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ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND LEAVE INTENTION AMONG NURSES: THE ROLES OF OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: *COVID-19 has changed the world as millions of deaths are associated with this pandemic. The situation is not different with healthcare professionals as they have to deal with such patients. COVID-19 has threatened nurses, thereby increased their turnover intention. Therefore, this study is an attempt to understand that through ethical leadership, nurses' turnover intention may be reduced. More specifically, this study investigated the mediating role of occupational commitment between ethical leadership and leave intention; whereas, psychological empowerment has been examined as a conditional variable on the association between ethical leadership and occupational commitment. Current study collected data from 356 nurses in two waves through a questionnaire-based survey. The results revealed that occupational commitment explains the association between ethical leadership and turnover intention. Further, nurses with a high level of psychological empowerment were noted to strengthen the association between ethical leadership and occupational commitment. The study contributes to social exchange theory and has implications for management.*

Keywords*: Ethical Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, Occupational Commitment, Leave Intention, Social Exchange Theory*

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Introduction:

Satisfied employees are recognized for their high level of commitment, exerting their full potential to accomplish organizational goals. However, dissatisfied employees feel exhausted, reckless, and disaffected (Jha, 2011). These negative feelings of employees affect their commitment adversely, leading them to leave the organization, in severe cases, occupation. Tett and Meyer (1993) relate leave intention as an employee's inner cognitive thought to leave the organization. There was already a poor health care system in the developing countries, i.e., Pakistan, and the situation worsened in the pandemic covid-19 the disease (Khattak et al., 2020). The covid-19 pandemic situation has increased the nursing staff's workload, ultimately increasing anxiety and depression in nursing staff. (Lucchini et al., 2020), as several nurses have been defeated by COVID-19 (Chirico et al., 2020). Because of the workload and the pandemic situation, nurses feel depressed, resulting in losing their mental health, ultimately thinking of leaving the organization (Ranney et al., 2020; Shahrour & Dardas, 2020). According to WHO (2006), there is already a shortage of 4.3 million nurses, which could rise to 12.9 in 2035 (Gulland, 2013). In Pakistan's case, there is already a deficiency of 60,000 nurses (Khawaja, 2013). Parveen (2016) reported the nurses' shortage by stating the nurse to doctor ratio (1:2.7). Considering the fact that there is already a shortage of nurses, one could not bear leave intention among nurses in this pandemic situation is the reason for choosing leave intention to be studied as a variable in the present study. In contrast, understanding the occupational commitment construct is also essential, as Johnson (1996) reported shifting organizational commitment to one's occupation. Occupational commitment is related to an employee's pledge to occupational objectives, values, beliefs, and readiness to continue in the said profession (Teng et al., 2009). In addition, due to organizational mergers and acquisitions, the issues of job insecurity and contingency work force growth have consistently increased (Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Cappelli et al., 1997; Hall & Moss, 1998). Employees are more inclined towards their profession rather than the organization (Yousaf et al., 2015). Cohen (1992) also claims that employees are more interested in directing their commitment to their occupation than the organization.

Although, certain management practices, i.e., leadership styles,enhance employee commitment and reduce leave intention (Suifan et al., 2020). One leadership style is ethical leadership that motivates employees to understand the importance of organizational outcomes (Abuzaid, 2018). Brown et al. (2005) relate ethical leadership as "the display of normative behaviour through own conduct and interpersonal connections with each other, and the expansion of such lead to subordinates through mutual communication, fortification, and managerial policymaking" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 20).The need to study leadership's impact on employees, i.e., nursing staff commitment, is essential as leadership may play an essential role in boosting employees' commitment (Kim & Brymer, 2011). Ethical leadership often leads employee's towards a higher level of commitment (Abuzaid, 2018).The current literature is scant on ethical leadership's impact on leave intention and occupational commitment (Suifan et al., 2020). The present study attempts to examine ethical leadership's impact on employee's leave intention through the mediation of occupational commitment suggested by Suifan et al. (2020) and Islam et al. (2019). Through their moral conduct, ethical leaders, policymaking, and communication develop positive beliefs and practices among employees at the workplace (Brown et al., 2005).Without a team of committed employees, leaders could not achieve organizational goals (Dust et al., 2018). The literature is scant on ethical leadership's influence on employees' commitmentand leave intention (Abuzaid, 2018; Zhu et al., 2004; Suifan et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a dire need to examine ethical leadership's impact on subordinates' attitudes and behaviours (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown &Trevino, 2006; Mayer et al., 2009). Empirical evidence supportsthe positive influence of psychological empowerment on employee's attitudes and behaviours (Mostafa & Motalib, 2020) by stating that highly empowered employees understand the four facets of empowerment, i.e.,"meaning", "competence", "self-determination" and "impact". Meaning refers to the inner feelings of an employee towards the organizational goals. Competence shows confidence in one's employees in his/her knowledge, skills, and abilities. Selfdetermination refers to the degree of freedom an employee feels in decision-making or in initiating actions. Finally, impact refers to an individual's feeling of influencing the results at the

