

SILENCED BY DESPOTIC LEADERSHIP: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF JOB TENSIONS AND MODERATING INFLUENCE OF PSYCAP ON EMPLOYEE SILENCE

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Abstract

Dark leadership is rising, and scholars are paying more attention to reducing its harmful outcomes. Present research probes the harmful effects of despotic leadership due to subordinates' silent behavior, along with mediating role of job tensions. This research used the moderating effect of the employees' PsyCap by using the conservations of resources theory. A self-administered, questionnaire-based survey was used to collect data from employees of Tourism industry. This study employed a three-wave design with a three-week time gap between them. A total of 408 relevant surveys were statistically assessed through Hayes's (2012) process bootstrapping, and SMART-PLS was used to confirm convergent and discriminant validity. According to the study's findings, despotic leadership is strongly associated with job tensions and employee silence, and these positive effects are buffered in the presence of strong subordinates' PsyCap. Furthermore, PsyCap' strong subordinates were studied to reduce the positive association of despotic leadership on job tensions and employee silence. In contrast, it reverses the positive relationship of despotic leadership with job tensions and employee silence. Our study adds to the scant body of research on the detrimental impacts of despotic leadership on followers by focusing on the conservation of resource viewpoints. Present study also contributed by establishing when and how these impacts could be mitigated or overcome. The evidence from our study points to ways that policymakers and organizations can lessen the harmful effects of despotic leadership.

Keywords: *Employees' Perceptions of Despotic Leadership, Employee Silence, Job Tensions, Employees' Psychological capital (PsyCap), and Conservations of Resources Theory*

INTRODUCTION

The extensive research on organizational leadership focuses on positive facets instead of dishonest or dysfunctional leadership practices (Ahmad et al., 2023). Many studies have found leadership destructive or dark aspects (Naseer et al., 2016; Thoroughgood et al., 2018; Mackey et al., 2021). Moreover, scholars have exposed leadership's deleterious forms, which may have a detrimental effect on job performance (Ahmad et al., 2023), work engagement (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020), career satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2016), organizational citizenship behavior (Wu, Peng, & Estay, 2018), creativity (Lee et al., 2013), job satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Raja et al., 2020). These leaders cause job stress, emotional exhaustion (Tepper, 2000; Khan et al., 2019), deviant work behavior (Mackey et al., 2019), counterproductive work behavior (Brender-Ilan & Sheaffer, 2019), and absenteeism (Tepper et al., 2006; Labrague et al., 2020). Such harmful leadership practices have been studied under names such as petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), supervisor undermining (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), destructive leadership (Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010), and despotic leadership (Aronson, 2001). De Hoogh & Den Hartog (2008) posit that despotic leadership displays important forms of deleterious leadership styles.



Despotic leadership has been characterized as leaders exhibiting dictatorial and assertive behaviors with a desire for self-aggrandizement, self-serving, and mistreatment of their subordinates (Islam et al., 2020). Schyns & Schilling (2013) studied that despotic leaders expect unconditional obedience from their employees. They exercise harsh and brutal tactics to influence subordinates for one-self. These leaders act against their organizations' and employees' interests by engaging in self-centered and immoral activities (Aronson, 2001). Despotic leaders' fraudulent and unlawful behavior in the organization severely impacts subordinates' creativity and citizenship behaviors. (Naseer et al., 2016). Such type of leadership is associated with emotional exhaustion and work-family conflicts (Nauman et al., 2018), job stress (Raja et al., 2020), work withdrawal behavior (Nauman et al., 2020), job dissatisfaction (Islam et al., 2020), workplace deviance (Mackey et al., 2019 and adversely associated to performance (Islam et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2021), job satisfaction, psychological well-being (Raja et al., 2020), work engagement (Jabeen, & Rahim 2020; Ahmad & Gao, 2018), innovative behavior (Ahmad, Khan, & Iqbal, 2021). Although studies show that despotic leadership is detrimental to subordinates, there is a scarcity of studies on its harmful impacts on subordinates' passive behavior in terms of silence and the mediating role of employee job tensions.

The adverse impact of despotic leadership extends beyond employees, including the organization, customers, workers' families, and the community (Nauman et al., 2018). According to research, these adverse outcomes of despotic leadership are a significant concern for organizations (Naseer et al., 2016). Present study employed the conservation of resources theory as a foundation that provides insight into despotic leadership and passive employee response (Witt & Carlson, 2006; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Xu et al., 2015). COR theory proposes that individuals feel stress in response to an actual or impending loss of resources. (Hobfoll, 1989). In addition, resources might be depleted when people face despotic leadership. Therefore, they struggle to save their remaining resources and defend themselves from future loss of resources and depletion (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). According to the conservation of resources theory, hurt employees from despotic leadership save their valuable job resources in a way that they seldom respond or complain against their higher-ranking leadership (Sarwar et al., 2017; De Clercq et al., 2018). They rely on themselves to protect valuable job resources like continuous employment or promotion prospects. Hence, upset subordinates save their limited resources and reduce their job tension such that they prefer the passive or avoidant dealing method, which involves separating oneself from the cause of the stressor.

Moreover, previous studies on dark supervision show that hurt employees involve regulative techniques like avoiding interaction to sustain relationships and adopting intentional feedback avoidance practices (Whitman et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2015; Dehkharghani et al., 2022). Where employees' silence is regarded as the subordinates intentionally hiding crucial or potentially meaningful and sensitive information, they deliberately withhold problems, suggestions, comments, or complaints about their jobs and their workplace (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009; Knoll et al., 2016; Uys, 2022). Hence, subordinates' silence is another employee's natural and logical response to leaders' misuse (Frommer et al., 2021), and studies on the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence are relatively scarce.

In line with, despotic leadership shows behavior such as ridiculing, fraudulent, unethical, and self-serving behavior, which would cause job tensions. Employees' psychological job strain is related to psychological responses to perceived disruptions in their workplace setting, which is referred to as job tension (Yousaf et al., 2023; Fakunmoju et al., 2010; Karamushka et al., 2019). Job tension is a type of stress in the job that arises when individuals react emotionally to interruptions in their work environments (Hochwarter, 2005; Andrews et al., 20015). Job tension impacts both personal and organizational outcomes (Steffensen et al., 2022). Therefore, distressed employees safeguard their precious resources by adopting passive dealing practices to avoid job tensions. The current study investigates to expand on this line of research by suggesting job tensions as a critical mediating mechanism. In particular, under job tension, this study recommends employee silence as a safe approach for employees to save the remaining resources from despotic leadership.



