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Workplace Misuse and Mental Exhaustion: How Counterproductive Behaviors and Ostracism Fuel Burnout in Banks

Abstract

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Keywords: Illegitimate Tasks; Toxic Workplace; Counterproductive Work Behaviour; Workplace Ostracism; Burnout

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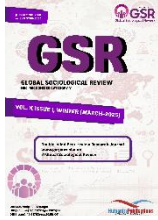


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Abstract

The current study aims at examining the influence of illegitimate tasks on burnout among graduate students working in the banking industry in Pakistan with a special interest on the role of counterproductive work behavior (CWB), toxic workplace environment, and workplace ostracism. The key question is how these organizational actors affect job preparedness and professional opportunity, are the key aspects of graduate employability. A quantitative research design was used whereby 400 participants took part in a convenience sampling method. Direct and indirect hypotheses that are brought throughout this study are all confirmed, as a holistic model, in which the illegitimate tasks reduce the employability through burnout and job dysfunction, but an entrepreneurial orientation and the support systems counter these impacts. The research has practical implications that any educator, policymaker, and human resource practitioner can use in promoting graduate employability in a turbulent environment.

Keywords: Illegitimate Tasks; Toxic Workplace; Counterproductive Work Behaviour; Workplace Ostracism; Burnout

Introduction

In the ever-changing journeys of organizational life, the issue of employee well-being and productivity is being acutely understood as one of the key moving factors behind the durability of business performance.

It has been found that burnout is a condition of physical, emotional, and mental depletion that tends to occur due to the long-term effect of stress, a problem that has now become a serious concern for most organizations all over the world (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). An illegitimate task (tasks the workers



believe are not job-related or not needed), which is one of the smaller but most important causative factors of employee burnout, has not been researched much (Semmer et al., 2007). Such activities are degrading to work identities and professional dignity, resulting in psychological stress.

Considering the growing complexity of work functions and the huge demands of the contemporary workplace, the delegation of illegitimate work roles has become widespread, and it is crucial to know its larger implications. More specifically, they should be discussed in terms of how they contribute to workplace ostracism, the development of the so-called toxic work cultures, and the emergence of counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). These mediating factors might lead to a more finely grained conception of how illegitimate tasks result in burnout. The present research would be able to address that gap with a serial mediation model that involved the mediation of illegitimate tasks by way of workplace ostracism, toxic workplace culture, and CWBs to burnout. Knowledge of this mechanism has great theoretical as well as practical organizational value.

The illegitimate tasks concept is based on Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory, according to which workers do their best to present themselves with a positive image at the workplace. Activities viewed to be illegitimate defy professional norms and are perceived as disrespect, thereby making it a form of stressor (Semmer et al., 2007). All previous studies on the topic dwelled more upon the immediate psychological outcomes of illegitimate tasks, including a low level of job satisfaction and excessive pressures (Eatough et al., 2016). The downstream effects that result in burnout via its mediators, i.e., ostracism, toxic culture, and CWBs, however, are under-researched.

Workplace ostracism is the perception of being disregarded by subordinates or others in their work. It is a mild yet powerful source of stress that worsens social relations and fosters an unhealthy company environment (Ferris et al., 2008). A very common feature of organizations with toxic workplace culture is conflict, lack of trust, and unethical practices, and this kind of workplace culture usually emerges where

employees feel marginalized or treated unfairly (Frost, 2004). These conditions may also promote CWBs such as sabotage, withdrawal, and deviance that further exacerbate stress as well as emotional burnout (Spector & Fox, 2005).

The previous research articles have discussed these mediators separately. As an example, it has been demonstrated that workplace ostracism is directly related to burnout (Wu et al., 2012) and that toxic workplace behaviors lead to CWBs (Leiter et al., 2011). Nonetheless, empirical studies offer little information on how these mediators shape a serial reaction, which begins with a stressor of illegitimate tasks. This paper can fill the gap by suggesting and examining a serial mediation model that gives an entire picture of how illegitimate tasks develop burnout.

The research questions of the study are the following: Is there a mediation relationship between illegitimate tasks and ostracism at work, between work ostracism and burnout? Is a toxic workplace a mediator between illegitimate tasks and burnout? Does the connection between illegitimate undertakings and burnout have mediator impacts by counterproductive work habits? What is the role of workplace ostracism, toxic workplace, and counterproductive work behaviors as serial mediators in the connection between illegitimate tasks and burnout? The major study purposes of the present research are as follows: To research the direct connection between illegitimate tasks and burnout. To study the mediation effect of workplace ostracism between illegitimate task and burnout. To analyze the mediation effect of toxic workplace culture between illegitimate task and burnout. To analyze which mediates illegitimate task and burnout-wasteful work behavior. To understand the sequential mediation of the following mediators: workplace ostracism, toxic work environment, and counterproductive behavior, and to explain how illegitimate tasks result in burnout.