workplace (Spreitzer 1995, p.1444). Islam and Irfan (2020) reported that an organization's culture varies from one organization to another, and in Pakistan, there is a high power-distance culture that may lead to misusing of power. In a high distance power culture, supervisors are relatively authoritative, autocratic with a centralized authority (Oruh & Dibia, 2020), leading to a stressful work environment. Similarly, a stressful environment could badly affect employees' mental health and commitment, ultimately resulting in a higher leave intention among employees (Bohle et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a strong need for psychological empowerment of employees at the workplace. The presence of ethical leadership does not guarantee to enhance commitment among employees. For case in point, Psychological empowerment moderated the relationship between various positive job-related outcomes, i.e., job performance, OCB, leave intention, job satisfaction, and leader-member exchange (Harris et al., 2009). Given that, psychological empowerment moderation is required in the organization where high power culture exists (Islam & Irfan, 2020). Blau's (1964) social exchange theory (SET) also states that subordinates reciprocate to their organization's behaviors. Therefore, when subordinates perceive their organization as taking extra care of their employees by empowering them psychologically and ethically, they also ensure their conduct at the workplace is based on ethical and moral values, ultimately enhancing their commitment towards the profession where ethical values are highly valued adopted.The study is an attempt to provoke hospitals to understand the significance of ethical leadership and psychological empowerment. It suggests outcomes that can be ensured after implementing ethical leadership and psychological empowerment as there are several issues currently faced by nursing staff in Pakistani hospitals, i.e., leave intention and commitment (Lishchinsky et al., 2019; Suifan et al., 2020). This contributes to ethical leadership literature in many ways. First, the study attempts to examine ethical leadership's impact on employee's attitudes and behaviours, i.e., leave intention addressing the future calls of Abuzaid (2018) and Suifan et al. (2020) as they highlighted that literature is scant on employee’s commitment and leave intention.The literature is scant on ethical leadership's influence on employees' commitment and leave intention (Abuzaid, 2018; Zhu et al.,

2004; Suifan et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a dire need to examine ethical leadership's impact on subordinates' attitudes and behaviours (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Mayer et al., 2009). Ethical leadership is considered to bring positive change in employees' attitudes and behaviour at the workplace, ultimately enhancing employee commitment. Hence a positive work environment could prevent employees from leaving the organization (Suifan et al., 2020). Second, The study examines the mediating role of occupational commitment between ethical leadership and leave intention. Ethical leadership creates a positive workplace environment at the workplace, which tends to enhance the commitment among employees, ultimately preventing them from leaving the organization (Islam et al., 2019).In this pandemic covid-19 situation witha shortage of nurses, one could not think of losing more lives, reasoning the nurse’s leave intention (Khattak et al., 2020). Third, the culture of the organization varies from organization to organization. There is a strong power-distance culture in Pakistan; therefore, positive effects of leadership are not always guaranteed (Islam & Irfan, 2020). Because of the cultural issues,the health sector of Pakistan needs to empower its employees in dealing with any circumstances in the absence of Ethical leadership. Empowered employees understand the importance and meaningfulness of their work (Mostafa & Motalib, 2020). Therefore, for empowered employees, leadership is less important as they understand the significance of their work and have a strong belief in their capabilities.To summarize, this study presents a mediation-moderation model to investigate ethical leadership impact on leave intention through the mediation of occupational commitment and moderation of psychological empowerment.

Hypotheses Development

Ethical leadership and occupational commitment

Employee's poor commitment is a root cause of various adverse job-related outcomes (Lofti et al., 2018). Leaders understand the importance of accomplishing organizational goals; therefore, they always want their subordinates to get highly engaged at the workplace, ultimately leading them to enhance commitment towards their job (Abuzaid, 2018). Occupational commitment relates to an employee's wish to work in a likable occupation

(Hall, 1971). Blau (2003) and Lin and Chen (2004) noted that employees highly committed to their occupation exert extra energy in the skills development to excel in the desirable occupation and provide more attention to their job than employees with a lower level of occupational commitment (Kuo, Chang & Chang, 2014). In addition, highly occupationally committed employees are more likely to live with their current occupation by avoiding other occupational offers (Weng et al., 2018).