Researchers have underlined the importance of personal resources that allow subordinates to be flexible and adapt to resource-draining situations (Paul et al., 2016). According to a study, individual resources impact employees' perceptions of mistreatment and their response (Martinko et al., 2013). The conceptual model of despotic leadership posits the importance of employees' psychological resources in resolving work-related issues (DeClercq et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2020). Psychological capital is a valuable personal resource related to an employee's positive psychological development state, classified by self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism (Youssef & Luthans, 2012; Nolzen, 2018; Ho & Chan, 2022). Psychological capital has gained prominence as a prominent psychological resource that moderates the effects of emotionally stressful workplace events such as dark supervision (Avey et al., 2021; Gill et al., 2019; Agarwal, 2018). Furthermore, according to scholars, psychological capital is favorably and strongly related to employee well-being and adversely related to occupational tension and anxiety (Rahimnia, Mazidi, & Mohammadzadeh, 2013; Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011).

PsyCap is a valuable personal resource enabling people to deal optimally with leadership hostility, which may mitigate the consequences of despotic leadership on subordinates' silence and lessen job tensions. Employees with low PsyCap lack the personal resources to cope effectively with despotic leadership. Job tensions will be heightened in these circumstances. Employees with strong PsyCap, on the other hand, are likely to be better equipped to deal with stressful events such as despotic leadership and hence less likely to experience stress as a result of such circumstances. For example, Narsa & Wijayanti (2021) and Patnaik et al. (2021) found that employees with more significant amounts of psychological capital adapt to stressful events more readily and behave favorably instead of an unfavorable emotional condition. As a result, current study argue that psychological capital may give employees the resources and ability to deal with despotic leadership, mitigating the favorable effect of despotic leadership on employee silence and reducing work-related tensions. Hence present research proposes psychological capital as a plausible moderator of the association between despotic leadership and employees' job tensions; and despotic leadership and employee silence. Despite its intuitive appeal, empirical research on the association between despotic leadership and personal resources is limited (Bouckennooghe et al., 2019; DeClercq et al., 2019).

The current study adds to the existing leadership research in various ways. First and foremost, it expands our understanding of the harmful implications of despotic leadership. By relating leaders' maltreatment to subordinates' silence, this study investigated employees' passive approach apart from the hostile approach to understand better what occurs under despotic leadership. Moreover, choosing confrontational responses that may exacerbate or even end their relationships under despotic supervision still, most employees continue to use passive coping strategies to prevent leader hurt (Chi & Liang, 2013; Lam & Xu, 2019; Moin et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is crucial to examine how these subordinates continually interact with their despotic leadership conceptually and empirically (DeClercq et al., 2019). Silence is a particularly significant passive response in this respect owing to its pervasive negative influence on organizations at all levels (Lam & Xu, 2019). In addition, employee salience caused many well-known business crises, such as Enron and WorldCom's demise. Similarly, without crucial and timely feedback from subordinates, organizations cannot address highly significant issues and generate immediate solutions for continuous development (Hao et al., 2022; Rai & Agarwal, 2018; Cullinane & Donaghey, 2020).

In addition, these factors are investigated in economically impoverished nations like Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2021; Ahmad2021) where the hostile effects of despotic leadership are visible in subordinate behavior. In the Pakistani cultural context, this research elucidates these research gaps and studied the harmful consequences of despotic leadership on employees' job tensions and silent behavior. It is important to comprehend how it functions for organizations in emerging countries, particularly those characterized by collectivism, high power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and insufficient job opportunities. (Hofstede, 2010; Raja et al., 2019).

Second, by investigating the moderating effect of PsyCap, our study advances this line of research by establishing a relationship context in which despotic leadership has potentially detrimental effects. Psychological capital is a valuable personal resource for empowering people to cope optimally with



leadership aggression. The present research donates significantly to the leadership literature by analyzing the interaction effect of despotic leadership behavior and PsyCap on employees from a resource conservation viewpoint. Additionally, this research expands on this field of research by using job tensions as a crucial mediating variable. Finally, despite the well-established detrimental effect of silence, the study on its antecedents is sparse (Morrison, 2014; Lam & Xu, 2019; Parlar et al., 2022). In addition, the current research contributes significantly to this inadequacy by examining the effect of leadership (i.e., despotic leadership and PsyCap proposed by Bouckennooghe et al. (2019) and De Clercq et al. (2019) along with the underlying mechanism of job tensions. Our results emphasize the debilitating impact of despotic leadership through an empirical perspective and critically affect organizations seeking to avoid silence. Additionally, it heightens leaders' awareness of their leadership style's influence on their employees' well-being and silent behavior.

Theory and hypotheses development

Conservation of resources (COR) theory

The conservation of resources theory describes how stress originates and how people respond to it. People strive to protect, safeguard, and create resources such as social support, future career and enhanced personal traits, or ability development (Hobfoll, 1989). Resources are essential because they help people to achieve meaningful goals and support people in identifying themselves as who they are. Fundamentally, humans want more resources to fulfil their basic needs and avoid situations that might cause them to lose valuable resources, which would make them feel uncomfortable or stressed (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). When stressors don't threaten people, they are more likely to obtain, retain, and invest the resources they need to fulfill their work needs and build up extra resources for when situations get stressful again (Hobfoll, 2001). However, when people are under stressful conditions, they work hard to keep their resources safe and secure themselves from losing them (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). To accomplish this, individuals isolate themselves from the stresses by devoting some efforts to passive and defensive responses (Dong & Chung, 2021; Hobfoll & Shirom, 1993). Misused subordinates from leadership intentionally hide important information or suggestions and adopt passive behavior to avoid upcoming stress or resources depletion in the shape of employment or career decay. However, when these subordinates develop personal resources, i.e., PsyCap, that is self-confidence, self-efficacy, hope and optimism. Psychological capital provides resources to hurt subordinates and the ability to deal with despotic leadership, mitigating the harmful effect of despotic leadership and decreasing work-related tensions.

Despotic leadership and employee silence

This study draws on the conservations of resources theory, which posits that resource loss is far more prominent than resource gain (Hobfoll, 2011). People who have drained their resources are strongly compelled to defend their scarce resources and minimize additional or excessive depletion of the remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Victimized people frequently save enduring resources by decreasing their determination, lowering their commitment to the company, and limiting their performance attempts (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). According to Wu Peng & Estay (2018), employees may engage in avoidant or passive responses to relieve the psychological stress caused by threatening stressors. Therefore, in this research, propose that hurt employees use silence as a passive and necessary response to save the remaining resource and reduce psychological distress affected by despotic leadership.