The study population in this study is employees in medium to large organizations, where roles are assigned to the employees, and workplace relationships are complicated and multi-dimensional. It has not been inclined towards a particular industry,

but there has been adoption across industries to foster superiority in the generalization of the studies. The data will be gathered with the help of structured questionnaires that will measure perceptions of illegitimate tasks, the experience of ostracism, workplace culture toxicity, and engagement in CWBs, as well as the levels of burnout. The scope is restricted by a few factors. First, it can contain biases due to a focus on self-reported data (including social desirability or common method variance). Second, a cross-sectional study limits the discussion of causality. Third, the cultural influences that could potentially lead to a certain vision of illegitimacy and a certain conduct at the workplace are not central to the research; however, they might be of both interest and importance in further study.

The given study should contribute considerably to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it widens the domain of the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self theory by explaining the indirect mechanisms of influence of illegitimate tasks on employee burnout. It is also prone to offer a better insight into the dynamics of the workplace and employee behavior by including a concept of a serial mediation model. Practically, managers and HR professionals can learn the widespread impact of putting illegitimate tasks on their employees, thanks to the findings. Knowing how these activities can lead to ostracism, toxicity, or CWBs can also help present a more supportive workplace. This can be achieved through more defined roles, improved communication channels, and conflict management techniques. Policy-makers and organizational leaders can also employ the knowledge generated in this study to draft policies that will reduce toxicity in the workplace and enhance psychological health. At a time and day and age when mental health and employee participation are considered the most critical, such evidence-based practices can make a strong improvement to the organizations and employee satisfaction.

Literature Review:

Direct Relationship

The illegitimate tasks, which are work assignments that are either unnecessary or unreasonable, are a

serious psychological burden that is a violation of the reality of the employees in terms of their professional functions (Semmer et al., 2010). These are classified into two categories: unreasonable tasks, which happen to be beyond the duties of a worker, and unnecessary tasks that are perceived as redundant. Previous studies indicate that illegitimate tasks are said to lead to the development of negative workplace outcomes like burnout, toxic workplace, counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), and workplace ostracism.

In a particular example, Ouyang et al. (2022) came up with the fact that these tasks, through psychological entitlement, will contribute to burnout in moderation with collective workplace climates. Ecuadorian and Chinese studies also confirmed the strong correlation between the extent of task illegitimacy and the rate of burnout ($r = 0.320$ to 0.588). According to Zeng et al. (2021), illegitimate tasks were associated with turnover intentions through work-family conflict and work-reward imbalance. It has also been found that illegitimate duties negatively affect emotional resilience (Wang et al., 2020) and that burnout may be mitigated using ethical leadership (Zeng et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the informal SME in developing countries is unexplored. Illegitimate work is also associated with toxic workplaces, including bullying and distrust (Verywell Mind, 2018). In their study, Sharma and Pandey (2024) established that such tasks predict workplace incivility and retaliation behavior, and Semmer et al. (2015) stressed their role in the development of resentment, a low level of self-esteem, and burnout. Other researchers (Tomic & Tomic, 2023) have repeated the results in the learning and medical fields, associating illegitimate work with occupational injury. Illegitimate tasks are cited as predictors of CWB, such as theft, sabotage, and aggression (Semmer et al., 2010). This is because daily feelings of illegitimacy result in anger and subsequent CWB (Zhou et al., 2015). The relationship between illegitimate tasks and procrastination was also mediated by emotional distress that is dependent on procrastination (Zhao et al., 2023). In Ilyas et al. (2021), the authors noticed that these tasks were influencing job dissatisfaction, which promotes CWB in Pakistan.

Another effect of the presence of illegitimate tasks is workplace ostracism, which is one of the biggest causes of psychological harm (Ferris et al., 2008). Ahmad et al. (2022) attributed such tasks to ostracism in terms of incivility, and Khan et al. (2020) reported greater exclusion when the tasks did not fit within job roles. Academic and BPO studies revealed similar trends, namely, ostracism resulted in knowledge hiding and intentions to leave (Fatima et al., 2019; Laeque et al., 2020). The concept of toxic environment is closely linked to CWB, and leadership style has been proven to be one of the tightest connections between them (Younus et al., 2020; Kayani et al., 2021). Illegal work leads to unhealthy work practices and promotes exclusion and job burnout (Farasat et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2020). In addition, workplace toxicity is the underlying cause of burnout (Qureshi et al., 2022), and scientific studies have demonstrated that it augments CWB (Azam et al., 2022; Naeem et al., 2024). On the same note, burnout is supported by ostracism (Farasat et al., 2021), and in turn, burnout and ostracism contribute to an increase in CWB, making this pattern a vicious cycle at work.

