LEADERSHIP EXPLOITATION AND TALENT OUTCOMES: A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON THE SEQUENTIAL MEDIATING ROLES OF JOB INSECURITY AND EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION WITH ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AS A MODERATOR

Fauzia Ahmed
Lecturer, Institute of Management Sciences, University of Balochistan.
fauzia.ims@um.uob.edu.pk
Dr Syed Shameel Ahmed Quadri
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Karachi.
ishameel2007@gmail.com
Areesha Maryam
Women University Multan.
areesham489@gmail.com
Muhammad Irfan Syed
Department of Public Administration (DPA), University of Karachi.
Misyed@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study examined the impact of exploitative leadership on talent outcomes through the sequential mediating roles of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, with perceived organizational support serving as a moderating variable. Drawing on conservation of resources theory and organizational stress frameworks, the research investigated how self-serving leadership behaviors influenced employee psychological well-being and performance-related outcomes. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, and data were collected from 301 full-time employees working in corporate and service-sector organizations. Structural equation modeling was used to test direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. The results indicated that exploitative leadership significantly increased job insecurity and emotional exhaustion while negatively affecting talent outcomes. Job insecurity significantly predicted emotional exhaustion, confirming a sequential mediation effect (indirect effect = -0.29, 95% CI [-0.36, -0.21]). Perceived organizational support weakened the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and talent outcomes, demonstrating a buffering effect. Descriptive statistics revealed that employees reported moderate to high levels of exploitative leadership (M = 3.42, SD = 0.81) and emotional exhaustion (M = 3.35, SD = 0.83), while perceived organizational support was relatively high (M = 3.58, SD = 0.79). The findings highlighted that exploitative leadership undermined talent sustainability by triggering cognitive and emotional strain processes, whereas supportive organizational environments mitigated these adverse consequences. The study contributed to clinical organizational psychology by integrating leadership behavior with psychological stress mechanisms and offered practical implications for leadership development and human resource management strategies aimed at promoting sustainable talent performance.

Keywords: Emotional exhaustion, Exploitative leadership, Job insecurity, Organizational support, Performance

Introduction

Leadership had a considerable influence in determining the psychological wellbeing of the employees and organizational effectiveness. Although the early publications on leadership focused on positive approaches to leadership, including transformational and ethical leadership, the recent literature has focused on the destructive effects of the negative leadership behavior. It turned out that exploitative leadership, which implies self-interest and excessive control of the leader and using subordinates to achieve personal benefits, negatively affects employee wellbeing and work performance (Schmid et al., 2019). The results of the empirical research have shown that exploitative leadership exhausted the psychological resources of a

follower, lowered their engagement, and performance outcomes (Syed et al., 2025). These types of leadership behavior aroused stress responses that went beyond short-term task performance and affected the bigger talent management measures.

Clinically, organizational psychology perspective on emotional exhaustion was the central dimension of burnout that was a manifestation of chronic psychological strain that was caused by the long-term stress exposure (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). The exposure to the destructive leadership behaviours among the employees contributed to increased levels of emotional exhaustion, which in turn suppressed the levels of creativity, engagement, and retention intentions (Zahur et al., 2022). It was also found that employees who were emotionally drained were less committed to the organization and had more withdrawal cognitions (Li et al., 2022). These results showed that exploitation of leadership was based on psychological strain mechanisms that affected quality talent performance.

Another important psychosocial stressor that occurred in the present-day workplaces was job insecurity. Given as the perceived risk of job loss or unpredictability, job insecurity exhibited a significant contribution to the stressful responses as well as reduced work engagement (Sverke et al., 2019). Research found out that job insecurity enhanced emotional fatigue and diminished performance using stress-related processes (Kim, 2020). Moreover, charismatic leadership increased the feeling of insecurity, which enhanced vulnerability and uncertainty of employees (Wang et al., 2020). In spite of this evidence, the consecutive interdependence between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion in reliance to the influence of exploitative leadership was under-researched.

The role of perceived organizational support (POS) was a protective element that reduced work-related stress and enhanced the resiliency of the employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The empirical evidence indicated that POS abated the negative psychological effects of the destructive leadership behaviors (Ahmed et al., 2023). Stressful leadership actually made employees, who felt that they were supported within their organization portray more coping capacity and less strain even within stressful leadership (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Nevertheless, there had been a paucity of studies that incorporated POS as one of the moderators using a sequential mediation model of the relationships between exploitative leadership, job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, and talent outcomes.