Silence captures employees' voluntary withholding of potentially useful ideas or information about work-related concerns. It is not a situation of non-communication, i.e., having nothing to say; however, workers consciously decide not to disclose problems or keep ideas (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Cullinane & Donaghey, 2020). As a result, scholars regard silence as a passive unfavorable work practice that would be destructive to organizations (John & Manikandan, 2019). Using conservations of resources theory, posit that standing up against leadership is typically expensive and unsafe. Additionally, it involves additional determination as subordinates must refine their concepts, prepare for the ideal situation, and then express themselves appropriately (Lam & Xu, 2019). Subordinates who speak up can be denoted as complainers or provocateurs, and as a response, they may lose valuable individual or professional resources (Detert & Trevio, 2010; Yang & Sekiguchi,



2021). Communicating about essential work problems may significantly jeopardize the status quo or leadership, resulting in a drain on existing resources and future resource depletion (Wang et al., 2020). However, when confronted with despotic leadership, keeping silent in a job effectively protects one's remaining resources. It takes lower effort and energy than speaking up (Rani et al., 2021). Moreover, hiding crucial information would help avoid further resource loss that might result from challenging current work settings. Following this reasoning, this study postulate silence as a passive dealing mechanism for emotionally drained employees when faced with continuous despotic leadership. Thus, propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Employees' perceptions of despotic leadership positively relate to employee silence.

Despotic leadership and job tensions

As demonstrated by oppressing and demeaning subordinates for self-gain, despotic leadership is a severe workplace stressor that threatens employees' valuable resources like employment stability and career opportunities (Naseer et al., 2016; Ahmad et al., 2021). It also drains employees' job resources, such as self-confidence, and diminishes job satisfaction (Islam et al., 2020). Additionally, victimized employees would expend more effort and energy to survive under despotic leadership (Nauman et al., 2020). Therefore, job tensions arise as hurt employees become vulnerable and lack the psychological, individual, or social resources to deal with their despotic leadership (Hobfoll, 1989; Ahmad et al., 2021; Faase et al., 2022). Job tensions are a persistent form of apprehension and stress, including emotional and psychological distress resulting from job stressors such as despotic leadership. Therefore, suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Despotic leadership is positively related to subordinate job tensions.

Job Tensions and Employee Silence

Job tensions are discussed as the detrimental physical and psychological responses that arise when despotic leadership fails to meet the demands of employees. Hence, due to leaders' such dark behavior, employees take more job tensions which provide serious harm to employees and would cause further resource depletion (Bartsch et al., 2020). Employees who take more workplace tensions might hold back concerns over their despotic leaders for the risk of additional resource loss (e.g., employment, promotion, and salary increases) and hostile confrontations (Raja et al., 2020). In addition, they may not endanger their existing resources to alter the status quo and contribute to improving the present working conditions (Kong, Liu, & Weng, 2020). Therefore, being silent on the job is a safe method to conserve employees' remaining resources when working under conduct work settings. It takes less effort and resource-draining than speaking up (Frieder et al., 2015; Gopakumar et al., 2020). Hence, recommend the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Subordinate job tensions are positively related to employee silence.

The mediating role of employee Job Tensions

Job tensions express subordinates' experiences of being stressed, pressured, and exhausted of their mental and physical resources (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004; Drobic et al., 2011). Job tensions are severe stress and unease that contain substantial physical, emotional, and mental distress caused by workplace stressors like despotic leadership (Faase et al., 2022). Such leadership is also a significant factor in reducing employees' work-life quality (Nouman et al., 2018) and a key factor in many critical organizational outcomes, such as reduced job performance and turnover intention (Naseer et al., 2016). Additionally, such despotic leadership produce job tensions that contribute to the threatened and possible depletion of resources (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Kong, Liu, & Weng, 2020). Employees that take workplace tensions would hide their concerns about their despotic leaders in order to face greater resource loss in terms of lower career or appraisals and more uncomfortable interactions (Nauman et al., 2018).

As a result, employees who have been affected are encouraged to offset the harmful effects of the source of stress (i.e., despotic leadership). Therefore, employees would instead remain silent to protect their scarce precious resources and focus on preventing additional resource loss at the organization's expense (Chen et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019). In this research, propose that silence is an appropriate passive response for hurt employees to save the limited resource and alleviate psychological distress caused by job tensions. The present study explores the association between



despotic leadership and employee silence through job tensions. Hence, present research concentrate on job tensions as a manifestation of the strain caused by exposure to despotic leadership and suggest the following:

Hypothesis 4: Subordinate job tensions mediate the relationship between despotic leadership and employees' silence.

Moderating Role of PsyCap

Following Youssef-Morgan et al. (2015), PsyCap contains four facets: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. PsyCap refers to an employee's profound personality development stage, which is categorized by: (1) having assurance (self-efficacy) in one's ability to take on and complete complex endeavors; (2) adopting an optimistic approach (optimism) to current and future success; (3) in terms of striving toward objectives and where essential extending routes to goals (hope); and (4) enduring and bouncing back (resiliency) when confronted with obstacles and hardship to achieve success (Luthans et al., 2007; Kumar et al., 2022). Moreover, subordinates with high PsyCap are regarded as a critical job resource for protecting employees from harmful situations (Ugwu et al., 2014; Novitasari et al., 2020). Subordinates strong in PsyCap are deeply engaged in their jobs, are positive, devoted, and can deal with potentially harmful conditions well. They also employ their proficiencies, abilities, and commitment to work (Nolzen, 2018).

Moreover, PsyCap has been highlighted as the most important in describing many employee job outcomes (Salanova et al., 2019; Purwanto et al., 2021). Employees strong in PsyCap are innovative and capable of doing something novel (Novitasari et al., 2020). Employee PsyCap is positively related to job performance (Shahzad, 2022; Peng & Chen, 2022), work satisfaction (Nolzen, 2018), employee engagement (Slåtten et al., 2021), citizenship behavior (Bogler & Somech, 2019), and job commitment (Lather & Kaur, 2015), enhance the quality of work-life (Allameh et al., 2018) and an adverse association with turnover intentions (Karatepe & Avci 2017).

Subordinates working under despotic leadership involve behaviors that are likely to hurt employees emotionally. Such subordinates are frequently mistreated and exploited and tend to evaluate their environment negatively and lose career satisfaction (Avey et al., 2011; Ahmad et al., 2021). Consistent exposure to such harmful behaviors enhances employees' dissatisfaction and deviance (Islam et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2022). When subordinates' personal resources are depleted due to workplace ill-treatment, they would feel anxious or depressed about their situation and lose confidence in their ability to perform work (Raja et al., 2020). These harmful events potentially erode subordinates' psychological states over time, shifting their focus from active to passive, i.e., silent behavior (Deci & Cascio, 1972; Avey et al., 2021). Hence under such harmful working conditions, employees need the capacity to cope and recover from obstacles or adversity (Luthans et al., 2007; Agarwal, 2018; Gill, 2019). PsyCap provides important psychological resources that give injured subordinates confidence and resilience (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016). Employees with strong PsyCap are optimistic, dedicated and proficient that recover the negative effects of despotic leadership. PsyCap buffers the adverse effects of subordinates' behavior in a way to enhance hope, self-esteem and capability to attain their goals (Novitasari et al., 2020).