H1: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks, then they are more likely to experience increased levels of job burnout.

H2: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks, then they are more likely to experience a toxic workplace environment.

H3: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks, then they are more likely to engage in CWB.

H4: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks, then they are more likely to experience workplace ostracism.

H5: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a toxic workplace environment, then they are more likely to engage in CWB.

H6: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a toxic workplace environment, then they are more likely to experience workplace ostracism

H7: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan perceive a toxic workplace environment, then they are more likely to experience burnout.

H8: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace ostracism, then they are more likely to engage in CWB.

H9: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience burnout, then they are more likely to engage in CWB.

H10: If employees in informal SMEs in Pakistan experience workplace ostracism, then they are more likely to experience burnout. See Figure 1 to understand the indirect relationships.

Indirect Relationship

The negative consequences of illegitimate tasks (IT), the to-be-done tasks that are considered unnecessary and irrational by the employee, have been examined more intensively in recent research, awakening interest in burnout and mediating processes of toxic workplace environment, counterproductive behaviors at work (CWB), and workplace ostracism (WO). Such assignments have discouraging consequences on professional identity and contribute to negative psychological pressure and workplace consequences. There is a direct association between illegitimate work and CWB that is confirmed by multiple studies. According to a study conducted by Semmer et al. (2010), IT, even with organizational justice and effort-reward imbalance, which have been accounted for, showed a significant correlation with CWB. In a daily diary study, Zhou et al. (2017) demonstrated that IT augmented end-of-day anger that boosted the following day CWB, especially when time pressure was high and political skill was low. This is also mediated by moral disengagement, as the study by Unler and Caliskan (2019) suggests that workers might justify unethical actions when subjected to IT. Likewise, Ilyas et al. (2021) established that anger mediates the relationship between IT and turnover intention among workers of the SMEs.

The effects of illegitimate tasks are increased by the toxic workplace environment. This was clearly shown by Kayani and Alasan (2021), who have proven that toxic leadership is actually a violation of the

psychological contract and that violating this condition and contract leads to increased CWB. The study by Younus et al. (2020) confirmed the role of injustice perceptions as a mediator between destructive leadership and counterproductive behaviors. Hameed et al. (2017) concluded that workplace incivility causes psychological distress that promotes CWB further. Workplace ostracism serves as a decisive mediator as well. Ahmad et al. (2022) and Sharma and Pandey (2024) observed that IT enforced by unsustainable HR practices brings potent incivility, resulting in WO. According to Asif et al. (2022), WO does stratify with CWB, and there is at least partial mediation of their stratification by depressed mood. Zhu and Zhang (2021) found that the WO-CWB correlation is indirect due to the mediating roles of anger and turnover intention sequentially. Negative behavior by the ostracized employees also promotes their ostracism. Interaction between the mediators is multifaceted. To give an example, CWB brought about by IT causes WO. The assignment of employees to illegitimate tasks might result in retaliation from the employees or coping with CWB, which is followed by social exclusion. On the other hand, emotional exhaustion and burnout may result from WO. The findings by Mirza et al. (2020) and Khan et al. (2024) demonstrated that WO has a significant association with employee exhaustion that mediates the negative behaviors of employees and performance.

Moreover, burnout is often one of the terminal consequences of the chains. In a recent study by Naseem et al. (2021), it was reported that the IT-burnout relationship is mediated by the depressive mood of university employees. Yuan et al. (2024) connected IT-related ego depletion to disengagement and burnout. As Budak et al. (2022) and Koon and Pun (2018) revealed, toxic leadership and job demands have a direct correlation with experiencing emotional exhaustion, which is a central element of burnout. According to Chaman et al. (2022) and Julmi et al. (2022), ethical and trustworthy leadership helps to reduce the impact of IT on burnout and ostracism, and a deficiency in such leadership results in the opposite effect. Based on these results, the contribution of supportive leadership, organizational

justice, and employee inclusion to alleviating negative IT impact on well-being and performance has been indicated.

H11: Illegitimate tasks positively influence counterproductive work behaviour, with the toxic workplace environment mediating this relationship. This hypothesis underscores the importance of addressing both task assignments and workplace culture to mitigate counterproductive behaviours.

H12: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with workplace ostracism, and this relationship is mediated by the perception of a toxic workplace environment.

H13: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with employee burnout, and this relationship is mediated by the perception of a toxic workplace environment.

H14: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with workplace ostracism, and this relationship is mediated by counterproductive work behaviour.

H15: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with workplace ostracism, and this relationship is mediated by counterproductive work behaviour.

H16: Illegitimate tasks are positively associated with employee burnout, and this relationship is mediated by workplace ostracism.

H17: Toxic workplace environments are positively associated with workplace ostracism, and this relationship is mediated by counterproductive work behaviour.