Ethical leaders play a crucial role in developing positive attitudes and behaviour among employees. Ethical leaders are people-oriented leaders, with their entire focus on employee development (Brown et al., 2005). It suffices to say that ethical leaders treat their subordinates with integrity, care, and fairness by demonstrating ethical conduct at the workplace (Brown et al., 2005; Trevino et al., 2003). This could lead to winning their subordinate's trust towards their leaders and the organization. In addition, ethical leaders are conscious about their employees' career development, and for this purpose, they endorse job rotation and job enrichment at the workplace, ultimately leading employees towards higher autonomy (Dust et al., 2018). It is noted that employees are conscious of their career development and when they observe their leaders thinking in employee's interest, they get emotionally attached to their job and focus on skills improvements (Kanungo & Conger 1993; Trevin˜o et al. 2003).

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory (SET) also supports the above discussion by stating that employees reciprocate to their leaders' behaviour. Therefore, when employees observe that their leaders are conscious about their well-being and exert the best career development efforts. They also start thinking in favour of the organization and stick their commitment to the organization, leading to occupation and put their best efforts to accomplish the organizational goals. They are hence saving the organization from destruction. Therefore, we propose our first hypothesis.

H1: Ethical leadership positively impacts anemployee's occupational commitment.

Ethical leadership and leave intention

In literature, leave intention is related to employee's volunteer inner feelings of quitting the current organization (Tett & Meyer, 1993). An employee's volunteer turnover could be very costly for organizations (Catania et al., 2019). Job

dissatisfaction, lack of training and development, promotional opportunities, and job-hopping could lead an employee to think of leaving the organization (Pang et al., 2015). Employee turnover could severely damage organizational performance and staff morale (Leineweber et al., 2016). Leaders play an important role in boosting employees' commitment because of their credible role modeling (Suifan et al., 2020). Ethical leaders possibly develop positive attitudes and behaviours among employees inthe workplace (Shareef & Atan, 2019). These positive gestures by the leaders reduce the thinking of leaving the organization among employees (Islam et al., 2019; Shafique et al., 2018). In other words, ethical leaders could reduce negative attitudes and behaviours at the workplace,leading to leaving intention (Lin & Liu, 2017).

Empirical studies suggest that building trust in employees and developing a positive climate inthe workplace could reduce leave intention among employees (DeConinck, 2015; Zeffane & Melhem, 2017). Islam et al. (2019) revealed that workplace stress and anxiety could lead an employee to quit the current job.Empirical studies relate working conditions, events at the workplace, and psychological aspects reasons for turnover intention (Leon et al., 2016). Ethical leaders encourage employee participation in decisionmaking and occasionally ask for their feedback (Islam et al., 2019). Researchers, i.e., Suifan et al. (2020) and Shareef and Atan (2019), suggested studying ethical leadership's impact on employee's leave intention.

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory (SET) also supports the above discussion by claiming that followers always reciprocate to their leader's conduct. Therefore, whenever there is a positive gesture from the leaders, employees reciprocate it positively by giving their best in their performance and staying committed to a particular organization. Therefore, in this study, we propose that ethical leadership could negatively impact an employee's turnover intention.

H2: Ethical leadership negatively impacts an employee's leave intention.

Occupational commitment as mediator

Empirical studies suggest that to learn how organizations can affect employees, one should understand the importance of an employee's attitude towards their career (Chang, 1999). She further revealed that the degree of commitment

that employees uphold towards their organization is decided byhow much organizations are critical towards their occupational development (Weng & MeELroy, 2012). Career commitment is considered the most important aspect of employee turnover intention in the service sector (Millard, 2003; Zhou et al., 2009).Mobley suggested that employees are likely to shift current employers due to a lack of career growth (Mobley et al., 1979). Cooper Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) proposed a negative relationship between occupational commitment and leave intention. This hypothesis's main purpose is to suggest a mediating role of occupational commitment between ethical leadership and leave intention. Prior studies confirm a moderating relationship of occupational commitment between career growth and leave intention (Weng & MeELroy, 2012). Aryee & Tan (1992) confirms that employees with a higher level of career commitment spend most of their time learning new skills and avoid leaving their occupations.

In addition, empirical evidence supports the moderating role of occupational commitment between the utility of one's current job with leave intention (Bedeian et al., 1991). The present relationship could be related to the previously studied association between career calling and jobrelated outcomes, i.e., organizational commitment and leave intention through occupational commitment mediation. However, this study examines ethical leadership's impact on leave intention through the mediation of occupational commitment as ethical leaders are said to be developers of positive attitudes and behaviours among employees at the workplace (Brown et al., 2005). Blau's (1964) social exchange theory also supports the above discussion by claiming that employees reciprocate to the organization's conduct. Therefore, when employees observe their leaders thinking in employees interest by taking care of their career development. As a result, they become reluctant to leave the organization, perceiving that their current employers are very conscious about their career development and wellbeing to be committed to their employers.