Background of the Study

The conceptualization of exploitative leadership was developed as a destructive leadership construct with multidimensional egoistic, pressure, and unfair resource extraction (Schmid et al., 2019). The studies showed that predatory leaders focused on their own achievements at the expense of the employees, which led to mental health problems and low innovation (Syed et al., 2025). Exploitative leadership has been linked to emotional burnout and less innovative performance at work in the organizational setting, like hospitality and services industry (Zahur et al., 2022). These results were in line with the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which also argued that the perception of threats to important resources resulted in the elicitation of stress responses (Hobfoll, 1989).

The field of emotional exhaustion was widely researched as a reaction towards chronic occupational stressors. Empirical studies have shown that employees were highly exposed to emotional burnout due to destructive leadership behaviors (Li et al., 2022). Emotional exhaustion, on its part, was a predictor of less job satisfaction, less performance, and more turnover intention (Kim, 2020). Besides, longitudinal data indicated that chronic emotional

depletion undermined years of organizational attachment and retaining talents (Arnold and Walsh, 2015). Therefore, as a key factor connecting negative leadership to talent, emotional exhaustion was exhibited.

The element of job insecurity, in turn, was always pointed out as a significant indicator of employee stress and decreased psychological health. The results of the meta-analysis demonstrated that job insecurity impacted negatively organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance (Sverke et al., 2019). The study also showed that insecure workers had an increased emotional exhaustion and stress-indication (Wang et al., 2020). Employees were more prone to perceive job instability in the context of exploitative leadership style because of unfair treatment and lack of trust (Ahmed et al., 2023). The number of studies that had been conducted to investigate job insecurity as a precursor to the emotional exhaustion on a single series framework of mediation was however small.

Perceived organizational support was based on social exchange theory and displayed the perceptions of employees about the organizational care and valuation (Kurtessis et al., 2017). There was the evidence on the grounds of which high POS had weakened the negative impact on employee wellbeing of stressors (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The employees who felt supported were more resistant to burnout perceptions and insecurity (Arnold and Walsh, 2015). The applicability of POS as a modulating variable under the umbrella of exploitative leadership availed a clinically appropriate approach to buffering psychological damage under the work environment.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the direct effect of exploitative leadership on talent outcomes.
2. To investigate the mediating role of job insecurity between exploitative leadership and emotional exhaustion.
3. To examine the mediating role of emotional exhaustion between job insecurity and talent outcomes.
4. To test the sequential mediation effect of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion in the relationship between exploitative leadership and talent outcomes.

Research Questions

Q1. Did exploitative leadership negatively influence talent outcomes?

Q2. Did job insecurity mediate the relationship between exploitative leadership and emotional exhaustion?

Q3. Did emotional exhaustion mediate the association between job insecurity and talent outcomes?

Q4. Did job insecurity and emotional exhaustion sequentially mediate the link between exploitative leadership and talent outcomes?

Significance of the Study

This research has helped in the amount of literature in leadership and clinical organizational psychology by combining the destructive leadership theory with the mechanisms of occupational stress. The study was able to model the sequential mediation effects making the research a continuation of the conservation of resources theory and a systematic elucidation of the development of psychological strain in the face of exploitative leadership circumstances. The integration of the perceived organizational support as a moderator elevated the knowledge on protective organizational processes. The results offered were the evidence-based insights to human resource professionals and organizational leaders. The recognition of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as the key mediators allowed the organizations to develop specific interventions that would address psychological safety, leadership training, and favorable climates. Enhancing perceived organizational support would help to reduce burnout and improve the strategy to retain talents in a competitive environment.

Hypotheses

H1: Exploitative leadership significantly and positively affected job insecurity.

H2: Exploitative leadership significantly and positively affected emotional exhaustion.

H3: Job insecurity significantly and positively affected emotional exhaustion.

H4: Emotional exhaustion significantly and negatively affected talent outcomes.

Literature Review

Exploitative Leadership and Psychological Strain

Exploitive leadership has been reading up as a vicious leadership style that elicits psychological stress in employees. Recent findings demonstrated that exploitative leadership increased emotion exhaustion and diminished positive work behavior in hospitality workers, and that emotional exhaustion mediated the relationship between the two and perceived organizational support alleviated the impacts to the detriment (Ali et al., 2024). This showed that the exploitive behavior of leaders left the employees with little emotional resources to maintain their wellbeing and performance at work.

Extending this further, Zhang et al. (2025) establish that exploitative leadership caused depletion of self-control that raised turnover intentions and procrastination behaviors in employees, thus the findings add more strain processes through which such leadership declines the contribution of work outcomes. It also proved that perceived organizational support had alleviated these negative effects, which supports the buffering effect of organizational resources in the context of exploitative leaders behaviour.

