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Effect of Ergophobia on the Performance of Pakistani Pink-Collar Workers

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Abstract

Background: The objective was to find out how Pakistani pink-collar workers' performance is affected by ergophobia, with a particular emphasis on the mediating function of work-life balance (WLB). This study investigated how anxiety and dread at work affect women in service-oriented professions' personal balance and professional effectiveness.

Methods: Purposive sampling was used to gather data from 384 female employees in Pakistan's tertiary industries using a cross-sectional approach. Smart PLS was used to analyse the data, and structural equation modelling was used to test hypotheses and evaluate validity and reliability.

Results: The results showed that ergophobia has a substantial and detrimental impact on WLB and performance. Furthermore, it was shown that WLB improved performance and acted as a mediator in the association between ergophobia and performance. This implies that anxiety at work disrupts the balance between personal and professional life, which in turn impairs job outcomes.

Conclusion: It was shown that reducing workplace anxiety is essential to raising pink-collar workers' job performance and general well-being.The study emphasizes the need for mental health programs and supporting organizational procedures that foster psychological safety, adaptability, and equilibrium in Pakistan's changing service workforce.

Keywords: Anxiety, Ergophobia, Fear, Work-life balance, Performance, Workplace fear

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary employment dynamics, changes in labour or shifting in roles and responsibilities, inflation, the need to have luxuries, and to achieve financial independence has compelled women to enter each and every sector of industries. The term pink collar workers have been used for women, who are associated with occupations such as teaching, secretarial, nursing, childcare, floristry, or maid services. A sexual division of labour is reinforced by pink-collar occupations, which are frequently low in status, salary, and possibilities for progression. They are also perceived as mirroring domestic obligations (APA, 2018). However, with the race to mirror responsibilities there is a presence of ergophobia, or the fear of labour, which needs to be addressed as it is a significant problem and sometimes becomes a barrier too. It adversely affects an individual's well-being, organizational productivity and retention by presenting anxiety, avoidance behaviours, and decreased job satisfaction. Women who work in service-oriented professions make up the majority of pink-collar workers, and they suffer particular stressors like poor pay, little opportunity for professional growth, and gender discrimination (Njoki, 2021).

Carloni (2023) defined ergophobia as an extreme, illogical, and crippling fear of work and work-related aspects, such as meetings, social interactions, and particular duties, is known as ergophobia. A patient must have symptoms for more than six months in order for ergophobia to be diagnosed, and the symptoms cannot be better explained by another condition such as generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, or another phobia. Anxiety, fear, and avoidance of the stimulus— anything work-related—are hallmarks of any phobia. Frequent job changes, pauses between employment, missing work, and unreasonable worries about interactions with supervisors and coworkers as well as evaluations are some examples of how fear of the workplace or work might show up. Moreover, De Jongh et al. (2001) cited that ergophobia is frequently accompanied by the following symptoms: Dwelling on unpleasant circumstances or difficulties at work, disengaging from the job, reluctance to take on more responsibilities at work, underemployment, or working fewer hours or in low-skilled occupations, difficulty maintaining employment, unable to complete tasks by the deadline, completely overwhelming panic episodes, prolonged spells of unemployment. Somatic symptoms include; dry mouth, sweating, palpitations or racing heart, suffocating or having trouble breathing.

This phenomenon not only has an impact on an individual's performance and job happiness, but it also poses important queries regarding social standards and working environment as it can stealthily attack efficiency and occupation fulfillment, particularly among people shuffling different obligations. Ergophobia is underrecognized and requires more research despite its clinical and societal significance (Malik, et al.2021; Haines, et al, 2002; Smith, 2009). Pakistan continues to have some of the lowest rates of female labour force participation in the world, with female involvement ranging from 20 to 25 percent, depending on the location and age group, while male participation is above 80 percent (IndexMundi, 2021). Many women who work in pink-collar jobs do so in informal, part-time, or home-based settings, which often provide fewer benefits and lower compensation (Khalil & Warner, 2025). The study dives profound into the transaction between ergophobia, balance between work and family activities, and the performance of the Pakistani pink-collar workers, revealing how these elements shape execution results in Pakistani tertiary businesses. Disentangling these elements will enlighten pathways for hierarchical help