H3: Occupational commitment mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and leave intention.

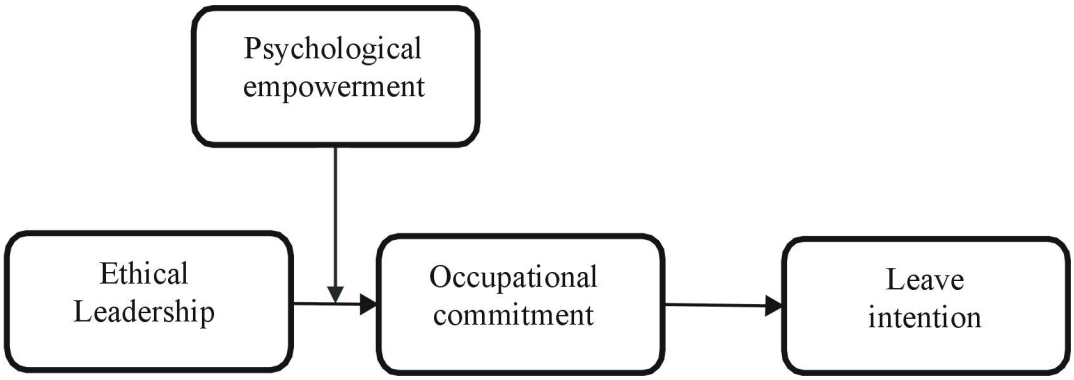
Psychological empowerment as moderator

Researchers support that a variable's moderating effect affects the degree of the association between the predictor and criterion variables. In contrast, a mediating variable influences the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (James & Brett, 1984; Baron & Kenny, 1986). Kanter (1983) noticed that empowered employees have the courage to share responsibilities and decentralize the work environment. On the other hand, Ethical leaders demonstrate fairness, integrity, and two-way communication in their conduct, providing their followers with a sense of belongingness (Brown et al., 2005). Suifan et al. (2020) and Dust et al. (2018) emphasized psychological empowerment as an enhancer of ethical leadership's impact on employee's jobrelated outcomes.

The psychological empowerment concept helps employees learn the importance of initiating actions, participating in decision-making, and iscommitted to their job (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). In addition, psychological empowerment develops a sense in their employees, which helps them accept their responsibilities, ultimately leading them to commit to their job (Jha, 2014).Liden et al. (2000) examined the agency effect of psychological empowerment dimensions with work characteristics and job-relating outcomes, i.e., job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, Harris et al. (2009) reported psychological empowerment moderating effects between a leader-member exchange, leave intention, in-role performance, and extra-role performance. Since psychological empowerment is a moderating construct, it could be assumed that psychological empowerment could play a moderating effect between ethical leadership and occupational commitment as ethical leadership itself does not guarantee occupational commitment; psychological empowerment is needed for that. Therefore, we propose our next hypothesis.

H4: psychological empowerment moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and occupational commitment.

Figure 1: Conceptual Method



Method

Data was gathered in three big cities from the nursing staff of public and private hospitals of Punjab, Pakistan. 600 questionnaires were distributed in a cross-sectional time between March-2020 to July-2020. The questionnaire included questions about the nurse's perception of ethical leadership and psychological empowerment (T1) and occupational commitment and leave intention (T2) with an interval of 15 days as employee perception varies with the passage of time (Islam & Irfan, 2020). Personal efforts were made to collect data from Lahore, Faisalabad, and Islamabad. Out of 600 questionnaires, we received 356 questionnaires (121 from Islamabad (33.9 %), 115 from Lahore (32 %), and 120 from Islamabad (33.7%). Data was collected through a surveybased questionnaire, i.e., T1 and T2. At first, T1 was given to nursing staff and was collected simultaneously. After 15 days intervals, the same nurse was given T2, and both responses were attached together and then reported in the datasheet. SEM was applied to conduct regression analysis for the testing of hypotheses. We were highly concerned about the staff's secrecy and the ethical concerns as the leakage of information could damage the respondent's repute and job. Respondents were selected from highly reputed hospitals in big cities Lahore (i.e., Sheikh Zaid hospital, Mayo hospital, General hospital, and Ganga Ram hospital) and Islamabad (i.e., Islamabad General hospital, CMH hospital, and AlShifa hospital) were collected individually; however, the data from the hospitals of Karachi (e.g., Civil hospital Karachi, Aga Khan hospital and