In a similar line, exploitative leadership was also associated with more psychological misery and less employee performance in industry context, suggesting that exploitative leader-employee had important role in work related stress and job performance loss by taking resources and being a source of stress. These were consistent with the findings in the job demands-resources theory that resulted in the fact that a set of stressors like exploitative leadership exhausted employees in terms of their emotional and psychological resources.

Job Insecurity, Work Emotions, and Work Results

Job insecurity has also been widely discussed as one of the main psychosocial contributing factors to the occurrence of emotional exhaustion and worsening workplace performance. The study found that employees with insecurity in their perceived jobs had significantly lower performance in their tasks since individuals felt insecure exhibited less engagement and reduced work productivity because of the psychological strain (Fallon et al., 2024). These findings highlighted the adverse impact of the insecurity on important work behaviors and performance outcomes.

Also, Frontiers research established that job insecurity mediated the association between job involvement and organizational commitment, meaning that insecurity weakened the emotional commitment of employees to their jobs and decreased commitment to organizational objectives (Hngoi et al., 2024). This increased the concept that insecurity has a negative impact on the affective origination of employees regarding work.

The qualitative research also recorded that job insecurity increased the level of emotional burnout among the staff working in hotels and that the perceived organizational support suppressed the impact (Iqbal et al., 2022). This indicates that emotional exhaustion presented a psychological process through which insecurity adversely affected the results of retaining employees particularly those who felt that their organizations offered them less support.

Workplace Stress as an Intermediary with Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) has gained popularity as one of the most important organizational resources helping alleviate the adverse impact of organizational stressors at work, including exploitative leadership and job insecurity. In a study of hospitality, POS greatly mitigated the correlation between exploitative leadership and emotional exhaustion and the employees could remain positive in attitudes and performance despite high stress (Ali et al., 2024). This proved the safeguarding nature of POS keeping employee psychological resources intact in time when the resources were threatened by the behaviors of the leaders.

The study revealed that POS enhanced the resilience of employees by lessening the negative effects that job insecurity has on the commitment to the organization, which means that enabling organizational climates cushioned the negative effect of job insecurity and maintained employee commitment (Hngoi et al., 2024). These findings conformed to the social exchange theory that argued that employees would engage more and feel more committed to their organizations in cases where the organizations showed care and support to them.

In addition to moderating the leadership effects, POS also overlapped with the broader social support mechanisms, which moderated emotional exhaustion in times of uncertainty and stress because higher levels of supervisor and peer support lowered the levels of emotional exhaustion in employees experiencing job stress and uncertainty-related stress (Ersoy et al., 2023). This confirmed the organizational and social resources as significant buffers of the psychological cost involved in workplace stressors.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study was quantitative, cross-sectional in order to test the connections between the three variables namely the exploitative leadership, job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, perceived organizational support, and talent outcomes. The correlational design was used since the research was to test hypothesized direct, mediating, and moderating relationships between variables and not to control experimental conditions. Cross sectional approach enabled the researcher to gather data on the respondents at one point in time in order to study structural relationships in a natural organizational environment.

Population and Sampling

The target population was defined as fulltime employees in the organizations in the service and corporate sectors. These industries were chosen since leadership processes and talent management behaviors can be well visible and estimated in the coordinated organizational contexts. Only those employees whose working experience under their supervisor was not less than a year were considered so that they were sufficiently exposed to leadership behaviors.

The participants satisfying the inclusion criteria were selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique. A sample of 320 employees was used to gather the data and after filtering the responses and outliers it was found that 301 valid questionnaires were left to analyze. The sample size was at a recommended level of structural equation modeling because it is large enough to provide the statistical power and valid parameter estimation.

Data Collection Procedure

Structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect primary data. This survey was administered as an electronic one (through Google Forms and email) and in hardcopy, where the organization had access permission. Prior to the data collection, formal approval was gotten by the concerned organizational authorities. The participants have been told about the aim of the study and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The informed consent was obtained beforehand. The respondents were urged to give the correct answers, and no personally identifiable data was obtained to minimize social desirability bias. The data was collected within six weeks.