H18: Toxic workplace environments are positively associated with employee burnout, and this relationship is mediated by counterproductive work behaviour.

H19: Toxic workplace environments are positively associated with employee burnout, and this relationship is mediated by workplace ostracism.

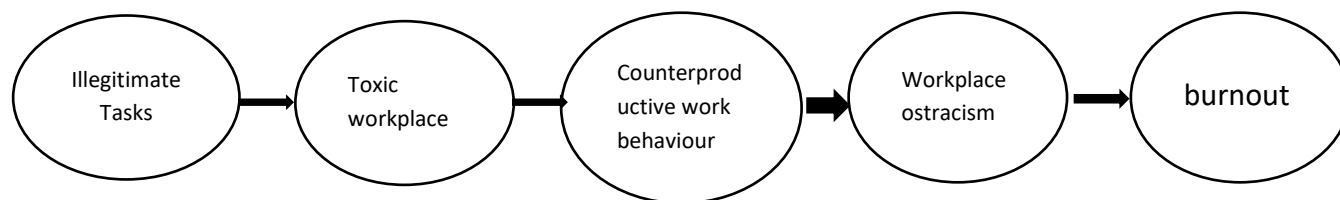
H20: Workplace ostracism positively influences counterproductive work behaviour, and this relationship is mediated by emotional exhaustion

H21: Illegitimate tasks positively influence employee burnout, and this relationship is mediated by toxic workplace environments, counterproductive

work behaviour, and workplace ostracism. See Figure 1 to understand the indirect relationships.

Figure1

Theoretical Framework



Methodology:

Research Design

The proposed study uses a quantitative research design, and the study intends to evaluate empirically the links between variables by conducting statistical analysis. Testing a hypothesis and determining a causal or mediating relationship are identified as the areas of quantitative research where this approach is exceptionally successful (Creswell, [2014](#)). The unit of analysis is the employees of the banking industry in the city of Gujranwala in the province of Punjab in Pakistan. This design allows for systematic collection and analysis of the numerical information to make generalizable conclusions.

The study would target employees of the different banks operating in Gujranwala City. The research is also based on the non-probability type of sampling, i.e., the study will use convenience sampling due to the researcher's mere access to the available respondents (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, [2016](#)) and the snowball method of sampling because it is easy to reach respondents through referrals who are not available to the researcher (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, [2017](#)) due to their dispersion in the institutions. The final sample size (n= approximately, 400) should serve as an adequate number of respondents to conduct the mediation analysis according to the recommendations on the power calculation (Fritz & MacKinnon, [2007](#)).

Data Collector Tool

A structured questionnaire shall be used to collect data that will help answer the research objective. The questionnaire will consist of demographic questions as well as verified scales to gauge the latent factors, e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance of the employees. A pilot test using a small sample will be done to enhance the clarity of items and the structure of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha will be used to determine the reliability, and the minimum acceptable value will be 0.70, which is acceptable with regard to the internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, [1994](#)).

Measurement

In the present study, the known and psychometrically proven scales were utilized in order to empirically examine the connections among illegitimate tasks, toxic workplace, counterproductive work behaviour, workplace ostracism, and burnout in the entrepreneurial settings. Some of the instruments were chosen because they had been proven reliable, have construct validity, and are conducive in terms of organizational and entrepreneurship research environments.

Illegitimate tasks used the Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS) 8-item questionnaire authored by Semmer et al. (2010). Items in the scale reflect perceptions of unreasonable (e.g., tasks that should be done by someone else) as well as unnecessary (e.g., tasks that make little sense) tasks as seen by the

employees. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale that included 1 (Never) and 5 (Very often). This scale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach 2 alpha >.80) in various workplace environments, e.g., instead of role conflict and stress in entrepreneurial ventures (Semmer et al., 2015). The 10-item Toxic Workplace Scale used by Pelletier (2010) measures the toxic workplace along the dimensions of manipulative behaviours, ethical amorality, organizational negativity, and verbal abuse measures, and it was chosen to assess the toxic workplace as appropriate. Examples of these are: backstabbing and betrayal by coworkers, and management is oblivious to unethical behaviours. The scale has shown to have positive reliability (Cronbach 2 85), has been validated during research into dysfunctional organizational climate conducted within both the corporate and entrepreneurial contexts (Webster et al., 2021).