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and strengthening, at last improving the prosperity and adequacy of pink-collar labourers in Pakistan's dynamic labour force. Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

O1: To find out the effect of ergophobia on the performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.
O2: To find out the effect of ergophobia on the work-life balance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.
O3: To find out the effect of work-life balance on the performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.
O4: To find out the mediating relationship of work-life balance between ergophobia and performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Effect of ergophobia on the performance

Ergophobia, sometimes known as workplace phobia or fear, has quantifiable detrimental consequences on job performance, even if it isn't often researched under that name. There is a clear correlation between "fear," which includes concern over work-related duties, health hazards, unfavourable evaluations, or punishment, and decreased productivity, more absenteeism, and unproductive actions. The association between fear and three aspects of performance—task performance, Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), and Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) were examined. According to the study, more fear is substantially linked to worse task performance, lower OCB, and higher CWB. A mediating factor between fear and performance outcomes was shown to be stress (Pustovit, Miao, Qian, 2024). Kaur (2025) cited the relationship between job satisfaction, workplace stressors and support of the family highlighting the its effect of performance in Punjab, India. Although the results show that workplace stresses have a major impact on job performance, family support's lack of influence calls into question presumptions about its protective function in high-stress occupations. According to Muschalla & Linden's (2014) study of patients with persistent mental problems in Germany, those with ergophobia frequently had higher rates of sick leave and worse performance, especially when thinking about or simply visiting the workplace caused anxiety or avoidance behaviour. Hence, research continuously shows that ergophobia influenced behaviours have detrimental impacts on a variety of performance aspects. Examining these factors in Pakistan's pink-collar sector is made easier with an understanding of these connections therefore, hypothesis one (H1) is generated as:
H1: There is a significant effect of ergophobia on the performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.

2.2 Effect of ergophobia on the work-life balance

Empirical research demonstrates that poor work-life balance is closely linked to increased workplace stress and anxiety. Wang et. al (2024) used a population-based Australian cohort and discovered that high levels of work-family conflict were linked to significantly higher odds of generalized anxiety disorder. Crucially, the study shows how job-related stressors and WFC are mutually reinforcing, meaning that anxiety both stems from and is reinforced by poor role balance hence affecting performance. One of the studies by Zeerak et al. (2018) cited that the presence of job stress and anxiety results in an imbalance in the social life of an employee, hence creating difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is stated as:
H2: There is a significant effect of ergophobia on the work-life balance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.

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2.3 Effect of work-life balance on the performance

According to Jamilah et al. (2024), work satisfaction serves as a mediator variable in the relationship between WLB and job training and performance. According to their results, workers who feel that their personal and professional lives are balanced are more engaged and motivated, which improves productivity. In addition to improving well-being, reaching WLB has a direct positive impact on company success through increased customer interactions, productivity, and satisfaction (Tahir, 2025). Thaufayl et al. (2024) further emphasized that flexible work schedules greatly enhance WLB, which in turn boosts worker dedication and productivity. Balanced workers are more creative, resilient, and reliable when it comes to meeting performance targets, according to their research. Hence supporting the idea that WLB is a key factor in determining an organization's performance. Further context-specific research is necessary in rising economies like Pakistan, as cultural and environmental variables, such as varying expectations of gender roles and organizational norms, may temper this link. Therefore, H3 is stated as:

H3: There is a significant effect of work-life balance on the performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.