Despite the intuitive appeal of the association between despotic leadership and PsyCap, efforts to investigate the relationship between despotic leadership and PsyCap have been far. Few of the handful of research investigating despotic leadership and PsyCap affiliation are inadequate to analyses it's all four aspects optimism, efficacy, hope, and resilience (Liao and Liu, 2015; Lee, Chou, & Wu, 2016; Ahmad et al., 2019). According to researchers, the combined effect of psychological capital's four core components offers insight into the role of personal resources and implementation for managing them (Karatepe & Talebzadeh, 2016; Okun, 2022). This study proposes that psychological capital serves as a resource for harmed employees, reversing the harmful effects of despotic leadership on employee job tensions and silence. Furthermore, this research adds to the conservation of resources theory by investigating how employees' PsyCap serves as a job resource when confronted with despotic leadership. Therefore, based on the definition and prior study, current study postulate that psychological capital promotes positive thinking and enhances

subordinates' confidence, leading to decreased job tensions and a silent employee approach. Hence, this research offers the following hypothesis:

H5. Psychological capital is negatively related to (a) job tensions and (b) employees' silence.

H5c. Psychological capital moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and employees' silence.

H5d. Psychological capital moderates the relationship between job tensions and employees' silence.

H5e. Psychological capital moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and employees' silence via employee-job tensions.

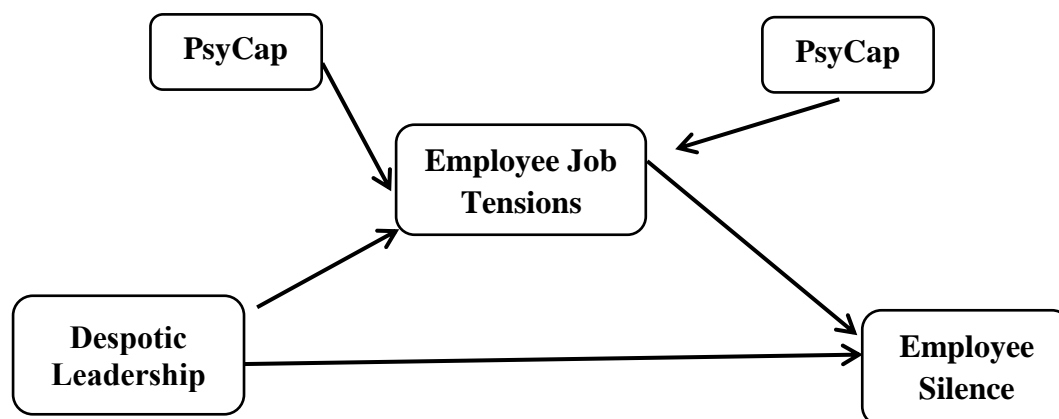


Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Despotic Leadership

Research Method

Sample and Data Collection

This study gathered data from the tourism sector, hotel industry employees located in area of Murree and Naran (Tourism areas) where more the 50% tourist visit every year. This study employed a three-wave design with a three-week time gap between them to avoid the problem of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The research has investigated employees' behavioral responses under despotic leadership and has used a time gap of this duration (Nauman et al., 2019) and is motivated by our desire to avoid the issues of reverse causality. Johnson et al. (2011) studied that a 3-week time lag between independent and dependent variables reduced correlations across constructs by 43% in research addressing common method variance. Furthermore, the essence of our studied variables demands self-reports from employees, such as rating perceived despotic leadership. The time-lag design in mediation models also manages reverse causality between variables. Additionally, low to moderate correlation size shows that common method variance is not an issue across the studied variables. All data in this study were gathered from identical participants, and time-lag replies were matched with increasing the accuracy of the results.

The questionnaires were conducted in English, the country's official language for business and higher education. The investigations were accompanied in each session by a cover letter noting that the research had been ethically granted and that respondents would trust anonymity. The cover letters detailed that no personally identifiable details will be disclosed, that only combined information will be published, and that they may leave the survey at any stage. The researchers also highlighted that there were no correct or incorrect answers, that it was likely for respondents' replies to differ, and that it was essential to answer questions carefully and fairly. The following ethics minimize the chances of compliance and social desirability biases (Spector, 2006). Present study measured employees' perceptions of despotic leadership and job tensions in the first survey, their PsyCap in the second, and their silence behavior in the third survey.



A total of 490 questionnaires were sent out to prospective respondents in the ins, who were selected randomly from personnel lists received from the HR offices of the companies. The number of participants chosen varied in every organization based on top leadership suggestions for who would be considered responders. Moreover, the random sample of respondents taken in alphabetical order from these suggested samples reduced the likelihood of biased sampling, indicating that the respondents were relevant to their paying organizations. We received back 460 surveys in session one, 435 in the second session, and 420 in the third session of the 490 initially administered questionnaires. After removing questionnaires with missing data, kept 408 finalized response sets for data analysis, with a reply rate of 66% male and 34% female of those who responded. The duration spent at work for all employees surveyed was three years.

Measurement

The scales used to measure the four focal concepts were validated by past studies. The anchors on each scale were 5-point Likert scales.

Despotic Leadership

De Hoogh & Den Hartog (2008) developed a six-item scale to assess employees' exposure to despotic leadership, which has also been used in previous research on this style of leadership in Pakistan (e.g., Nauman et al., 2018; Naseer et al. 2016). Participants responded, i.e., my boss has no pity or compassion, and my supervisor seeks revenge when wronged, which was measured at time 1. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.86. All items were loaded between 0.66 and 0.81, with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.51, establishing convergent validity.

Employee Silence

subordinates' silence was evaluated using a five items scale developed by Tangirala & Ramanujam (2008). For example, "I chose to remain silent when I had concerns about my work, "On a Five point Likert scale, participants were asked how much they hide suggestions, problems, or facts concerning crucial workplace issues, which was measured at time 3. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. The items were loaded between 0.68 and 0.82, with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.58, confirming convergent validity.

Job Tension

House & Rizzo (1972) created a seven-item measure to assess job tension. Using a five-point Likert scale, respondents were asked, i.e., my job tends to affect my health directly, and I work under a great deal of stress, were two examples which were measured at time 1. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.85. All items were loaded between 0.52 to 0.87, with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.54, approving convergent validity.