The counterproductive work behaviour was assessed by referring to the 19 items of the short form of the CWB checklist, designed by Spector et al. (2006). Some behaviours that belong to this scale include abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. There are items such as: "Intentionally wasted the materials/supplies of an employer" and "Said something mean to a colleague at the workplace." The scale was on a 5-point basis; 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Daily"). The instrument has indicated good internal consistency (alpha greater than 0.90) and has been used in the field of entrepreneurship research to examine unethical or retaliatory practices in an environment with a high level of stress and role conflict (Zhou et al., 2020). Workplace ostracism was assessed using the scale of 10 items produced by Ferris et al. (2008), which asks questions about how perceptually ignored or excluded people are at the workplace. Examples are: people at the workplace overlooked you, and you were not involved in activities or meetings. The replies were registered using a 5-point Likert scale (1-5 points, where 1= Never and 5= Always). This scale has demonstrated strong psychometric characteristics (Cronbach's alpha, approx. 0.94) and has been proven to possess positive validity in organizations of various types, including startup companies, in which social

exclusion may originate due to either competition-related or politically-motivated factors (Wu et al., 2021).

The 9-item emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) was used to measure burnout. Example items are: I experience an emotional drain due to work, and I experience work burnout. The evaluation was based on a 7-stage Likert scale, where 0 was placed at the Never stage and 6 at the Everyday stage. The exhaustion dimension of distress has been selected because of its high predictive power in terms of measuring the key element of burnout and high scores in studies of entrepreneurial burnout (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). This scale demonstrated an outstanding internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > .90). Schedules were chosen using the criteria of their demonstrated empirical soundness, foreseeable simplicity of administration, and conceptual alignment with dysfunction and stress of the workplace in an entrepreneurial context. Before proceeding to the primary analysis, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to examine the uniqueness of constructs. Alpha coefficients of all the scales used in this research were more than .80 and thus reliable.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The first statistical method applicable in the current research is the mediation analysis, which examines whether the correlation of an independent variable and a dependent variable is mediated by a third variable (mediator). Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and structural equation modelling (SEM) will be conducted with the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) or AMOS or modelling analysis will be computed in the form of the bootstrapping method (using 5,000 resamples) that is thought to be more reliable compared to traditional tests like the Sobel test (Hayes, 2013). The estimate of indirect effects will also be estimated, and confidence intervals will be calculated using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 4 of simple mediation). To this end, to establish the validity and robustness of the results, there are several

fit indices that will be employed against SEM models, such as:

Chi-square (χ^2) test

Comparative Fit Index (CFI), a.k.a. Goodness-of-Fit Index (CFI), is acceptable, 0.90, and above

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is acceptable if ≤ 0.08

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) -acceptable ≤ 0.08

The convergent validity will be measured by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR), and discriminant validity will be measured by Fornell-Larcker and the HTMT ratio.

Ethics will be of great concern to the research process. All participants will be informed and given consent to participate in the study; they will be fully aware of all the proceedings, potential risks, and benefits associated with the study. This will be a voluntary participation where the respondents will be entitled to withdraw at any point without any implication. The respondent's confidentiality and anonymity will be adhered to by allocating unique codes rather than personal identifiers, and the data will also be stored in a safe place under restricted research team access. The research will take place considering the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association (APA, [2017](#)).

Results

Table 1

Direct Effect

Paths	β	SE	t	CR	p	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
H1 IT \rightarrow B	0.12	0.04	3.00		0.000	0.07	0.17
H2 IT \rightarrow TW	0.23	0.03	7.66		0.00	0.23	0.41
H3IT \rightarrow CPWB	0.14	0.02	7.00		0.00	0.09	0.19
H4 IT \rightarrow WPO	0.24	0.05	4.8		0.00	0.12	0.36
H5 TW \rightarrow B	0.13	0.04		3.25	0.00	0.05	0.21
H6TW \rightarrow CPWB	0.25	0.03		8.33	0.00	0.25	0.35
H7 TW \rightarrow WPO	0.17	0.06		2.83	0.00	0.07	0.34
H8 CPWB \rightarrow B	0.20	0.04		5.00	0.00	0.25	0.30
H9CPWB \rightarrow WPO	0.12	0.03		4.00	0.00	0.06	0.18
H10 WPO \rightarrow B	0.18	0.04		4.5	0.00	0.11	0.26

T: Illegitimate tasks, TW: toxic workplace, CPWB: counterproductive work behaviour, WPO: workplace ostracism, B: burnout

The results show a significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout ($\beta = 0.12$, SE = 0.04, $t = 3$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as illegitimate tasks increase, burnout also rises. The effect is statistically significant, indicating strong evidence for the association between these variables.

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and a toxic workplace environment ($\beta = 0.23$, SE = 0.03, $t = 7.66$, $p < 0.01$). This means that higher levels of illegitimate tasks are associated with increased perceptions of

workplace toxicity. The strong statistical significance supports this finding.

The results reveal a significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = 0.14$, SE = 0.02, $t = 7.00$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as illegitimate tasks increase, employees are more likely to engage in harmful workplace behaviours. The strong significance supports the reliability of this effect.