2.4 Mediating role of work-life balance between ergophobia and performance

Work-life balance (WLB) is a key mediating factor in the links between work stresses and performance outcomes, according to recent studies. WLB considerably mitigated the detrimental impact of work-family conflict on the performance of Indonesian public servants (Isa & Indrayati, 2023). Moreover, work-related stress or anxiety saps time and energy for non-work-related activities, lowering WLB, which in turn impairs performance. In a similar vein, the Mediating Role of Work-Life Balance found that higher levels of conflict resulted in lower levels of WLB, which in turn affected well-being and indirectly work results. Avoidance behaviours or rumination caused by fear of work tasks impair efficient time management and recovery, which upsets WLB and lowers job performance. Therefore, WLB acts as a buffer, preventing performance losses from being caused by the negative effects of ergophobia, or dread associated with the workplace (Mehmood and Khan, 2024). Despite the fact that these analogies offer valuable insights, there are yet no direct empirical studies that connect ergophobia to WLB and performance, which indicates a significant gap in the research. Therefore, H4 is stated as:

H4: Work-life balance mediates the relationship between ergophobia and performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers.

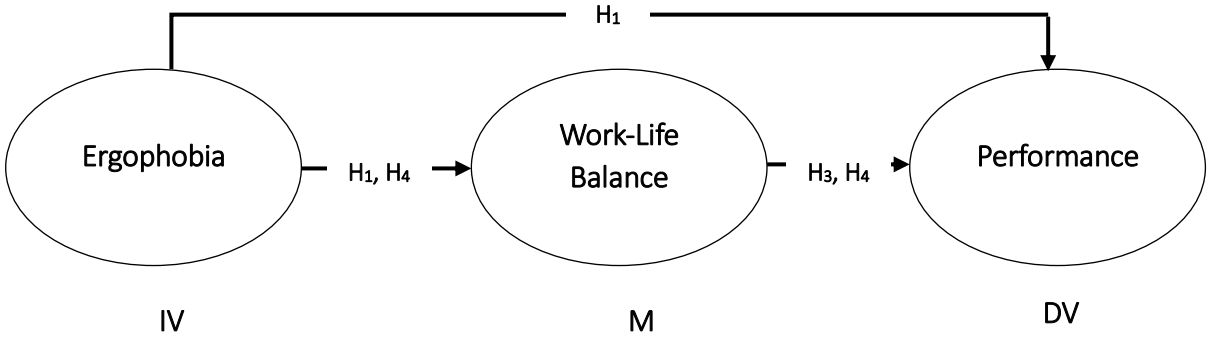

Figure 1
Proposed Model

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3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Studying setting

Banking administration, education, health sectors, BPOs were targeted from all over Pakistan.

3.2 Target Population

The target population included working women from the above-mentioned tertiary sectors.

3.3 Study design

The study design selected for research was cross-sectional.

3.4 Sample size

The sample size was calculated using Open epi version 3.0, considering 1 million populations, with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence interval, the sample size was 384.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Participants of the study were recruited by a purposive sampling method.

3.6 Sample inclusion criteria

- Women engaged in pink collar jobs specifically school teaching, nursing, secretarial and clerical positions or from customer services.
- Minimum age of the participants must be 18 years.

3.7 Sample exclusion criteria

- Women engaged in white collar jobs or top management level
- Non-working women

3.8 Data collection procedure

Data was collected using the self-constructed close ended questionnaire made on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The questionnaire consists of 25 items in total. 7 questions were related to demographics while 18 items analysed the impact and relationship of the variables.

3.9 Data analysis procedure

The data was examined utilizing correlation and Smart PLS 4 (Partial Least Square) regression methods (Hair et. al, 2025). Relationships between independent and dependent factors are analysed to provide a thorough evaluation of the impact of ergophobia on employee performance, with work-life balance acting as a mediating factor. Interpreting the correlations allowed us to look at the relationships and interactions between the variables.

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4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographics

Table 1. Demographics

Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18 – 30	110	28.64%
31 – 42	188	48.95%
43 – 54	72	18.75%
55 & above	14	3.64%
Marital Status		
Single	8	2.08%
Married	298	77.60%
Widowed	46	11.97%
Divorced	30	7.81%
Separated	2	0.52%
Dependents		
Zero	1	0.26%
1-3	342	89.06%
4-6	24	6.25%
7-9	15	3.90%
More than 9	2	0.52%
Occupation		
Educationist	200	52.08%
Makeover artists	25	6.51%
Health professional	45	11.71%
Customer services	70	18.22%
Secretarial/Administrative	16	5.20%
Clerical	20	5.20%
Flight Attendants	8	2.08%
Work Experience		
Less than a year	25	6.51%
1-2 years	110	28.64%
3-4 years	150	39.06%
More than 4 years	99	25.78%
Do you work in shifts?		

