

IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITIES OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

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Abstract

This paper evaluates how mental health influences the commitment of teachers working in the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and the hypothesis of whether psychological capital (PsyCap) mediates the relationship between mental health and commitment or not. In a cross-sectional survey of N = 490 faculty members, a mental health inventory (DASS-21), Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) and organizational commitment scale by Allen and Meyer were used. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression and bootstrapped mediation (PROCESS) were used to analyze data. Findings suggest that worse mental health (greater distress) is linked with less organizational commitment; PsyCap positively related with commitment and mediated the mental-health organizational commitment relation partially. Results indicate that PsyCap based interventions may be used to mitigate adverse impacts of mental issues on faculty dedication. Conclusions on university policy and mental health support services are put across.

INTRODUCTION

The aspect of mental health in teachers is becoming more popular on a global scale and especially relevant in the context of higher education where the workload, insecurity, and lack of resources are quite common phenomena (World Health Organization, 2017). Nevertheless, faculty in the context of universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the public sector are forced to deal with other stressors, such as high enrolment, insufficient research investments, and socio-political unrest (Mehmood et al., 2022, Perveen, 2023). Depression and anxiety, as well as other mental health issues, have previously been recognized to have negative influences on work attitudes and behaviors, with one of them being organizational commitment (Cooper et al., 2019; Yaseen, 2024).

As long as Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualized organizational commitment as a major predictor of retention, performance, and discretionary effort, organizational commitment, which in this case is operationalized as affective, continuance and normative commitment, has been a predictor of retention, performance, and discretionary effort (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Higher-order positive resource (Hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism) has also developed

as a psychological capital (PsyCap), which is an individual level resource that helps them to be well and committed to their work (Luthans, Avolio, Avey and Norman, 2007). PsyCap is also demonstrated to mediate the relationships between stressors and outcomes at work place (Avey et al., 2011; Adil, 2008).

The research question is as follows: (1) what is the relationship between mental health and organizational commitment among university teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; (2) how is PsyCap related to mental health and commitment; (3) does PsyCap mediate between mental health and organizational commitment? The theoretical basis is based on positive organizational behavior and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Luthans et al., 2007). Results will be used to design faculty support and retention strategies in state universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health has been seen as an important factor in the attitudes of employees and how an organization operates. Psychological distress has been linked to a decline in motivation, engagement, and attachment to organizations in workplaces, with its outcomes (depression, anxiety) and stress being shown (Cooper et al., 2019). In the context of higher education, faculty members are commonly overloaded with their roles, research duties, publication obligations, and administrative tasks that increase the level of psychological stress (Maqbool, 2021). Particularly, the stress level of the teachers in the setting of the public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can be additionally increased due to the resource scarcity and the sociocultural issues (Mehmood et al., 2022). Based on the theory of conservation of resources which was introduced by Stevan Hobfoll (1989), psychological distress may be perceived as depletion of individual resources which adversely affects work-related attitudes such as commitment to the organization.

Allen and Meyer (1990) define organizational commitment as affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (perceived cost of leaving) and normative commitment (sense of obligations). The empirical results indicate that employees with high psychological strain indicate lower affective commitment and increased withdrawal intentions (Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernandez, 2017). Research work done in schools has shown that commitment of teachers and institutional loyalty are negatively correlated with mental health issues (Yaseen, 2024). On the basis of this research, the hypothesis is presented as follows:

H1: Mental health distress has a negative relationship with organizational commitment in university teachers.

On the one hand mental health issues can undermine commitment, but on the other hand such negative effects can be counteracted with positive psychological resources. The concept of psychological capital (PsyCap) was coined by Fred Luthans and his co-authors (2007) and is a proximate expression of positive psychological state of a person in terms of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. PsyCap is based on positive organizational behavior and empirically related to better performance, satisfaction and organizational commitment (Luthans et al., 2008; Avey et al., 2010). Those who possess more PsyCap will be able to perceive issues as less overwhelming and manage them better in case of failure and believe they can still reach their objectives.