The findings show a significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.24$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 4.8$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that employees assigned more illegitimate tasks are more likely to feel excluded or ignored at work. The result is statistically strong and meaningful.

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between a toxic workplace and burnout ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 3.25$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that increased toxicity in the workplace is associated with higher levels of employee burnout. The statistical significance confirms the reliability of this association.

The results show a significant positive relationship between a toxic workplace and counterproductive work behaviour ($\beta = 0.25$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 8.33$, $p < 0.01$). This means that as workplace toxicity increases, employees are more likely to engage in harmful or disruptive behaviours. The effect is statistically robust.

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between a toxic workplace and workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.17$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 2.83$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that higher levels of workplace toxicity are linked to increased feelings of exclusion

among employees. The statistically significant finding supports this association.

The results show a significant positive relationship between counterproductive work behaviour and burnout ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 5.00$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that employees who engage more in counterproductive behaviours are likely to experience higher levels of burnout. The effect is statistically strong and meaningful.

The results indicate a significant positive relationship between counterproductive work behaviour and workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 4.00$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that employees who engage in counterproductive behaviours are more likely to feel excluded or ignored at work. The finding is statistically significant.

The results show a significant positive relationship between workplace ostracism and burnout ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 4.5$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that employees who feel excluded or ignored at work are more likely to experience burnout. The statistically significant result supports this association.

Table 2

Indirect Effect

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	LL	UL
H11 IT → TW → CPWB	0.152	0.025	0.106	0.205
H12 IT → TW → WPO	0.134	0.026	0.083	0.195
H13 IT → TW → B	0.066	0.01	0.023	0.121
H14 IT → CPWB → WPO	0.203	0.036	0.146	0.276
H15 IT → CPWB → B	0.113	0.02	0.056	0.143
H16 IT → WPO → B	0.037	0.015	0.013	0.068
H17 TW → CPWB → WPO	0.151	0.025	0.100	0.202
H18 TW → CPWB → B	0.163	0.026	0.127	0.198
H19 TW → WPO → B	0.12	0.011	0.063	0.145
H20 CPWB → WPO → B	0.125	0.017	0.064	0.176

IT: Illegitimate tasks, TW: toxic workplace, CPWB: counterproductive work behaviour, WPO: workplace ostracism, B: burnout

The indirect effect of 0.152 (Boot SE = 0.025, 95% CI \ [0.106, 0.205]) indicates a significant mediating role of a toxic workplace in the relationship between

illegitimate tasks and counterproductive work behaviour.

The indirect effect of 0.134 (Boot SE = 0.026, 95% CI \ [0.083, 0.195]) signifies a significant mediation effect of a toxic workplace in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and workplace ostracism. This means that assigning unreasonable tasks fosters a toxic environment, which subsequently increases feelings of exclusion among employees.

The indirect effect of 0.066 (Boot SE = 0.01, 95% CI \ [0.023, 0.121]) indicates a significant mediating role of a toxic workplace in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout. This suggests that when individuals are assigned unfair or unreasonable tasks, it fosters a toxic work environment, which in turn contributes to higher levels of burnout. In educational and entrepreneurial contexts, this emphasizes the importance of fair task distribution and supportive environments to maintain well-being, sustain motivation, and promote long-term performance and innovation.

The indirect effect of 0.203 (Boot SE = 0.036, 95% CI \ [0.146, 0.276]) indicates a significant mediating role of counterproductive work behaviour in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and workplace ostracism. This suggests that assigning unfair or unreasonable tasks leads to negative employee behaviours, which in turn increase feelings of exclusion at work.

The indirect effect of 0.113 (Boot SE = 0.02, 95% CI \ [0.056, 0.143]) demonstrates a significant mediating role of counterproductive work behaviour in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout. This suggests that when individuals are burdened with unfair or inappropriate tasks, they may engage in harmful workplace behaviours, which subsequently elevate burnout levels.

The indirect effect of 0.037 (Boot SE = 0.015, 95% CI \ [0.013, 0.068]) indicates a significant mediating role of workplace ostracism in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout. This suggests that assigning tasks perceived as unfair or inappropriate can lead to feelings of exclusion, which in turn contribute to employee burnout.

The reported indirect effect of 0.151 (Boot SE = 0.025) with a confidence interval that appears incorrectly ordered (LL = 0.100, UL = 0.202) suggests a possible error in the data. Normally, the lower limit (LL) should be less than the upper limit (UL). Assuming this is a typo and the corrected confidence interval is \ [0.100, 0.202], the results indicate that counterproductive work behaviour significantly mediates the relationship between a toxic workplace and workplace ostracism.