Psychological Capital

The PsyCap (CPC-12) scale measures hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism. On a five-point Likert scale, each of the four components is scored. The CPC-12 has demonstrated high reliability and validity (Lorenz, Beer, Putz, & Heinitz, 2016), which was measured at time 2. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.89. All items were loaded in the 0.61 to 0.81 range, with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.50, indicating convergent validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To estimate the measuring model, construct reliability, convergent and discriminant validity tests were performed. Individual Cronbach's alpha coefficients were estimated for each research variable to evaluate construct reliability. All constructs had a Cronbach's alpha value larger than 0.7, the acceptability level proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Additionally, composite reliability (CR) was estimated to ensure construct reliability. The outcome showed that every value was more than 0.7 (Kline, 2010; Werts, Linn, & Joreskog, 1974). The factor loading of the items was used to measure indicator reliability. Loading larger than 0.5 is acceptable; according to Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Gudergan (2017), all Items scored greater than 0.5. Likewise, the average variance extracted (AVE) has been used to measure the convergent validity. The findings demonstrate that all

values were more than 0.50, as proposed by Hair, Babin, Anderson, and Black (2018). See (Appendix A).

Moreover, evaluated model fitness of this study using “comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 , standardized root mean square residuals (SRMR) ≤ 0.10 , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 , and chi-square (χ^2/df) ≤ 3.0 ”, and model was found to be fit (i.e., $\chi^2/df = 2.74$, RMSEA = 0.067, CFI = 0.93, SRMR = 0.071) Williams et al. (2009).

HTMT was also used in this study to evaluate discriminant validity. Becker & Ringle (2018) state that the HTMT refers to heterotrait-heteromethod correlations, which are correlations of the mean values of the latent variables distributed across constructs in comparison to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations of the indicators measuring the same construct. Henseler et al. (2015) suggested that HTMT levels of more than 0.90 might be problematic. Table 1 showed that all values were less than the benchmark value of 0.90, suggesting adequate discriminant validity. Hence, this study’s measurement model achieved good discriminant validity.

Table 1: Results of Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

No.	Factors	1	2	3	4
1	Despotic Leadership				
2	Employee Silence	0.644			
3	Job Tensions	0.599	0.737		
4	Psychological Capital	0.503	0.562	0.608	

Fornell and Larcker (1981) placed the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) at all constructs’ diagonal elements of the correlation matrix. The outer model is discriminately valid since these diagonal items were greater than the other elements in the row and column where they were placed. The hypothesis testing proved valid and reliable based on the construct validity of the outer model. According to Table 2, each research variable’s average extracted variance had a square root that was larger than the correlations among other variables, suggesting that the variable had adequate discriminant validity (Chin, 1998; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Results of Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

No.	Factors	1	2	3	4
1	Despotic Leadership	0.714			
2	Employee Silence	0.661	0.761		
3	Job Tensions	0.604	0.642	0.735	
4	Psychological Capital	-0.508	-0.567	-0.619	0.707

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

First, Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for all variables, including the mean and standard deviations. Second, this table shows the correlation analysis; all associations were according to the prediction. Despotic leadership is strongly associated with subordinates’ silence ($r = .589^{**}$, $p < .01$), job tensions ($r = .529^{**}$, $p < .01$), and PsyCap ($r = -.4.73^{**}$, $p < .01$). Notably, none of the model’s control variables—age, gender, and tenure—had any impact on the variables being studied. This study followed Becker’s (2005) recommendation and eliminated such control variables from further study. Moreover, to avoid reduced statistical power and elevated Type II error, he suggested removing uncorrelated control variables from studies (i.e., incorrectly assuming no connection available between the substantive variables and the criterion variables).

In order to assess the scale’s internal reliability, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is also given, with a value of 0.7 or above indicating adequate reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 1995). The Cronbach’s alpha values of despotic leadership (0.86), Psychological capital (0.89), employee silence (.88), and job tensions (0.85), all exhibit excellent outcomes. The recommended value of skewness is ± 1 , and the value of Kurtosis is ± 3 . All reported values indicate excellent findings. The tolerance value was more than 0.1. Table 3 indicates that all values exhibit outstanding results.

Furthermore, the relationship between the variables was reported to be less than 0.85, as demonstrated in Table 3. It means there is no collinearity between the variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Reliabilities

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Despotic leadership	3.15	.762	(.86)			
Psychological Capital	3.18	.692	-.473***	(.89)		
Job Tensions	2.81	.871	.529***	-.514***	(.85)	
Employee silence	2.47	.982	.589***	-.481***	.726***	(.88)
Skewness	± 1	----	-.261	-.472	.168	.644
Kurtosis	± 3	----	-1.570	-1.543	-1.766	-.985
Tolerance	>0.1	----	.665	.531	.580	.473

Note. N=408, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

The results of the study Regression Analysis

According to the regression analysis's findings, despotic leadership and employee silence are positively associated (see Table 4, $\beta = .507$, $R^2 = .347$, and $P < .000$). In addition, despotic leadership is also positively linked with job tensions ($\beta = .575$, $R^2 = .280$, and $P < .000$), employee job tensions are positively related to employee silence ($\beta = .575$, $R^2 = .527$, and $P < .000$). Employee PsyCap, in contrast, has an adverse effect on employee silence ($\beta = -.403$, $R^2 = .232$, and $P < .000$), and employee PsyCap is negatively associated with job tensions ($\beta = -.543$, $R^2 = .264$, and $P < .000$). The study hypotheses are significantly supported by all the variables. All associations were according to the prediction.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

No.	Descriptions	β	R^2	T	P
H:1	Despotic Leadership → Employee Silence	.507 ***	0.347	14.69	.000
H:2	Despotic Leaderships → Job Tensions	.575***	0.280	12.56	.000
H:3	Job Tensions → Employee Silence	.573***	0.527	21.27	.000
H:5a	Psychological capital → Employee Silence	-.403***	0.232	-11.20	.000
H:5b	Psychological capital → Job Tensions	-.543***	0.264	-12.06	.000
Level of Significant *** $P < .001$, ** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$.					

