporary dynamics, were targeted for data collection as 260 healthcare professionals including 171 doctors & 89 medical support staff participated in the conduction of this study. Data was collected from the working masse using adopted questionnaires for the variables under consideration. Data was analyzed using regression and correlation analysis in order to examine the relationship among the variables of the study.

Findings: It was established that JS relates positively with JB and is negatively related to the OC. However, it was found that that POS does not moderate the relationships among JS and JB as well as among JS and OC.

Practical Implications: The study finds its importance as it addresses the impact of a stressful situation on employees and may prove to be at the core of policy making during unprecedented and unwanted situations like pandemic. The study suggests that management needs to make human resource policies accordingly to tackle with the stressful situations in order to enable employees to work in favorable environment.

Originality/Value: The study ratifies the relevance of Social Exchange theory in comprehending the reciprocation of employees in response to the presence of stressful environment at workplace. The study finds its value in exploring the unwanted and novel situations like COVID-19 pandemic owing to the employees' well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

Outbreak and spread of Corona Virus in almost all parts of the globe has been the center of attention lately; multiple sectors of industry have borne the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic (Purwanto et al., 2020). The healthcare institutions have been at the forefront of dealing with the virus. The healthcare professionals working at different hospitals all around the globe had to put their lives on line in order to cater the patients affected by the virus. The war against the corona virus was an unannounced one and the professionals working in the hospitals had been the main soldiers in this. The paramedical staff had to deal with extensive work and pressure in order to save lives and perform their duty which is to serve the humanity (Shreffler et al., 2020). At the same time, the management of these hospitals had to make sure that work pressure and circumstances does not get too much to the employees that it affects their commitment towards the organization. The management needs to keep an eye on different aspects, such as the stress from work other than the routine, related to the employees that could affect their commitment towards the work or the organization itself. An important aspect in the commitment of employees towards their workplace is that how they perceive the backing from their organization (McBey et al., 2017). It is very important to study such different aspects in the healthcare organizations especially under the situations like we had on our hands, the COVID-19 pandemic. Being the frontline fighters, they had a lot on their shoulders which actually made them at the verge of losing their mental health which was leading to deterioration of their physical health which led to unprofessional routine in working hours. Aim of this study is to examine the relationship of Job Stress (JS) with the Organizational Commitment (OC) as well as with Job Burnout (JB). The core objective of this study is to analyze the moderating effect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) of healthcare professionals among the relationship of JS with OC and JS with JB. The authors seek to conduct the study under the radar of Social Exchange theory in order to examine the reciprocity of employees towards the organization under the presence of due stressors. Variables under consideration have been extensively studied by the scholars (Chou et al., 2014; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Westman & Etzion, 2001) but this study is an effort to address the opening on literature by linking these variables with the novel and unprecedented situation of Corona virus.

One of the important objectives of the human resource management in any organization is to keep a check on the stress level of professionals working therein. Meeting this objective is for the sake of wellbeing of employees as from the organization's point of view owing to the smooth running of its operations. It is an important aspect of successful organizations to keep a track of the stress level of the employees that it does not go the levels of exhaustion among them and affect their working (Sivalogathasan & Hashim, 2013). When the work of the employees becomes more challenging than routine, it increases the stress levels and the same happened to the healthcare employees during this pandemic. Vast amount of research has been conducted in the field of management and this study vows to be part of it

with the novel situation of COVID-19 pandemic. It will help organizations to deal with situations like COVID-19 pandemic in the future from managerial point of view.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The organizations always strive to remain competitive to other firms in the market owing to the ever so tough competition (Shimomura & Thisse, 2012). To remain competitive and to achieve social as well as financial targets is the primary goal of every organization for the sake of all the stakeholders involved with it (Kotlar et al., 2018). In order to put the company into a competitive position and to let it achieve its goals, the operations need to be conducted efficiently and effectively. Running of operations in a company are dependent on its resources and the human resources are the most important of the resources for any firm. The fundamental is that the employees are liable to run a company and take it to position where goals could be met as well as make it competitive enough to compete in a competitive environment. The structure of any company is constituted by the people working there and they are the ones responsible for the success or failure of the firm (Brekke & Nyborg, 2008). Maximum utilization of available resources is indeed one of the major targets sought by the management of a company and the human capital is right up there in terms valuable resources of any organization (Yu & Wang, 2020). It is of paramount importance that management pay due attention to the working environment of the employees and likely challenges and problems they could face at the workplace. The unwanted situations like COVID-19 pandemic demands more focus of the management on the well-being of employees. Attention should be given as to how much the more than routine work put the employees under undue stress. This study is an effort to address this important issue from the firm's point of view. As the firm was the main stakeholder for the success or the failure of saving lives in the crucial time of pandemic breakout. If these important facets are ignored, then it would be very difficult for the firms to remain in competition with its competitors and produce efficient results for the stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Variables of the Study