The reported indirect effect of 0.163 (Boot SE = 0.026) suggests a significant mediating role of counterproductive work behaviour in the relationship between a toxic workplace and burnout. However, the confidence interval appears incorrectly ordered (LL = 0.127, UL = 0.198); assuming a corrected CI \ [0.127, 0.198], the effect remains significant. This implies that toxic work environments foster negative behaviours, which in turn lead to burnout. In educational and entrepreneurial settings, fostering a healthy culture is essential to reduce harmful behaviours, support well-being, and enhance productivity and innovation.

The indirect effect of 0.12 (Boot SE = 0.011, 95% CI \ [0.063, 0.145]) indicates a significant mediating role of workplace ostracism in the relationship between a toxic workplace and burnout. This suggests that toxic workplace environments increase feelings of exclusion, which in turn lead to higher burnout levels.

The indirect effect of 0.125 (Boot SE = 0.017, 95% CI \ [0.064, 0.176]) indicates a significant mediating role of workplace ostracism in the relationship between counterproductive work behaviour and burnout. This suggests that when individuals engage in harmful workplace behaviours, it can lead to social exclusion, which in turn increases burnout. In educational and entrepreneurial contexts, these findings stress the need for promoting positive behaviour and inclusive practices. Addressing such dynamics can enhance collaboration, reduce emotional strain, and improve overall performance and innovation potential.

Table 3*Indirect Effect of IT on B through Sequential Mediation*

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	LL	UL
H21 IT → TW → CPWB → WPO → B	0.007	0.004	0.001	0.015

IT: Illegitimate tasks, TW: toxic workplace, CPWB: counterproductive work behaviour, WPO: workplace ostracism, B: burnout

The indirect effect of 0.007 (Boot SE = 0.004, 95% CI \ [0.01, 0.015]) suggests a very small but significant combined mediation of toxic workplace, counterproductive work behaviour, and workplace ostracism in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and burnout. This means that unfair task assignments contribute to a toxic environment, triggering negative behaviours and social exclusion, which cumulatively increase burnout.

Discussion

The discussion section of the present research is instrumental in understanding and contextualizing the results in the development of employee burnout (B) by supporting the hypothesis of illegitimate tasks (IT) as a methodology toward toxic workplace environments (TW), counterproductive work behavior (CPWB), and workplace ostracism (WPO). The empirical findings support the associations proposed firmly, as all 21 hypotheses were accepted using the cascade effect of stressors on psychosocial mechanisms in the office to support workplace relationships.

H1 reflects that IT is directly connected with burnout, which is consistent with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model that states that a lack of resources in jobs due to excess job demands results in emotional burnout. In addition, the strong relationships of IT with TW (H2), CPWB (H3), and WPO (H4) reiterate the illegitimate tasks as stressors, which are the breaches of norms of the workplace. Such results suggest that accounting for unreasonable tasks or tasks beyond the job for the employees can spoil their feeling of fairness and lead to poor performance in various areas of the organization. A comparison of the results with those of the previous studies shows that the study contributes to the existing

literature, besides confirming what has previously been reported. The relationship between IT and TW justifies the statement by Semmer et al. (2019), which indicates that illegitimate tasks undermine self-worth and dignity to promote the feeling of injustice. Equally, the existing correlation between TW and CPWB (H6) affirms previous studies by Spector and Fox (2005), who observed that most organization-related stressors lead to employees developing deviant behaviors. Social exchange theory also helps in explaining and interpreting this relationship between IT and CPWB, and it may be said that employees react to instances of perceived mistreatment by retaliating. In the meantime, the conservation of resources (COR) theory can be used to understand how toxic work environments and mistreatment of a person by others lead to psychological resources running out and their subsequent withdrawal and burnout.

The results have crucial theoretical implications. They bring illegitimate tasks to the fore as a serious antecedent of various stress outcomes at the workplace, broadening even the JD-R model by defining the existence of illegitimacy as a strong stressor as well as a contravened job resource. Further, the sequential mediations evidenced by this study of IT IT → TW TW → CPWB CPWB → WPO WPO → B B (H21) means that a process-based, multidimensional concept of the manifestation and dispersion of stress in organizational systems has emerged. These processes cannot be reduced to mere cause-and-effect patterns and can be instrumental in advancing more dynamic approaches towards the phenomenon of occupational stress. It is critical to recognize the limitations of the current study so that its contributions can be defined accordingly. One major weakness is that it has a cross-sectional nature

that restricts its ability to make a causal inference. It needs longitudinal or experimental studies to confirm the temporal direction between these relationships. Moreover, there is a chance of having the common method bias since the data were collected by self-reports. This can be overcome by using multi-source data or objective measures, e.g., surveys of peers, or records of performance. Perception of task legitimacy may also be under the influence of cultural variability, which limits the applicability of the results obtained. The study leaves some horizons to be explored in futuristic studies. Longitudinal studies might investigate the process by which these connections develop over time. Researchers may consider individual factors, e.g., resilience or emotional intelligence, that may mitigate the impact of IT. It is also worth investigating further on reverse causality, such as a possible higher risk of allocation of illegitimate work in ostracized employees. These would help in gaining an insight into feedback loops and organizational dysfunction.