Studies have shown that PsyCap has a negative relationship with psychological distress because the latter eliminates optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy (Shahid et al., 2019). On the other hand, workers who have a greater PsyCap indicate greater attachment and commitment to their companies (Perveen, 2023). PsyCap has been used in learning institutions to increase the flexibility and dedication of teachers especially during stressful situations. The following hypotheses are formulated, according:

H 2: Mental health distress has a negative relationship with psychological capital.

H3: Organization commitment has a positive association with psychological capital.

In addition to direct effects, PsyCap can be an intervening variable between mental health and organizational commitment. Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) holds that the negative impacts of stressors may be compensated by personal resources. Such a resource is PsyCap, which may reduce the effects of psychological distress on the attitudes of an organization. It is shown that PsyCap is the mediating force of the relationships between work stress and work results, such as commitment and performance (Avey et al., 2011). In addition, mental-health structures that the World Health Organization (2017) promotes in the workplace focus on enhancing individual resilience to maintain workforce engagement.

Based on these theoretical and empirical premises, this paper will support the following mediation hypothesis:

H4: The mediation factor is psychological capital between mental health distress and organizational commitment.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that psychological distress indeed causes a lack of organizational commitment but psychological capital is a safeguarding psychological resource. The hypothesis testing of these among teachers in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government universities is beneficial in terms of providing contextualized evidence within the higher-education system in Pakistan and also in terms of further research in positive organizational behavior within the developing country.

METHODS

Participants and procedure

A stratified random sample of five universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of the public sector, a sample size of 490 full-time teaching faculty was used. Inclusion criteria: Working 6 months and above, teaching. The data were gathered through the online and paper surveys in a single semester of an academic year. Follow up response rate: 72%.

Measures

1- Mental health (predictor). Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale -21 items (DASS-21; Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). The more the scores the more the psychological distress. Alpha =.86-.90 reported in similar stages in Pakistani samples (Iqbal et al., 2020).

Psychological capital (mediator). Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24; Luthans et al., 2007). The increase in scores implies an increase in PsyCap. In Pakistan, local validations are reported $\alpha \approx .80$ -.90 (Afzal, 2018; Adil, 2008).

2- Organizational commitment (outcome). The 18-item scale of affective, continuance, and normative commitment of Allen and Meyer (1990). The more the score, the higher the commitment. According to the Pakistani validations, the reliability ($\approx .75$ -.88) is acceptable (Batool, 2023).

3- Demographics. Age, sex, academic level, years of practice, university, major.

Data analysis

Evaluations were done with SPSS and PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Descriptive statistics and reliability (Cronbach 0.2) were calculated. Pearson correlations were used to measure bivariate relationships. Mental health predicting organizational commitment was tested in hierarchical regression in the control of demographics. The program tested mediation based on the PROCESS Model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples; indirect effects were deemed significant when the 95 percent bias-corrected confidence interval did not contain zero. Tables include the most important statistics (demographics, correlation matrix, regression, mediation).

RESULTS

Table 1: Sample demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	302	61.6
Female	188	38.4
Age		
25–34	112	22.9
35–44	168	34.3
45–54	132	26.9
55+	78	15.9
Academic rank		
Lecturer/Assistant	210	42.9
Associate Professor	154	31.4
Professor	126	25.7
Mean years of service (SD)	11.8	(7.4)

The sample size (N = 490) consisted of a higher number of males (61.6% of respondents) than females with the majority of them being aged between 35 and 44. Academic ranks were spread between lecturer and professor and the mean tenure was approximated to be 11.8 years. This population sample facilitates the generalizability of the career stages in the province by the public universities.

Table 2: Reliability of scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean (SD)
DASS-21 (total)	21	.89	28.6 (12.4)

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean (SD)
PCQ (PsyCap)	24	.92	3.45 (0.61)
Allen & Meyer OC (total)	18	.87	3.18 (0.72)

All scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (0.87) and were an indication of reliable measurement in this sample. Results show that means are moderate in DASS-21 and moderate in PsyCap and organization commitment within the faculty. These psychometric findings can be validly used in the further analysis.

Table 3: Correlations

Pearson correlations (two-tailed).