Job stress refers to a variety of workplace events that cause dissatisfaction among employees (De Looft et al., 2018). Often employees work is divided into several categories in different ways, which causes psychological stress. When individuals get together, even there tends to have been some ascendancy of some employees on other employees, which also causes "job stress" (Beehr & Newman, 1978). Stress also linked with various other normal circumstances, that perform stressors role and ultimately led to psychological distress for employees (Finney et al., 2013).

(McBey et al., 2017) observed organizational commitment in several perspectives. When goals of organization and employee are in synchronized, there is organizational commitment present between workforces. Employees in this situation believe that there has been good communication among organization and employees. (Abuseif

& Ayaad, 2018) discusses the typical behavior of the Organizational Commitment which forces the employees to work for the organization with an intention of helping and gain competitive edge by performing and competing among competitors in market.

Job burnout has also been connected to three different human states; first is emotional exhaustion, in which someone feels emotionally exhausted after a long day at work, second is detachment of someone's emotions from colleagues at job which could lead to the loss of someone's ability to regulate their thoughts and third is lower personal accomplishment which would be a situation of doubting one's own capacity to perform their task effectively (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is observed differently by authors from various perspectives. POS act as motivating force for managers in order to motivate them to recognize what their subordinates have accomplished and also encourages them to play a role in how POS is perceived by employees (Zhang et al., 2017). POS explains professional connections in employees and the organization at workplace (Sivalogathan & Hashim, 2013).

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG VARIABLES UNDER CONSIDERATION

Job Stress and Organizational Commitment

Recent studies on similar topics have attempted to understand the impact of job stress on commitment of employees towards organization and relationship between two variables. Haque and Aston (2016) claimed that there is a strong and negative relation between organizational commitment and job stress. The more the job stress, the more the negative impact on the health of workers and then gradual decrement in the work commitment is witnessed.

Researchers also aimed to assess the impact of stress levels on workers with various commitment levels to their organization, emphasizing that stress was seen as being more problematic for workers with higher commitment level than for those with lower commitment level (Al-Hawajreh, 2011). It is the basic human psychology: the more concerned a person mentally is, the more stress one bears due to that factor, it is all due to the commitment a person has for that. Haque and Aston (2016) further examined that job stress effect on efficiency and performance of different employees at organization, in this relationship attitude and behaviors act as mediators, and claimed that job stress has a negative relationship with the employee's behaviors which negatively impacts their performance. When the employees in abundance deliver the below-par performance in the firm, the collective dull-performance due to wear out leads to the downfall of firm.

Job Stress and Job Burnout

Previous researchers have linked job burnout to job stress in such a way that it's recognized as severe phenomenon of job stress. Employees experience burnout when such stressors are present at their place of employment because they respond to them for a longer time. The triggers at first are overlooked, most of the time, the employees try to mitigate the

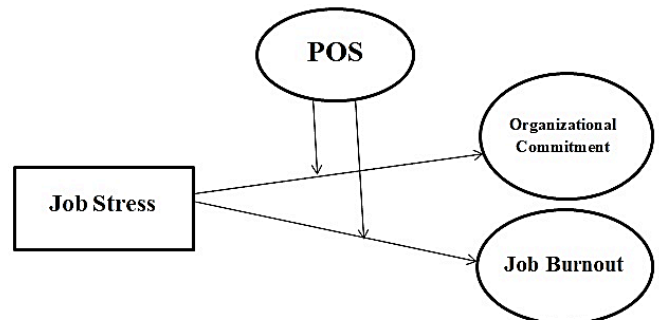
feeling by suppressing them in a way where they disown their feelings in order to settle down thing. But later on the whole baggage of emotional distress creates a lot of nonchalance in the way of success of the firm. This has a serious negative influence on employees' physical and mental health (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2009).

As stressors are present at workplace that put pressure on employees, they lead to emotional and physical compromise, and eventually results in a last situation known as Job Burnout. Kyriacou, (1987) predicted that employees in organization are unable to control their stress levels that are worst possible stress situations. Burnout on the job occurs when stress management for employees becomes impossible. Due to the lack of stress management, things turn from bad into worst. Emotionally, analytically, cognitively, physically, the employees suffer from the wear out at their workplace due to untreated stress caused by triggers which were left unchecked and untreated due to the casualness of the employees.