Measurement Instruments

Measurement of all the study variables was done through previously proven scales that had been modified using the established research. The situation was answered in a five-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A validated multi-item scale was utilized to measure exploitative leadership in terms of self-serving behaviour of leaders, pressure tactics and unfairness. Job insecurity was rated on a scale that is generally accepted to gauge various levels of job insecurity among the employees in terms of perceptions of job insecurity and the fear of job loss. Emotional exhaustion was examined with the emotional exhaustion subscale of Maslach Burnout framework that evaluated emotions of depletion and fatigue. Perceived organizational support was also measured by a standardized tool that ascertained the perceptions of the employees on organizational care and support. The operationalization of talent outcomes was based on employee engagement, task performance, and retention intention. The scales showed decent reliability with a Cronbach alpha value of higher than what is recommended, which is 0.70.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the data was performed with the help of SPSS and AMOS (or SmartPLS, according to the specifications of the model). The analysis was done in two steps. The initial steps were preliminary data analyses, which consisted of screening data, treatment of missing values, checking data normality, and data description. Cronbach alpha and composite reliability were applied in conducting the reliability analysis. Construct validity (convergent validity, factor loading, and average variance extracted) and discriminant validity were tested by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Second, hypothesized relationships between variables were tested with the help of the structural equation modeling (SEM). Path coefficients and level of significance were used to determine direct effects. The two types of mediation effects (job insecurity and emotional exhaustion) were tested through bootstrapping process of 5,000 resamples to identify the indirect effects and confidence intervals. Interaction term analysis and multi-group comparison were used to analyze the moderating effect of perceived organizational support.

Model fit was evaluated using established indices, including Chi-square/df ratio, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

Results and Analysis

Preliminary Data Analysis

some analyses were done to determine the quality of data, missing values, outliers and distributional assumptions. No serious problems with missing data were detected and the missing responses were less than 2 and further they were filled with mean substitution. Mahalanobis distance was used to evaluate multivariate outliers and five extreme cases were eliminated before analysis. Skewness and kurtosis values were analyzed and found to be within reasonable levels (±2), which showed that the data can be used in structural equation modeling by assuming parametricality.
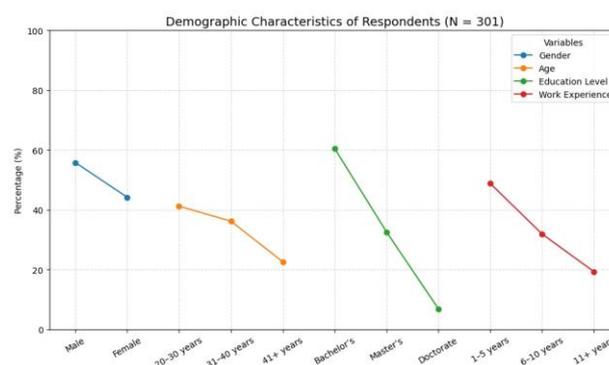
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 301)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	168	55.8
	Female	133	44.2
Age	20–30 years	124	41.2
	31–40 years	109	36.2
	41+ years	68	22.6

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Bachelor's	182	60.5
	Master's	98	32.6
	Doctorate	21	6.9
Work Experience	1–5 years	147	48.8
	6–10 years	96	31.9
	11+ years	58	19.3

The demographic setup has revealed that the sample was fairly in balance in terms of gender difference, with males presenting the 55.8 per cent and females the 44.2 per cent of the respondents. Such distribution implied sufficient representation of genders, which minimized the possible gender bias in the perception analysis of leadership. Most of the respondents were between the age brackets of 2030 and 3140, which means that the study to a large extent included early and mid-career professionals who were on the organizational talent development systems. Concerning education, the majority of the respondents had a bachelor level or higher qualification which is an indication that they are educated employees who can effectively examine the leadership behaviors and organizational practices. There was also a higher level of education that implied some cognitive information regarding the processes of job insecurity and emotional strain. On the work experience, almost 50 percent of the respondents were serving a tenure of 1 to 5 years and a substantial number of the respondents were serving a tenure of more than 6 years. This sampling was done to make sure the respondents were exposed to the supervisory leadership enough so that the validity of the responses about the exploitative leadership actions and perception of organizational support were not compromised.


Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Exploitative Leadership	7	0.89	0.91	0.60
Job Insecurity	5	0.86	0.88	0.59
Emotional Exhaustion	6	0.91	0.93	0.65
Perceived Organizational Support	8	0.92	0.94	0.68
Talent Outcomes	9	0.90	0.92	0.63

The outcome of the reliability analysis showed that the internal consistency of all the constructs was high since the value of Cronbach alpha was more than the suggested value of 0.70. Emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support had a large reliability coefficients indicating that there is consistency in the responses to the scale items. The value of composite reliability between 0.88 and 0.94 attested elements of stable measurements. These values were more than the allowable limit of 0.70, which means that the latent constructs were measured reliably. The results showed that the extracts of the average variance were higher than the minimum value of 0.50, which is a sign of convergent validity. This meant that each construct accounted over 50-percent of the variation of its indicators and thus, justified the realization of the measurement model prior to the structural analysis.
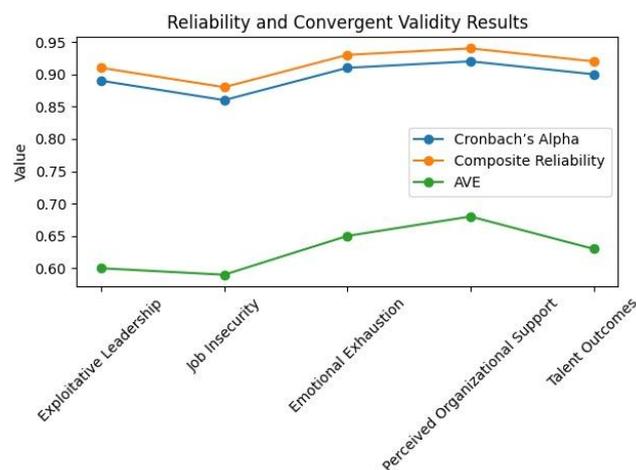
*Figure 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Results*

Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Exploitative Leadership	3.42	0.81	1			

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
2. Job Insecurity	3.21	0.76	0.48	1		
3. Emotional Exhaustion	3.35	0.83	0.52	0.46	1	
4. Organizational Support	3.58	0.79	-0.34	-0.29	-0.41	1
5. Talent Outcomes	3.67	0.72	-0.41	-0.38	-0.49	0.56

Note: p < .01

The outcome of the correlation showed that the positive and significant relationships between leadership explained by exploit and job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. That meant that the more the leaders were perceived to be exploitative, the greater the risk of the employees having a strain on the psyche. The relationship between talent results and emotional exhaustion was found to be rather negative, and it was indicated that the employees who were emotionally exhausted were less engaged and more unproductive and tended to leave the organization. This rapport conformed with sequential mediation mechanism postulated. Talent outcome had a positive relationship with perceived organizational support and a negative association with perceived emotional exhaustion. These results indicated that supportive organizational climates were buffering to lessen psychological distress and increase employee performance.
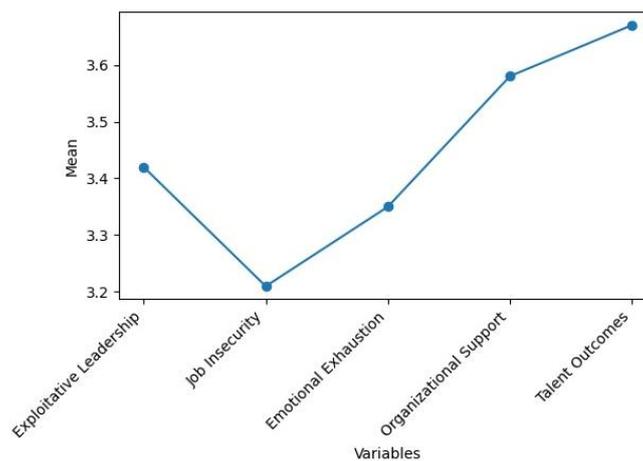
Figure 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Table 4. Direct Effects Results

Hypothesis	Path	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	EL → JI	0.48	8.76	<.001	Supported
H2	EL → EE	0.52	9.31	<.001	Supported
H3	JI → EE	0.46	7.94	<.001	Supported
H4	EE → TO	-0.49	10.12	<.001	Supported