Variable	1	2	3
1. Mental health (DASS-21 total)	—		
2. PsyCap (PCQ)	-0.48**	—	
3. Organizational commitment (OC total)	-0.42**	0.56**	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

PsyCap ($r = -.48$) and organization commitment ($r = -.42$) had a negative correlation with mental health (distress). There was a positive correlation between psycomp and organizational commitment ($r = .56$). The moderate-strong associations confirm the theory and give initial results that PsyCap could be a mediator.

Table 4: Hierarchical regression predicting organizational commitment

Predictor	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1 (controls)				.06
Gender (male=1)	.05	.04	.03	
Years of service	.01	.00	.10*	
Rank (higher)	.08	.03	.09*	
Step 2 (add DASS-21)				$\Delta R^2 = .15^{**}$
DASS-21 (distress)	-.012	.002	-.39**	
Step 3 (add PsyCap)				$\Delta R^2 = .18^{**}$
PsyCap	.54	.04	.48**	
DASS-21 (controlling PsyCap)	-.006	.002	-.19**	
Model F (final)				$F(7,482)=56.4, p<.001$

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Mental health (distress) had a significant prediction on lower organizational commitment after controls (Step 2). The addition of PsyCap decreased the DASS-21 beta as -.39 compared to -.19 and PsyCap was a significant ($r = .48$) positive predictor. The tendency indicates that PsyCap mediates (partially) the distress relationship to commitment.

Table 5: Mediation analysis (PROCESS, bootstrapped indirect effect)

Path	Effect	SE	95% CI
a (DASS \rightarrow PsyCap)	-0.028	0.003	[-0.034, -0.022]
b (PsyCap \rightarrow OC, controlling DASS)	0.54	0.04	[0.46, 0.62]
c (total effect DASS \rightarrow OC)	-0.013	0.0017	[-0.016, -0.010]
c' (direct effect DASS \rightarrow OC)	-0.006	0.002	[-0.010, -0.002]
Indirect effect (a*b)	-0.015	0.003	[-0.021, -0.010]

The significance of bootstrapped indirect effect (a b) was significant (95% CI did not include zero), which suggests that PsyCap partially mediated the relationship between mental health distress and organizational commitment. The mediation was approximately 54 percent, which is in line with partial mediation.

DISCUSSION

This paper concluded that the higher the level of psychological distress among university educators in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the worse the organizational commitment, which is in line with previous research on the negative mental health being related to poor professional attitudes (Cooper et al., 2019; Mehmood et al., 2022). PsyCap had negative relationships with distress and positive relationships with commitment, and mediated the path distress commitment. These findings can be explained by the theory of conservation of resources: teachers who had higher PsyCap own personal resources (hope, resilience, efficacy, optimism) that counter the negative impacts of distress on commitment (Hobfoll, 1989; Luthans et al., 2007).

Practical implications are focused on PsyCap by using short, scalable interventions (PsyCap training, resilience workshops, coaching) to reinforce faculty resources and reduce the effects of mental health issues on commitment (Luthans et al., 2006; Avey et al., 2011). Mental health services, workload management, and supportive leadership are other areas of investment the university administrations should make to deal with the root causes of distress (WHO, 2017).

Limitations and Future study.

This study has a number of limitations despite the contributions being made. First, it is limited in its ability to make causal inferences as the cross-sectional design requires longitudinal or experimental designs to determine directionality between mental health and psychological capital and organizational commitment. Second, the use of self-report measures can create the issue of common method bias and social desirability. Third, the study sample was restricted to the public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and this may not be generalizable to the other institutions in the country or other provinces in Pakistan. The future research must utilize multi-source data, longitudinal models and intervention based research to test PsyCap development programs and test other moderators like style of leadership, workload, and organizational culture.

CONCLUSION

The present study is the empirical evidence that mental health plays a significant role in organizational commitment among teachers in the universities of the public sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The increased levels of psychological distress correlated with a decreased commitment, which indicated that the faculty attitude is prone to mental health issues. Notably, it was observed that psychological capital developed as an interesting mediating factor, which partially mitigated the adverse effect of distress on commitment. Such results highlight the importance of building positive psychological resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism in the academic settings. The structured PsyCap development programs, availability of counseling services and the supportive leadership practices to improve the faculty well-being, their commitment, and eventually institutional sustainability and performance need to be prioritised by the university administrations.

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