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

- H1: Job Stress relates positively with Job Burnout and negatively with Organizational Commitment.
 H2: Perceived Organizational Support moderates the relationship among Job Stress and Organizational Commitment.
 H3: Perceived Organizational Support moderates the relationship among Job Stress and Job Burnout.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The variables under consideration are analyzed using the deductive approach under the philosophy of positivism. The data is analyzed among quantifiable variables hence the quantitative research methods have been deployed. The whole mechanism goes through the definite process as Positivism leads to Deduction which leads to the Quantitative Research. This method has a reliability validity, as it has multiple stages that lead to the accuracy of the research. The steps include Research questions, Research design, Measurement, Sampling, Data collection, Analysis, Conclusion and Interpretation and then the final outcome Report.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Subjects/Participants

Prime participants of this study are healthcare

professionals including the doctors and the support staff of five private hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan. The five hospitals are so chosen because the researchers of this study had smooth access to collect the data from their doctors and staff owing to COVID-19 situation. The pandemic influenced the working masses at their behavioral level which were working under severe pressure of saving lives. Taking the samples from those individuals who are cognitively active and have a working tendency was the key factor kept in consideration. Data is collected only from those professionals who had at least one year working experience and were aware of hospital culture and also were the team members during the time period of pandemic.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling technique has been deployed because of the constraints in access to the paramedical staff in hospitals' setting, the non-probability sampling was the appropriate sampling method chosen for this research. Choosing this type sampling was considered because of the geographical limitation of the research, as the limited resources were available who willingly contributed.

Data Collection Instrument

The required collection of data is done using an adopted survey questionnaire for the current study. 275 questionnaires were distributed among the participants of the study out of which 260 were considered for data analysis. Out of those 260, 171 were filled by the doctors and the rest by the support staff such as nurses etc.

Analysis Software

The collected data has been analyzed using the statistical software, SPSS 22, robust software that analyzes the set of data efficiently with precision, it provides user friendly interface that enables the competent statistical analysis to be compiled without problematic encounter.

DATA ANALYSIS

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha technique was utilized by the researcher to analyze the reliability of each variable separately and that of overall instrument was also examined. The results are as follows:

Table 1
Reliability Statistics of Overall Instrument

Items	Cronbach's Alpha
26	0.813

It is clear from the above table that the instrument is reliable overall as the value of .813 is above the standard of 0.70. Hence it can be said that measurement of the adopted instrument is reliable.

Table 2
Individual Items Reliability Statistics

Variable Name	Items	Alpha Value
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Job Burnout	6	.829
Job Stress	10	.883
Organizational Commitment	6	.803
Perceived Organizational Support	4	.776

Table 3
Correlation Analysis

Variable Name	1	2	3	4
Job Stress	1			
Job Burnout	.795**	1		
Perceived Organizational Support	-.208**	-.312**	1	
Organizational Commitment	-.278**	-.418**	.496**	1

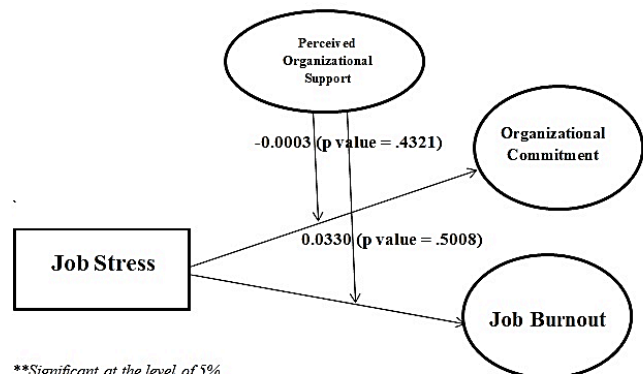
** Level of Significance at 0.05 or 5%

Table 3 highlights that JS & OC are negatively and significantly correlated with each. There is a positive relationship between JS and JB and also between the POS and OC. The linkage between JS and JB clearly depicts how cognition affects the commitment, and how the worn-out cognition deteriorates the physical performance of the paramedical staff. Both of these relationships are significant in nature. The right amount of POS can actually boost up the OC of the employees if and only if that is provided in the right way at the right time. It is also reflected that JB correlates negatively and significantly with POS.