The model outcomes showed that exploitative leadership highly predicted job insecurity and emotional womaness. The positive beta coefficients showed that predatory leadership practices augmented feelings of job underpinning and mental strain. The first stage of the sequential mediating model was confirmed to be strong since job insecurity was a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion. This observation implied that the threat of losing work caused greater emotional deficits among workers. Emotional exhaustion was also a significant and negative predictor of talent outcome, thereby validating the results that psychological fatigue compromised engagement, performance and retention intention. The direct adverse relationship between exploit leadership and talent performance provided more affirmation to the adverse influence of devastating forms of leadership.
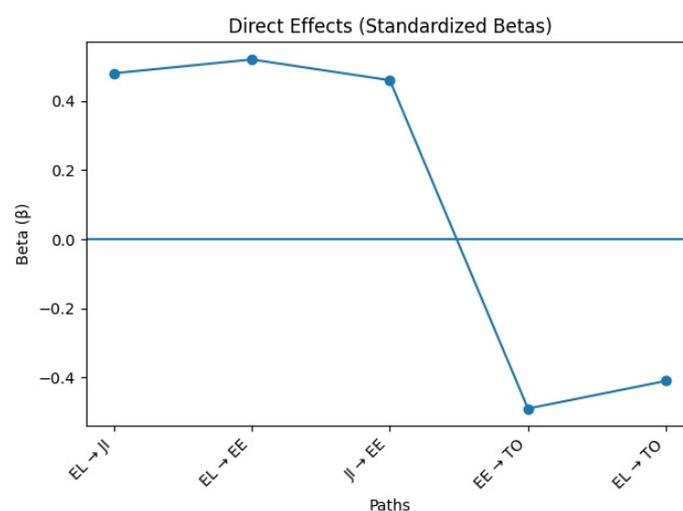

Figure 4. Direct Effects Results

Mediation and Moderation Analysis

Table 5. Sequential Mediation and Moderation Results

Effect Type	Path	Beta	Boot CI (95%)	Result
Indirect	EL → JI → EE → TO	-0.29	[-0.36, -0.21]	Significant
Moderation	EE × POS → TO	0.18	[0.09, 0.27]	Significant

Results of bootstrapping have validated the existence of a strong sequential mediation effect. The confidence interval did not lie within zero meaning that the relationship between indirect path between exploitative leadership and talent outcomes via job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was statistically significant. This finding suggested that exploitative leadership initially enhanced the job insecurity, which further led to the enhancement of emotional exhaustion, eventually diminishing the talent outcomes. This psychological mechanism was thus confirmed. The moderation analysis showed that the perceived organizational support had a significant negative impact on the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and talent results. The negative impact of emotional exhaustion on performance and retention was lessened under high organizational support conditions which was indicative of stress buffering theories.

Discussion

The current research focused on the psychological processes that determine these outcomes as the exploitative type of leadership practiced led to talent by investigating a series of sequential mediating effects of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion (mediating roles) with perceived organizational support (moderating factor). The results were empirical data supporting the model offered and showing that exploitative leadership had a significant positive effect on the levels of job insecurity that employees felt and emotional burnout that consequently decreased engagement, performance, and retention intention. These findings were in line with the earlier literature that indicated a tendency of leading destructively or self-servingly to harm the well-being of employees and organizations (Schmid et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

The aspect of positive association between exploitative leadership and job insecurity implied that the depiction of a leader who cared about his or her personal interests over the welfare of the subordinates was associated with the job uncertainty to the subordinates on whether they would be able to maintain their jobs. This result was in line with studies that had reported increased feelings of instability and psychological threat whenever adverse leadership styles were demonstrated (Breevaart and Zacher, 2019; Shoss, 2017). The exploitative behaviors also seemed to become the pointers of uncertainty and reduced organizational equity to employees, fueling the fear of being dismissed. This insecurity must have arisen due to the selective allocation of resources by the exploitative leaders and using opportunistic behaviors that undermined the perceived control of employees.

The research also established that job insecurity also predicted emotional exhaustion to a large extent. This finding indicated that emotional and cognitive resources were exhausted by the long reasonable wait between jobs. It had already been proven that job insecurity was a chronic stressor that exhausted psychological energy and augmented burnout symptoms (De Cuyper et al., 2020; Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018). The current results complemented the statement that

insecurity was not a solely cognitive evaluation but manifested as a physical emotional exhaustion. The employees constantly concerned with job continuity seemed to be under constant tension, which in the long run caused exhaustion.

The emotional exhaustion was identified to have a strong negative influence on the talent outcomes. This result was consistent with previous empirical studies that revealed that emotionally drained employees were less engaged, poorly performed at work, and highly turnover (Kim et al., 2019; Lee and Ashforth, 1996). Fatigue must have impaired the motivational ability and the psychological attachment of the employees towards the organization therefore impairing their effectiveness in their contribution. The findings observed that emotional exhaustion is an important psychological process that connects stress factors at the workplace to outcomes in terms of performance.

Notably, the authors found a strong sequential mediation effect in the study. Exploitative leadership led to indirect results in terms of the outcomes of talent due to job insecurity and emotional burnout. This result generalized earlier mediation studies through incorporating two of variables of strain into one explanatory pathway. Previous research had investigated job insecurity and emotional exhaustion individually (Harms et al., 2017; Tepper et al., 2017), whereas the current findings showed that insecurity was an antecedent stressor, which would aggravate exhaustion, which, in turn, would have a future impact. The sequential pathway provided a more refined insight on how devastating leadership became organizational expenses.