Application of the findings on a larger scale in the organization and in society increases the degree of relevance of the study.

Conclusion and Implications

A research paper conclusion is one of the decisive parts that summarizes the study and provides its main findings as well as contributions to general theory and practice. Within the framework of this study, dealing with the influence of Illegitimate Tasks (IT) on Burnout (B) in terms of mediators, including Toxic Workplace (TW), Counterproductive Work Behavior (CPWB), and Workplace Ostracism (WPO), the conclusion does not only repeat the results of the research but also locates them in the context of academic and practical fields.

The main aim of the research was to analyze the direct and indirect influence of Illegitimate Tasks on employee Burnout and of the mediating variables, which were Toxic Workplace, Counterproductive Work Behavior, and Workplace Ostracism. The fact that all twenty-one hypotheses are accepted helps to emphasize the complexity of relationships between these variables. In particular, it is found that

Illegitimate Tasks substantially break out into the occurrence of Toxic Workplace environment, which further leads to the development of Counterproductive Work Behavior and Workplace Ostracism, and culminates in the increased levels of Burnout among the staff members. Such findings correspond to the past study results that stated that non-core job assignments may produce negative psychological outcomes (Semmer et al., 2019).

Theoretical Contributions

Such a study proceeds the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and explains the source of resource-depleting factors such as Illegitimate Tasks that consume psychological resources of employees, prompting them to experience stress and Burnout (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Moreover, the research incorporates the Stressor-Emotion model and shows that negative emotions elicited by such stressors as Illegitimate Tasks are expressed through Counterproductive Work Behavior and Ostracism (Spector & Fox, 2005). The study received a dimensional perspective of the processes that mediate the effects of workplace stressors on the well-being of employees, thus contributing to current conceptualizations.

Practical Implications

The practical implication of the findings is that it has a great implication for organizational management and human resource practices. One of the things that organizations ought to do is reduce Illegitimate Task assignment, such that job design is clear and correlates to the professional identity of employees. Training interventions aimed towards promoting a positive workplace culture would help curtail the formation of Toxic workplaces, thus curbing the occurrence of Counterproductive Work Behavior and Ostracism. In addition to this, frequent monitoring of job tasks and employee feedback systems may enable efficient identification and correction of possible causes of work-related stress that will eventually lead to increased job satisfaction and hence increased employee productivity. The results of the study have supported the findings of other literature on the

negative impact of Illegitimate Tasks and Toxic Workplaces on the health of employees. As an example, Eatough et al. (2016) were able to show that tasks that are identified as illegitimate are linked with elevated amounts of stress as well as declines in job satisfaction. Likewise, the study in Leka and Jain (2020) shows that organizational culture affects the behavior and mental health of the employees. This study confirms these associations and explains the mediating pathways, which build on and contribute to existing information in this field.

Limitations

Although the research study gives significant findings, there are weaknesses that need to be considered. The cross-sectional design limits the capacity to establish the causality of variables. Moreover, as the study is based on self-reported data, it can also give rise to biases during responses. Longitudinal designs may be implemented in further studies to get a more informed picture of the relations between Illegitimate Tasks, employee outcomes, and workplace environment, with the incorporation of more objective measures.

Conclusion

In short, this paper presents substantial results in the form of the dramatic effect of Illegitimate Tasks on employee Burnout, mediated by Toxic Workplace environments, Counterproductive Work Behavior, and Workplace Ostracism. The research also provides a rich source and framework for developing knowledge of workplace stressors due to the

integration and extension of available and existing theoretical concepts. The simple suggestions based on the conclusions will make it possible to discuss the organizational policies based on encouragement of healthier working conditions, thus improving the well-being of employees and the performance of the organization.

Future Research Directions

Future research can also be conducted based on the findings of the present study, since the longitudinal impacts of Illegitimate Tasks on the well-being of employees can be analyzed, namely, how these dynamics change over time. Examination of personal variances, for example, resilience and coping mechanisms, could also offer perceptions on the component of stress affecting the negative effects of workplace demands. Also, analyzing how artefacts of such practices as organizational culture and leadership styles affect the likelihood and perception of Illegitimate Tasks may provide approaches to reducing the negative impact of these activities. The results of this study could be generalized with more confidence, and based on them, it would be possible to develop interventions applicable universally by expanding the research to other cultural and organizational settings. The topic of future studies should address these avenues and enhance a more sensitive view of the mechanisms involved in workplace stress, and lead to the development of a supportive workplace setting.

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