Model Testing using Process by Hayes

Table 4
Description of Model

Independent Variable	Moderating Variable	Dependent Variables
Job Stress	Perceived Organizational Support	Organizational Commitment, Job Burnout



**Significant at the level of 5%

*Significant at the level of 10%

Regression was applied to examine the moderating effect of POS among JB & OC. The insignificant β value of -0.0003 and p value of 0.4321, more than 0.05 or 0.10 suggest that POS does not moderate the relationship between JS & OC. The above figure also shows that POS also does not moderate the relationship between JS & JB since the β value of 0.0330

is insignificant and p value of 0.5008 indicates that moderation is insignificant at a level of 5% or even 10%.

Findings & Discussion

The major objective of the study was to analyze the moderation of Perceived Organizational Support between the relationships of Job Stress with Organizational Commitment and Job Burnout under the unprecedented situation of Corona virus pandemic. The correlation as well as regression analysis was deployed to analyze the collected data. Three hypotheses were developed in the study after the review of relevant literature. The analysis of the data reflects that the JS relates negatively and strongly with the OC, supporting first hypothesis.

POS did not have a moderating effect on the relationship among JS & OC. Hence we can say that due to COVID-19, the staff felt extreme stress and it led to lower their commitment towards the organization. As the pandemic was one of its own kind, nobody thought in 21st century such an epidemic would take place and will make industries or mega-projects shut. It created a haze of panic and uncertainty. The support perceived by them was not much under the circumstances and it did not play any significant part in enhancing the commitment of employees. The people at the managerial posts did not realize how strongly the Perceived Organizational Support was required in the stressful conditions at the time of COVID-19. As a result, the second hypothesis was rejected. Similarly, the third hypothesis was also rejected because it was seen that POS also did not have any moderating effect on the relationship between the JS & JB either. The JS had a significant and positive impact on JB which means that the presence of high stress due to COVID-19 situation, it ultimately resulted in burnout of the employees.

The employees were completely devastated after the hectic working hours, the constant cycle of working several hours without any break or actual support from the organization left them hanging in the tiredness due to which many of the employees collapsed. Managing the pandemic at the front, being the front-liners was undoubtedly the stressful task. Although the organization tried to work on the support of the employees but all the efforts made were below-par.

Hence it is safe to say that due to COVID-19, the staff felt extreme stress and it led to lower their commitment towards the organization, conforming the theory of Social Exchange. In addition to this, the stress among the healthcare professionals due to increased workload and overall situation of chaos was so that they felt little support from their respective organizations. In the hectic time of managing numerous patients at the same time, the organizations diverted all their attention towards the purchase of equipment, latest sanitary item, ventilators, medicines, and safety gears. Monetarily the medical organizations were completely consumed and had their all focus on the fact of saving people's life. In this way they unwillingly or unwanted over-burdened the paramedical staff, as it was the need of the hour. But what they did not understand that workers needed peaceful mindset in the muddled routine. Apparently workers were working day and night beyond their capacity in order to save lives but they

did not receive the amount of pus in the form of Perceived Organizational Support. The little support they perceived could not prevent the lowering of employees' commitment as well as preventing the stress levels to reach the heights and cause burnout among employees.

The analysis of the data showcases that the challenging work situations prove to be stressful for the employees, the healthcare professionals in this case. It is of utmost importance that organizations like hospitals pay attention to the negative implications of unprecedented situations like COVID-19 outbreak on the employees since it is highly possible that they feel excessive pressure. At the end of the day no matter how talented or big of a person someone is, everyone is human. Stressful conditions and startling state of affairs negatively impacted the paramedical staff whether it was doctor, nurses or the office staff of the hospital all were crushed under the immense pressure of the overload which led them to have anxiety, crumbling state of mind and a weird kind of dis-concern towards the organization and lack of commitment which becomes inevitable to occur. Actual practical ways to combat the stress of employees should be listed in the code-of-conduct of the medical organizations, providing employees autonomy in their working condition within a monitored sphere, increasing the ranks of working employees, providing incentives to the dedicated employees who worked day and night. Helping the employees to reduce their stress, the wellness of the employees should be prioritized, the flexible hours in an alternative manner of numerous employees should be deployed, and the efforts of the employees should be valued, vocalized and appreciated. The method of appreciation could be in the form of money, souvenir, or any incentive. Because none of such exact measures were taken as pandemic was unanticipated and it left everybody in state of distress, but the health workers were at the peak of stress due to their exertion. The presence of such pressure at workplace can have adverse impact on their performance just like it happened at the peak of COVID-19 and ultimately affect their commitment toward their workplace.