Mediation Analysis

Hayes (2012) bootstrapping approach is used in this study (Table 5). In the mediation model's first step, there is a significant relationship between despotic leadership and employee silence ($b = .2449$, $df^2 (405)$, $t = 7.54$, and $p = < .001$). Step two demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between despotic leadership and job tensions ($b = .5749$, $R^2 = .28$, $df^2 (406)$, $t = 12.56$, and $p = < .001$). Stage three of the mediation study suggests that job tension is also strongly related to job silence ($b = .4558$, $df^2 (405)$, $t = 15.26$, and $p = < .001$). The fourth step shows that despotic leadership is highly associated with employee silence via job tensions (mediator) ($b = .5070$, $df^2 (406)$, $t = 14.69$, and $p = < .001$). Additionally, the indirect impacts are also shown with a 95% confidence interval that excludes zero in this instance. The effect size is .2620, indicating that the influence is considerably more than zero at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 5 shows that the indirect effect of despotic leadership and subordinate silence via the mediating impact of employee job tensions is also significant. The lower-level confidence interval (LLCI) and upper-level confidence interval (ULCI) both have the same sign since no zero was included.

Given that the direct link between despotic leadership and employee silence in our study is significant, this research suggests, in accordance with Hayes (2012) recommendations, that employee job tensions partially mediate the relationship between them.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis

Sr.#	Indirect Effects of Bootstrap Results	Effect	SE	95%LLCI	95%ULCI
H:4	DL → EJT → ES	.2620	.0283	.2086	.3194
The Effect of Employee Job Tensions as a Mediator Note(s): N = 408. Unstandardized regression coefficients. Bootstrap sample size = 5000. LL = lower limit, CI= confidence interval 95%, UL= upper limit. Path-1 = IV→DV, Path-2 = IV→MV, Path-3 = MV→DV, Path-4 = IV→MV→DV Despotic Leadership = DL, Psychological Capital = PC, Job Tension = JT, Employee Silence = ES					

Moderation Analysis

The association between despotic leadership and employee silence is moderated by the employees' PsyCap, seen in Table 6. Employees' PsyCap considerably weaker the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence. The interaction term results show that ($\beta = -.1848$, $df^2 = 404$, $R^2 = .433$, $\Delta R^2 = .033$ and $p = .000$), despotic leadership impact on employee silence is ($\beta = .401$, $t = 10.66$, $p = .000$), psychological capital (moderator) impact on employee silence is ($\beta = -.219$, $t = 5.98$, $p = .000$). The value of $\Delta R^2 = .033$ shows that the employees' PsyCap strongly changes the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence. Figure 2 depicts it as well.

Table 6: The Psychological Capital Moderating Effect

Descriptions	β	SE	T	P	95%LLCI	95%ULCI
H:5c DL*PC	-.1848 ***	.0380	-4.841	.000	-2.588	-.1093
Conditional direct effects of DL on ES at values of the moderator (i.e., DL* PC)		SCFG	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1SD		1.8333***	.692	.070	.5540	.8312
M		3.833***	.324	.039	.2461	.4027
+1SD		4.25***	.247	.048	.1526	.3427
Note(s): N = 408. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5000; lower limit = LL, confidence interval 95% = CI, upper limit= UL, ***P<.001, **P<.01, *P<.05. (Despotic Leadership = DL, Psychological Capital = PC, Employee Silence = ES.)						

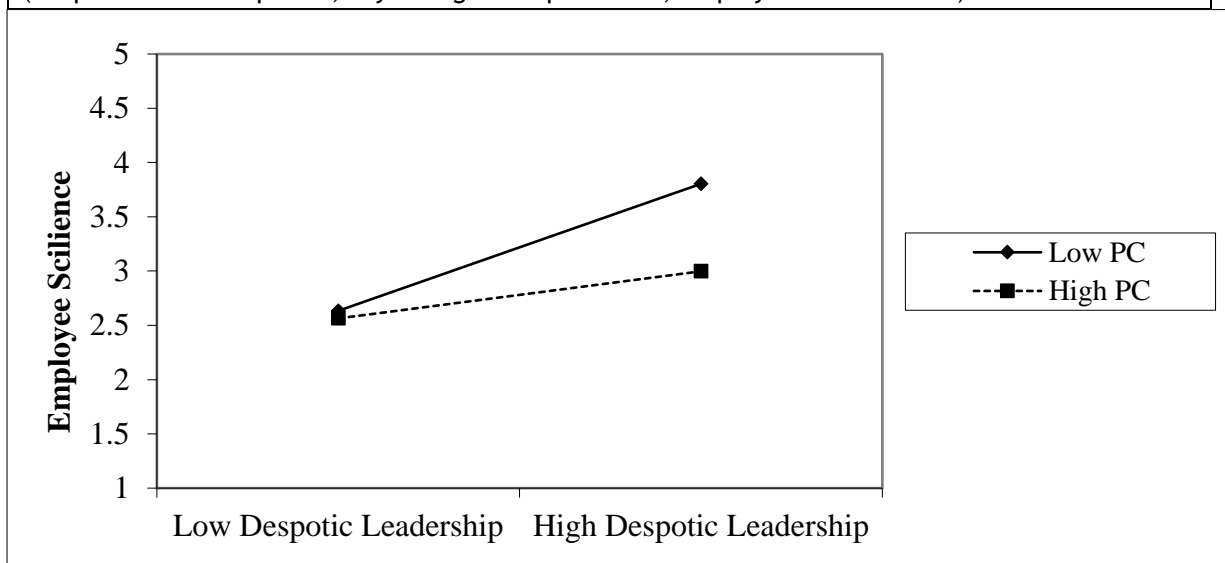


Figure 2: Interactive Effect of Despotic Leadership and PsyCap on Employee Silence

The employees' PsyCap moderates the relationship between job tensions and employee silence Table 7 shows the results. Employees' PsyCap substantially supports and weakens the relationship between job tensions and employee silence. The interaction term results show that ($\beta = -.083$, $df^2 = 404$, $R^2 = .554$, $\Delta R^2 = .012$ and $p = .000$), job tensions effect on employee silence is ($\beta = .515$, $t = 16.62$, and $p = .000$), and psychological capital (moderator) influence on subordinate silence is ($\beta = -.123$, $t = -3.76$, and $p = .000$). The value of $\Delta R^2 = .012$ value exhibited that the subordinates' PsyCap strongly changes the relationship between job tensions and employee silence. As also seen in figure 3.

Table 7: The Psychological Capital Moderating Effect

Descriptions	β	SE	T	P	95%LLCI	95%ULCI
H:5d JT*PC	-.0830 ***	.0250	-3.26	.0000	-.1334	-.0331
Conditional direct effects of JT on ES at values of the moderator (i.e., JT* PC)		SCFG	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1SD		1.8333***	.6920	.0454	.5353	.7138
M		3.833***	.4581	.0353	.3887	.5275
+1SD		4.250***	.4234	.0416	.3415	.5052
Note(s): N = 408. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5000;						
lower limit = LL, confidence interval 95% = CI, upper limit= UL, ***P<.001, **P<.01, *P<.05.						
(Despotic Leadership = DL, Psychological Capital = PC, Job Tension = JT, Employee Silence = ES.)						