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Yes	115	29.94%
No	269	70.05%
Weekly working hours		
≤ 40 hours	279	72.65%
≥ 40 hours	105	27.34%

Table 1 concluded the demographics of the data. A total of 384 samples; comprised 188 women who belong to age group 31-42, also there were 110 working females from the age bracket 18-30, while 72 were aged in between 43-54 and there were only 14 females of age 55 and above. Second part of the demographics was the marital status; which showed that 77.60% of the population of the study was married women, 11.97% were the widow, 7.81% of the sample was divorced women, while only 2.08% single women had participated in the study and there were only 0.52% women with a separated marital status. After that, dependents of the respondents were asked, to which 342 participants responded that they have 1-3 dependents. A smaller group had four to six dependents, making up about 6.2% of the total responses. While there were 15 respondents with 7-9 dependents and only 2 pink-collar workers have more than 9 dependents. After that the table interpreted the occupational details and concluded, the respondents comprised 200 educationists, there were 70 people from customer services, 45 health professionals, 25 makeover artists, 20 clerks, 16 people from administration/secretarial position and 8 flight attendants. The respondents were then asked work experience to which 150 respondents confirmed 3-4 years' experience, 110 respondents had an experience of 1-2 years, 99 participants had more than 4 years' experience and only 25 respondents confirmed an experience of less than a year. In addition, 269 pink-collar workers confirmed that they work in rotating shifts while 115 denied and the weekly working hours for 279 respondents was found to be less than or equal to 40 hours while 105 respondents worked for more than 40 hours per week.

4.2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Ergophobia (E)	0.800	0.751
Work life Balance (WLB)	0.799	0.726
Performance (P)	0.823	0.780

Table 2 concluded high internal consistency among the items within each construct by Cronbach's Alpha scores over 0.80. The items successfully tested the same underlying idea, indicating that the answers were steady and consistent. Likewise, every AVE value is more than 0.50, indicating superior convergent validity. The items are highly representative of their respective latent variable, and each construct appears to account for a significant amount of the variance in its indicators.

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4.3. Discriminant Validity

Table 3. Fornell Larcker Criterion

	E	WLB	P
E	**0.866**		
WLB	0.031	**0.852**	
P	0.065	0.021	**0.883**

Table 3 displayed the correlations between constructs in the off-diagonal cells as well as the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) on the diagonal. Ergophobia (0.866), work-life balance (0.852), and performance (0.883) are the diagonal values. Strong discriminant validity is confirmed by this, which showed that each concept has more variation with its own indicators than with other constructs. The extremely low correlations imply that performance, work-life balance, and ergophobia are separate ideas with little in common. These findings corroborate the measurement model's general validity and usefulness for additional structural analysis by confirming that it successfully separates the three variables.

Table 4. Cross Loadings

	E	WLB	P
E1	**0.852**	0.047	0.041
E2	**0.830**	0.014	0.022
E3	**0.844**	0.021	0.056
E4	**0.857**	0.034	0.032
E5	**0.821**	0.025	0.036
E6	**0.809**	0.031	0.011
WLB1	0.013	**0.963**	0.021
WLB2	0.034	**0.842**	0.034
WLB3	0.023	**0.853**	0.022
WLB4	0.036	**0.866**	0.012
WLB5	0.0223	**0.841**	0.035
WLB6	0.018	**0.831**	0.030
P1	0.026	0.025	**0.888**
P2	0.036	0.041	**0.841**

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P3	0.041	0.044	**0.865**
P4	0.015	0.036	**0.835**
P5	0.035	0.056	**0.899**
P6	0.066	0.014	**0.874**

Table 4 showed that each item has a significant loading on its corresponding construct and extremely weak correlations with other constructs, according to the cross-loading matrix. The fact that all of the ergophobia items have loadings above 0.80 on the ergophobia factor but below 0.06 on the work-life balance and performance factors indicates that they assess different constructs. In a similar vein, every item related to work-life balance has high loadings over 0.83 on its own construct with little cross-loadings, suggesting great construct purity. Additionally, all of the Performance elements load significantly (above 0.83), and their cross-associations with other constructs are minimal. These findings demonstrate the measurement model's internal consistency and distinct discriminant validity by confirming that each set of questions appropriately captures its underlying factor without overlapping with others.