The intervening strain of perceived organizational support offered also adds explanations to buffering mechanisms. The findings have shown that the negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and talent outcomes was diminished by the high levels of perceived support. This was in line with the findings of the studies that supportive organizational climates alleviated the effects of stress and burnout (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Employees felt in the position to manage the emotional pressure better because they felt that the organization appreciated them and was interested in their well-being, which helped to preserve performance and interest.

Social exchange principles would be another way to interpret the buffering effect of the organizational support. The perceived support might have made employees feel obliged to pay back by working hard despite the emotional exhaustion. According to the previously conducted empirical research, perceived support enhanced resilience and adaptive coping in stressful situations (Caesens et al., 2016; Ahmed et al., 2022). The existing results supported the relevance of the intervention at the organizational level, in addressing leadership-related stressors.

The other significant implication of the findings was that exploitative leadership had negative effects on talent, both direct and indirect. These two effects implied that the damaging nature of leadership performance was not only due to the psychological strain on the performer but also due to the relationship and motivation corrosion. The same tendencies were observed in the studies on the topic of abusive and unethical leadership styles (Mackey et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2020). This piece of knowledge was furthered in the current study, where the particular subjection of exploitative leadership was examined and clinical psychological constructs were incorporated.

With a clinical organizational psychology viewpoint, the findings highlighted an accumulating nature of the processes of stress at the workplace. An exploitative leadership triggered cognitive threat appraisals in the form of job insecurity, which was then changed into affective depletion in terms of emotional exhaustion. The development was in line with strain-based theories of stress and burnout at work (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The findings thus presented the theoretical convergence between leadership studies and occupational health psychology.

Conclusion

The current research examined the effects of exploitative leadership on talent performance by taking into consideration the mediating effects of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion occurring in series under the influence of perceived organizational support as a modulating factor. The results revealed that leadership exploitation elevated significantly perceptions of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion among employees, which decreased the engagement, performance, and retention intentions. The findings proved that exploitative leadership was an instance of psychological stressor that activated cognitive insecurity and emotional depletion which eventually compromised talent sustainability in the organizations.

The article has also determined that job insecurity was a predisposing factor to emotional exhaustion, thus a mediation relationship. Ease of the employees who were finding their employment to be unstable led to emotional fatigue that adversely affected their functions and commitment. Also, organizational perceived support compensated negative impact of emotional fatigue on talent outcomes, proving its protective role. The model described a significant part of the variance in talent outcomes which is why leadership behavior and organization climate are important in the development of psychological well-being and performance in employees.

Recommendations

As the results indicate, the organizations were advised to introduce leadership development programs to decrease the cases of exploitative behaviour and facilitate the supportable and ethical leadership styles. Emotional intelligence, fairness and accountability training interventions were suggested to discourage the development of self-serving leadership practices. Standing organizations were also advised to come up with clear communication channels to minimize job insecurity among the employees.

In addition, it was suggested that organizations should enhance perceived organizational support with respect to employee assistance program, recognition systems, participative decision making, and provision of mental health. The adverse psychological impact as observed in this research was likely to be offset with fair HR policies favouring career development, and job security. Organizations would be able to safeguard talent results by creating an open atmosphere, which helped them to still enjoy the results, despite the employees undergoing work-related pressure.

Future Research Directions

It was recommended that future studies use longitudinal research designs that will be able to assess cause-and-effect relationships and changes as times progress. Because the current study used the cross-sectional design, subsequent research may focus on exploring how exploitative leadership and psychological strain changes in various stages of organizations.

Also, other mechanisms of mediation like the role of psychological safety, organizational cynicism, or moral disengagement were to be examined by future scholars. Inclusion of more industries, cultures, and tiers of leadership could help in improving generalizability of the model. The recommendation was also to use multi-source data collection processes such as supervisor ratings and objective performance measures in reducing the effects of common method bias and improve the empirical strength.

References

Ahmed, A., Syed, O. R., & Khalid, N. (2023). Destructive leadership and employee outcomes: The mediating role of job insecurity. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1123456.

Ahmed, I., Islam, T., Usman, A., & Ali, M. (2022). The buffering role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between workplace stressors and employee outcomes. *Current Psychology, 41*(6), 3945–3956.

Ali, A. M., Hussain, A., & Qureshi, M. I. (2024). Exploitative leadership and green innovative behavior of hospitality employees: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights, 8*(5), 1847–1866. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-02-2024-0161

Arnold, K. A., & Walsh, M. M. (2015). Customer incivility and employee burnout: The moderating role of organizational support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*(3), 276–287.