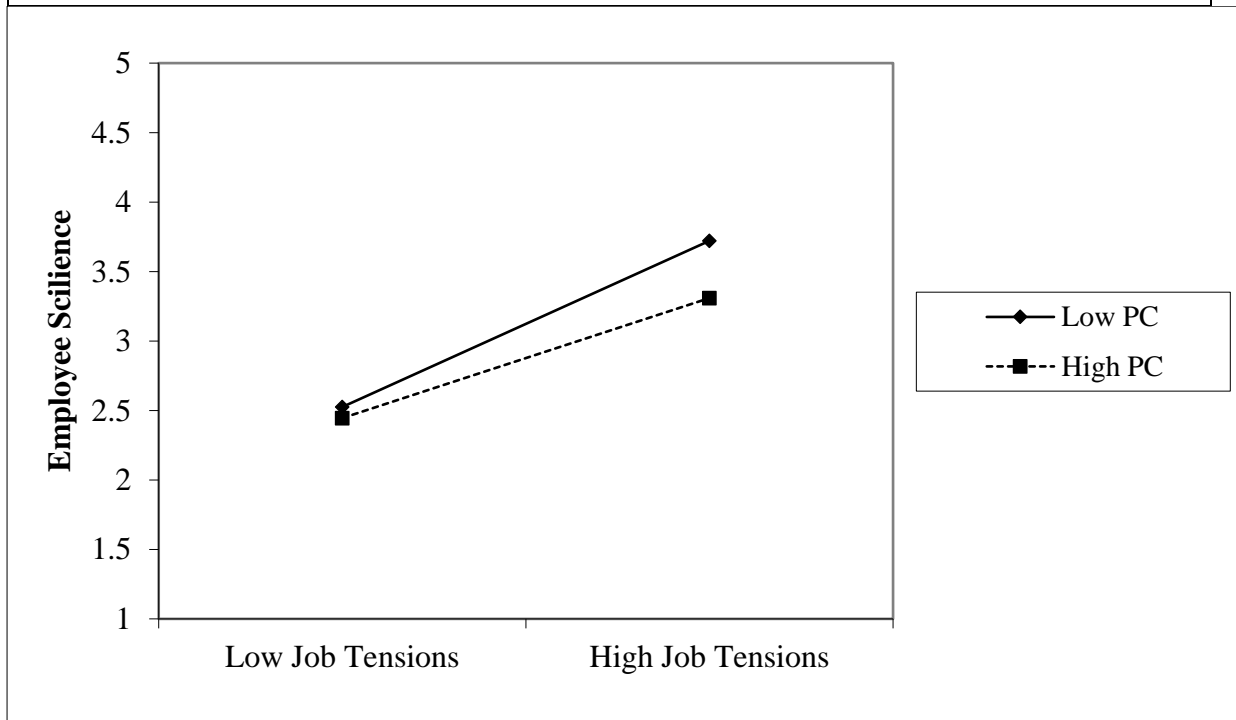


Figure 3: Interactive Effect of Job Tensions and PsyCap on Employee Silence

Moderation Mediation Analysis

The employees' PsyCap moderates the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence via subordinates' job tensions. Employees' PsyCap considerably weakens the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence, see Table 8. The interaction term results show that ($\beta = -.233$, $t = -4.73$, $df^2 = 404$, $R^2 = .402$, $\Delta R^2 = .035$ and $p = .000$), despotic leadership influence on subordinate job tensions ($\beta = .401$, $t = 8.23$, and $p = .000$), subordinate job tensions influence on subordinate silence is ($\beta = .455$, $t = 15.26$, and $p = .000$), despotic leadership impact on subordinate silence is ($\beta = .245$, $t = 7.55$, and $p = .000$), psychological capital (moderator) impact on employee silence is ($\beta = -.359$, $t = -7.56$, and $p = .000$). The value of $\Delta R^2 = .035$ displays that the employees'

PsyCap considerably modifies the relationship between despotic leadership and subordinate silence, as seen in figure 4.

Table 8: Regression Analysis for Moderated Mediation

Index of Moderated Mediation		Index	SE	95%LLCI	95%ULCI
H:5e Mediator: Job Tensions		-.1064	.0181	-.1389	-.0678
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y (Despotic Leadership * PsyCap via Employee Job Tensions on Employee silence)	PsyCap	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1SD	1.833***	.3512	.0387	.2705	.4242
M	3.833***	.1385	.0283	.0842	.1966
+1SD	4.250***	.0942	.0314	.0332	.1585
Note(s): N = 408. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5000;					
lower limit = LL, confidence interval 95% = CI, upper limit= UL, ***P<.001, **P<.01, *P<.05.					
(Despotic Leadership = DL, Psychological Capital = PC, Job Tension = JT, Employee Silence = ES.)					