4.4. Structural Model Assessment

Table 5. Structural Model Assessment

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Decision
H1	**E → P**	-0.321	0.000	Supported
H2	**E → WLB**	-0.359	0.001	Supported
H3	**WLB → P**	0.234	0.003	Supported

Table 5 concluded that ergophobia and performance have a strong and substantial negative association, as indicated by the path coefficient between the two (β = -0.321, p = 0.000) suggesting that higher levels of ergophobia result in lower job performance. In addition to it, the path from ergophobia to work-life balance also demonstrates a strong negative connection (β = -0.359, p = 0.001), indicating that employees' ability to maintain a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives is disrupted by their fear of work. Conversely, there is a positive and substantial correlation between work-life balance and performance (β = 0.234, p = 0.003). This implies that workers often perform better in their employment when they have a better work-life balance. Lastly, the indirect path (E → WLB → P; β = -0.111, p = 0.001) validates the function of work-life balance in mediating the relationship between performance and ergophobia.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study looked at the direct and indirect effects of ergophobia on the performance of Pakistani pink-collar workers. Four hypotheses were examined in this study; H1: impact of ergophobia on the performance; H2: the impact of ergophobia on work-life balance; H3: the impact of work-life balance on the performance and; H4: the mediating role of work-life balance between ergophobia and performance. Support for all four hypotheses showed

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that the emotional cost of workplace dread affects not just job performance but also the delicate balance between work and life, which is especially important for Pakistani pink-collar workers. The results of H1 suggested that workers who feel anxious or afraid about their jobs or workplaces are less productive, maybe as a result of a decline in motivation, engagement, and focus. While the results of H2 concluded that ergophobics have trouble psychologically separating themselves from work-related pressures, which can have negative repercussions on their social and personal lives. Moreover, H3 results proved that energy levels, concentration, and general job happiness are all likely to increase with a healthy balance, which leads to better performance results. In addition to it, the results of H4 indicated that ergophobia's deleterious effects on work-life balance contributed to its detrimental effects on performance. Stated differently, ergophobia diminishes work-life balance, which consequently diminishes job performance.

These findings are consistent with research demonstrating that ergophobia impairs job quality and engagement. The negative behavioral effects of workplace fear, such as avoidance, sick leave, and diminished work capacity, have long been shown in clinical and occupational studies to translate into worse employment results (Muschalla, 2014; Vignoli et al., 2017). This is extended to nonclinical populations by more recent research, which shows that persistent workplace worries and pandemic-related fears result in emotional tiredness and cognitive interference that lower workers' performance (Sarwar et al., 2022; Alagarsamy et al., 2024). Therefore, our conclusion that ergophobia has a detrimental impact on performance aligns with organizational and clinical data that fear impairs performance. Ergophobia and WLB have been found to be negatively correlated, which is consistent with systematic studies that see WLB as susceptible to work-related stressors and hazy boundaries. Reviews of work-from-home and hybrid employment show that fear, increased demands, and uncertainty increase role conflict and hinder recuperation, which lowers WLB (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Workplace anxiety is more likely to bleed over into home life in situations when employees have both significant domestic responsibilities and workplace anxiety, such as Pakistani pink-collar industries, which increases stress and reduces work-related resources.