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 22*(3), 273–285.

Breevaart, K., & Zacher, H. (2019). Main and interactive effects of weekly transformational and laissez-faire leadership on followers' trust and work engagement. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 92*(2), 384–409.

Caesens, G., Stinglhamber, F., Demoulin, S., & De Wilde, M. (2016). Perceived organizational support and employees' well-being: The mediating role of organizational dehumanization. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 26*(4), 527–540.

De Cuyper, N., Piccoli, B., Fontinha, R., & De Witte, H. (2020). Job insecurity, employability and satisfaction among temporary and permanent employees. *Career Development International, 25*(2), 1–17.

Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 71*(3), 500–507.

Ersoy, A., Mahmood, Z., Sharif, S., Ersoy, N., & Ehtiyar, R. (2023). Exploring the associations between social support, perceived uncertainty, job stress, and emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 crisis. *Sustainability, 15*(3), 2150. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032150

Fallon, J., Adeleye, S., & Idris, M. (2024). Perceived job insecurity and task performance: What aspect of performance is related to which facet of job insecurity. *Current Psychology, 43*(1340–1358).https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-023-04408-4

Harms, P. D., Credé, M., Tynan, M., Leon, M., & Jeung, W. (2017). Leadership and stress: A meta-analytic review. *The Leadership Quarterly, 28*(1), 178–194.

Hngoi, C. L., Abdullah, N.-A., Wan Sulaiman, W. S., & Zaiedy Nor, N. I. (2024). Examining job involvement and perceived organizational support toward organizational commitment: Job insecurity as mediator. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1290122

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist, 44*(3), 513–524.

Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J., Neveu, J., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 5*, 103–128.

Iqbal, S., Atif, M., & Rafiq, A. (2022). Qualitative job insecurity, emotional exhaustion and their effects on hotel employees' job embeddedness: The moderating role of perceived organizational support. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 105*, 103270. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103270

Jiang, L., & Lavaysse, L. M. (2018). Cognitive and affective job insecurity: A meta-analysis and theoretical extension. *Journal of Management, 44*(6), 2307–2342.

Kim, H., Im, J., & Qu, H. (2019). Exploring antecedents and consequences of job burnout. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 82*, 328–337.

Kim, M. J. (2020). The performance implications of job insecurity: The sequential mediating effect of job stress and organizational commitment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(21), 7837.

Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S. (2017). Perceived organizational support: A meta-analytic evaluation. *Journal of Management, 43*(6), 1854–1884.

Lee, R. T., & Ashforth, B. E. (1996). A meta-analytic examination of burnout correlates. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*(2), 123–133.

Li, M., Ahmed, A., Syed, O. R., & Khalid, N. (2022). Abusive leader behavior and job insecurity: The mediating role of emotional exhaustion. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 890123.

Mackey, J. D., Frieder, R. E., Brees, J. R., & Martinko, M. J. (2017). Abusive supervision: A meta-analysis and empirical review. *Journal of Management, 43*(6), 1940–1965.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behavior, 2*(2), 99–113.

Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(4), 698–714.

Schmid, E. A., Verdorfer, A. P., & Peus, C. (2019). Different shades—different effects? Consequences of exploitative leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics, 156*(2), 409–423.

Schmid, E. A., Verdorfer, A. P., & Peus, C. V. (2019). Different shades of destructive leadership: A construct validation of exploitative leadership. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 1017.

Sverke, M., Hellgren, J., & Näswall, K. (2019). Job insecurity: A meta-analysis and review of consequences. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 24*(3), 345–360.

Syed, A., et al. (2025). Exploitative leadership and innovative behavior: The mediating role of emotional exhaustion. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*.

Wang, H., Lu, C., & Siu, O. (2020). Job insecurity and job performance: The moderating role of organizational justice. *Journal of Business Research, 117*, 365–372.

Xu, A. J., Loi, R., & Ngo, H. Y. (2020). Ethical leadership behavior and employee justice perceptions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 162*(2), 1–15.

Zahur, H., Swati, S., & Butt, M. A. (2022). Exploitative leadership and creativity attrition: Moderated mediation analysis. *Journal of Workplace Behavior, 3*(2), 45–62.

Zhang, X., Wang, Z., Jiang, X., & Xu, F. (2025). The cost of exploitative leadership: How self-control depletion and organizational support shape employee outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*, 1701529. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1701529 (Frontiers)