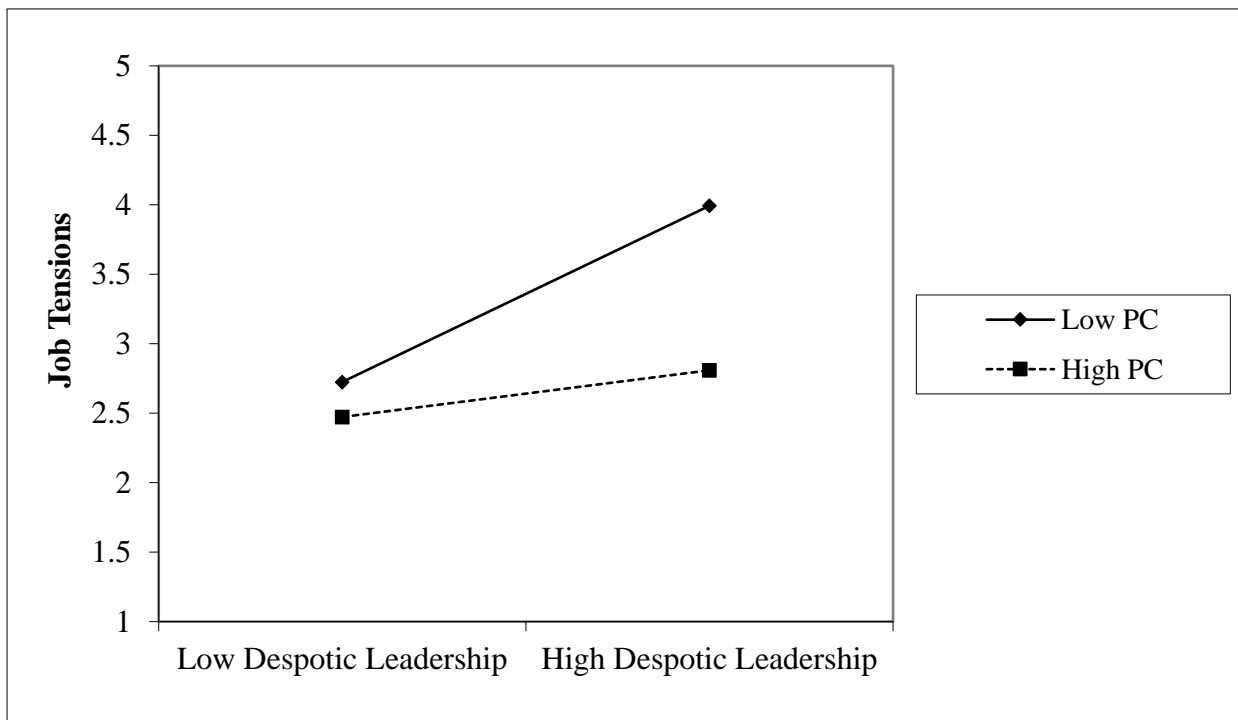


Figure 4: Interactive Effect of Despotic Leadership and PsyCap on Employee Silence via Job Tensions

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research expands ethical business literature by investigating the association between subordinates' perception of despotic leadership and workplace silence, emphasizing unstudied aspects such as employees' job tensions and passive employee response. Most past studies on despotic leadership have highlighted employee outcomes like decreased work performance, citizenship behavior, and creativity (Naseer et al., 2016), or the leader's goal is to gain power and a higher status position in the workplace (De Clercq et al., 2019). Similarly, the study has explored despotic leadership's detrimental impacts on employee job dissatisfaction and organization deviance seen through the perspective of Islamic work ethics (IWE) (Islam et al., 2020). However, there is an absence of studies on why subordinates may remain silent in the organization in the existence of a



harmful leadership type, i.e., despotic leadership. This research contributes to the knowledge of dark leadership by revealing how a strong PsyCap moderates the association between despotic leadership and subordinate silence; employee job tensions and subordinate silence. The present study also examines the association between despotic leadership and employee silence through job tensions.

A robust PsyCap is crucial for subordinates employed under despotic leadership in especially developing countries like Pakistan. Pakistan is top-ranked regarding power distance, collectivism, short-term orientation, and risk avoidance (Hofstede, 2007; Naseer et al., 2016). On the 2020 United Nations Human Development Index, which rates 189 nations, Pakistan was rated 154th, reflecting human development is very low comparatively (Ahmad et al., 2021). Pakistan's citizens confront extreme poverty, high unemployment, and injustice. Employees are more likely to accept power disparities and self-serving leadership in these circumstances. (Nauman et al., 2018; Raja et al., 2020). In this scenario, present research revealed that a strong PsyCap of employees is critical in such an oppressing work environment where employees are abused and neglected. Moreover, this study witnessed that most employees continue to use the passive dealing approach while working under despotic leadership.

Theoretical implications

First, this study makes a significant contribution to the body of literature on despotic leadership by evaluating its effect on subordinates' silence and the underlying mediating role of job tensions, which has not been studied previously. Our findings revealed that when deciding how to deal with despotic leadership in the workplace, injured subordinates prefer to keep silent to retain current resources and avoid future resource loss. Research has witnessed that distressed employees involve information avoidance, feedback withdrawal, and surface acting to deal with everyday interactions with their dark leadership, such as despotic supervision (Whitman et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2022). This study results revealed that being silent in one's job is another passive method preferred by hurt employees to adjust and work with their leadership. In comparison to other passive responses to despotic leadership, employee silence poses a more significant threat to the workplace due to its pervasive negative influence on crucial knowledge and innovative behavior in the organizations (Morrison, 2014; Aboramadan et al., 2020).

In addition, the findings on the PsyCap moderating effect add to the existing leadership literature and provide additional insight that influences the association between despotic leadership and job tensions (Whitman et al., 2014). Our results suggest that when confronted with despotic leadership, the emotional resources of low PsyCap employees deplete more rapidly than those of strong PsyCap employees. Subordinates with greater levels of psychological capital are believed to be better able to deal with stressful situations such as despotic leadership and hence to be less prone to suffer job tensions and adopt passive behavior as a result of such experiences. For example, Roberts et al. (2011) and Wu (2019) revealed that those with greater amounts of psychological capital respond to stressful events more effectively and behave optimistically instead of in a harmful psychological state.

This study is in line with the results of Agarwal et al. (2020), who suggest that employees experience greater stress when the sources of employment resources and job demands (or stresses) are the same. Moreover, our results also support earlier research by Lian et al. (2012) and Avey et al. (2021), which discovered an association between abusive leadership and a high PsyCap, which reduced subordinates' ability to satisfy their basic needs and led to workplace deviance. Present research extends their findings by employing COR theory to establish a relationship between despotic leadership and PsyCap with another significant organizational outcome (i.e., silence). Additionally, this study revealed from the results that strong PsyCap fosters beneficial outcomes (Ozturk, & Karatepe, 2019).

Finally, our results add to dark leadership literature and precursors of silence (Guo et al., 2018; Lam & Xu, 2019; Parlar et al., 2022; Younus et al., 2022). More precisely, our findings demonstrate despotic leadership's essential role in developing subordinates' silent behavior, mainly when PsyCap is strong. The mediating effect of job tensions further emphasizes that employees are unwilling to

speaking out against despotic leadership to safeguard the limited remaining resources. Moreover, this study not only examined the impact of despotic leadership on subordinates' deciding to keep silent and also investigated the underlying process. Our results are compatible with earlier research indicating that hurt subordinates always keep silent, particularly when the offender has a higher social position (Xu et al., 2015; Aboramadan et al., 2020).


Practical implications


Our findings have several significant implications for management. First, organizations should focus more on restraining despotic leadership practices in light of their severe repercussions. Organizations should communicate clearly to policymakers about the negative implications of despotic leadership and may implement regulations or policies to discourage despotic behaviors. Moreover, management considers that in a suppressing environment, hurt subordinates are more chances to remain silent than to express their despotic leadership behavior. Organizations must establish a secure mechanism for subordinates to complain or speak up about any despotic leadership behavior in the organization and shield strategies to safeguard them from deviance. Furthermore, the underlying function of job tensions draws the attention of organizations to the significance of providing a safe working environment to minimize such job strain inside the organization (Halbesleben, 2006; Bartsch, et al., 2020).


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