Implications of the Study

The study finds its managerial implications in a way that it offers valuable insights to the personnel responsible for managing the human resources of the organizations. The study proves that if stressful situations are not managed appropriately, it leaves a negative effect on employees' commitment towards their organization. The most important and crucial aspect of human psychology leads to the revelation that competence of the work comes from the dedication, and dedication forms the commitment to the optimum level that triggers the execution of commitment. Commitment towards the organization is the top-notch desirable aspect or key feature in the employee's characteristics.

Constant unattended stress, rewires the brain of human and takes a toll on the mental health, as soon as the threshold of bearing stress is crosses, the sirens of burnout are blown in full volume.

Also, there are possibilities as reflected by the results of the study that stress from work can lead to exhaustion among the professionals and cause an unwanted situation of a burnout. Leaving the mental health of the workers hanging in

the dark alley of indifference evokes undesirable conditions within the working environment. These findings should alert the human resource managers, especially in hospitals, that they should keep an eye on the well-being of employees. No matter how tough the situation is.

Hence in this way the study offers practical implications to the managers. The burden on the shoulders of a manager is much more than he understands, constantly maintaining the balance between stress and encouragement is the ultimate duty of the manager. Along with managing the projects meeting the deadline with effectiveness, saving employees from the wear and tear mentally and physically is something of prime important enlisted in a manager's duty. In theoretical sense, the study also has its implications in the field of management as well as pandemic situations.

Limitations of the Study

The study has its limitations on the grounds that only five hospitals were considered for the collection of data because of not-so-easy access to other similar places. As many of the hospitals do not cooperate in the practicing manner of easy research. The questionnaire template designed for sampling has to reach the credible people in order to gain particular information regarding the significant topic as many hospitals deny the access of their inner circle, finding results have been quite problematic. In the future studies on corona virus outbreak and post pandemic scenario, researchers could be having more access to the people affected by the pandemic since the vaccination to cure the virus is available and the post-pandemic era has begun.

The after-effects of the vaccination will be opening a gateway to plethora of new findings and new beginnings as experiencing the new-vaccine for COVID-19 on human race will for sure create positive and negative tides. The most important part where the researchers can kick in, is the part how the vaccine altered the human efficiency of work or the workload in the professional environment. By executing the right dimensions of the post-pandemic scenarios, putting the right studies in action in order to see how vaccine affected human brain in the sectors of professional decorum when working under pressure, such as team-work, empowerment, integrity towards the work, innovation in the manner of adapting new changes, transforming things, and the backbone of the working places respect towards one another. There will be a lot of research regarding the post-pandemic era in times to come especially in link to the human resources management as per the researchers of this study.

Future Directions

Other than the healthcare industry, other industries such as the construction industry, automobile or automaker industry, education industry or financial institutions could well be a part of relevant studies in the future. The manipulation of variables as per the influence the pandemic had on the specific industry is another aspect to look out for future researchers.

Through proper channel of communication and analysis, as per the delicacies of that particular industry or firm, highs and lows of that specific industry can be analyzed precisely with the help of same methodology in a way to help understanding the effect of pandemic on working masses within a professional environment so that a better future could

be built after considering valuable changes in the certified workplaces since it is the need of the hour that such issues are taken seriously at organizational level

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IMPACT STATEMENT

The aim of the study is to examine the moderating effect of perceived organizational support, under unprecedented pandemic situation, among job stress and job burnout as well as among job stress and organizational commitment in relevance of social exchange theory. In addition, relationship of job stress with job burnout and organizational commitment was also analyzed therein. Variables of the study have been extensively studied by the scholars in the past but this study is an effort to address the opening on literature by linking these variables with the novel and unprecedented situation of Corona virus. By considering the results of this study, the management at large scale medical institutions would not be able to ignore the psychological impact on employees due to the presence of unwanted situations like pandemic outbreak and the policies would be made accordingly as well.

Conflict of Interest Statement: This work is original and has not been published anywhere before. All authors have approved the contents of this paper.

Declaration of Competing Interests: It is declared here that the authors have no known competing financial or personal interests that can influence the work reported in this research paper.

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Sadia Farooq, Dr. Sadia Farooq has more than twenty years of teaching experience with active involvement in research and administrative work. As an educationist and researcher, she is committed to two major philosophies. Dr Sadia is serving as an Assistant Professor at Hailey College of Commerce, University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan. She has 20 HEC recognized Article Publications along with one book.



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