On the other hand, WLB's beneficial effects on maintaining performance support recent meta-analyses and field research that demonstrate how balance maintains focus, motivation, and wellbeing—all of which are factors that support productivity (Rafique, 2022; Fazal et al., 2022). Employees report better recuperation and higher job productivity when their firms offer boundary-management assistance (flexibility, family-friendly rules, and managerial support); this trend suggests practical levers for employers looking to protect performance amid psychosocial stressors. A crucial mechanism is highlighted by the mediation finding, which shows that WLB transmits a portion of the performance impact of ergophobia: fear diminishes recovery and boundary control, which in turn impairs job functioning. Recent mediation studies that link stressors to performance through work-family conflict or tiredness have matched this mediation, which is conceptually congruent with resource-based frameworks (Catapano et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The mediating function of WLB indicates that interventions directed at boundary restoration and recovery may significantly buffer the performance costs of workplace fear for Pakistani pink-collar workers, many of whom struggle with informal contracts, caring pressures, and few institutional supports.

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6. Recommendations

Organizations should prioritize psychological well-being by implementing mental health awareness programs that address worries and fears related to the workplace, according to the research. Supervisors should be trained to spot ergophobia early and offer helpful solutions like flexible scheduling or therapy. A culture of psychological safety, open communication, and empathy can be established to lessen workplace pressures that result in subpar performance. Additionally, companies in Pakistan's pink-collar industry ought to put in place work-life balance-promoting policies including employee assistance programs, flexible scheduling, and workload redistribution. Employee confidence and productivity can be further increased by supporting wellness programs, resilience-building courses, and mindfulness.

7. Practical Implications

- The study's findings are very applicable to legislators, human resource specialists, and organizational leaders. Management can create interventions that improve employee satisfaction and lessen anxiety related to performance by having a better understanding of the mediating function that work-life balance plays.
- Addressing ergophobia in supportive work environments can have a direct positive impact on pink-collar workers' motivation, engagement, and general job performance. These findings can be used by organizations to create evidence-based HR initiatives, such as frameworks for psychological support and workload management.
- In Pakistan's service sectors, cultivating a fair and inclusive workplace culture can also lead to increased employee retention, decreased burnout, and a more resilient and effective staff.

8. Future Research

To better understand how these associations change over time and in various professional contexts, future research on ergophobia and work-life balance should include cross-cultural and longitudinal approaches. Research could use qualitative methods to document workers' real-life experiences, especially in Pakistan's expanding pink-collar industry. Deeper understanding of the psychological processes relating workplace fear and performance may be possible by extending the model to include factors like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, looking at sectoral and gender-based variations may show how workplace cultures, economic incentives, and social conventions all specifically influence how ergophobia affects employee outcomes.

9. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, ergophobia significantly affects Pakistani pink-collar workers' psychological and professional responses. The results demonstrate that ergophobia influences people's capacity to maintain balance between their personal and professional lives, going beyond emotional discomfort. It becomes clear that work-life balance is an important mediating factor between ergophobia's emotional difficulties and performance results. The study adds to the increasing amount of data showing a connection between ergophobia and lower levels of productivity and general well-being, especially in service-oriented and gendered occupations. The research adds to the body of knowledge in organizational psychology by highlighting the relationship between mental health and job

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effectiveness. It also lays the groundwork for understanding how balanced work dynamics and emotional resilience support peak performance. All things considered, the study emphasizes how crucial it is to manage psychological well-being in contemporary work settings in order to maintain both institutional success and personal contentment.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION AND DECLARATIONS

Conception or Design: Uroosa Amin, Ahad Hasan

Data Collection and Processing: Nisha Rafique, Kiran Yameen

Analysis or Interpretation of Data: Subita Kafeel, Nisha Lohana

Manuscript Writing & Approval: Uroosa Amin, Ahad Hasan, Nisha Rafique, Kiran Yameen, Subita Kafeel, Nisha Lohana, All Authors

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Furthermore, this research did not involve the use of animals, plants, or any biological specimens requiring ethical approval. Therefore, ethical clearance from an institutional review board, prior informed consent (PIC) from respondents, or animal/plant welfare approvals are not applicable to this study.

The author(s) affirm full compliance with international ethical standards for research and publication.

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