South city hospital) were collected by a volunteer. The response rate was 59.33 %, acceptable, according to Ruane (2015). The respondent's majority gender was female with age in a range of 23-35 (38 %), master's degree

Table: Summary for previous studies

Author	Sector	Findings
Islam and Irfan (2020)	Health sector	Psychological empowerment positively impacts organizational citizenship behaviour among nursing staff. The future call must address the role of psychological empowerment where leadership lacks the impact on job-related outcomes.
Suifan et al. (2020)	Banking sector	Ethical leadership reduces leave intention with the help of psychological empowerment mediation. Future research must investigate ethical leadership's impact on leave intention in different sectors through psychological empowerment mediation.
Lofti et al. (2018)	Health sector	Ethical leadership positively impacts organizational commitment through patient safety perception. Further research could be done to investigate the role of ethical leadership on commitment among employees in different sectors in underdeveloped countries.
Islam, Ahmed & Ali (2019)	Health sector	Ethical leadership reduces bullying. Further research could be done to reduce more job related negative outcome through ethical leadership

Measures

Responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale ranging from"1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree".

Ethical Leadership

We used Brown et al.'s (2005) ten-item ethical leadership scale used. The scale was also validated by Suifan et al. (2020) and Dust et al. (2018). The scale's Cronbach value (i.e. 0.72) was greater than Nunnally's (1978)

suggested value (i.e. 0.70). A sample item includes, "My leader demonstrates a strong concern for ethical and moral values."

Psychological empowerment

Spreitzer's (1995) twelve items scale was used to measure employee perception about psychological empowerment. Previously, Islam and Irfan validated the scale in Pakistan's health sector by measuring the perception of the hospital's nursing staff.Criteria of Nunnally's (1978) suggested value was met with Cronbach alpha value (0.74). The sample item was, "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job".

Occupational commitment

The occupational commitment was measured using Meyer et al. (1993) six items scale, which has been validated by Yousaf et al. (2015). The Cronbach's alpha value of this scale was noted (0.82), greater than the suggested value of Nunnally (1978). The sample item was, "Nursing is important to my selfimage".

Leave intention

We used Mobley's (1982) three items scale. The scale was also validated by Islam et al. (2015) in the Pakistani context. The Cronbach's alpha value of this scale was noted as (0.84). The sample item was, "I often think to leave this job."

Control variables

Demographic variables, i.e.,gender, experience, qualification, and age, were controlled as researchers suggested(Bouckenooghe et al., 2015; Lotfi et al., 2018).

Results

Preliminary analyses were performed on data of 356 questionnaires. Out of these 356 questionnaires, 8 questionnaires were dropped due to missing values (Sekeran, 2003). Secondly, the stem and leaf method was performed to identify outliers, and another seven questionnaires were discarded (Islam & Tariq, 2018). Data of 341 questionnaires were finalized in comparison to standard values of normal distribution and Skewness and Kurtosis values. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of respondents who agreed to ethical leadership (M= 3.72), occupational commitment (M= 3.53), Leave intention (3.41), and psychological empowerment (M= 3.21). The Cronbach's alpha values passed the criteria suggestion by Nunnally's (1978), which was 0.70. The correlation between all the variables existed as the value shows ethical leadership correlates to occupational

commitment (r=0.56, p<0.01), leave intention (r= -0.61, p < 0.01).

Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis testing was done through SPSS software version 25. We found ethical leadership's positive relationship with occupational commitment (β = 0.38, P < 0.01) and negative relation with leave intention (β = -0.32, P < 0.01). The finding further revealed the negatively significant relation of occupational commitment with leave intention (β = -0.49, P < 0.01). The moderator of the study was found to be insignificant with the predictor variable (β = 0.25, P >0.05). Table 2 shows the result of the hypotheses. For the examination of occupational commitment mediation role between ethical leadership and leave intention, Baron and Kenny's(1986) approach was used. Hierarchical regressions in three steps were performed. In the first step, demographical variables were regressed with occupational commitment. In the second step ethical leadership was regressed with occupational commitment (β = 0.32, P < 0.01). Lastly, in the third step, the occupational commitment was regressed with leave intention, and the ethical leadership value remained constant, which specifies partial mediation.

Table 1: Descriptive and Correlational Analytics

Variables	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD	α
1- Ethical leadership	1				3.72	0.57	0.82
2- Occupational commitment	0.56**	1			3.53	0.63	0.71
3- Leave intention	-0.61**	-0.64**	1		3.41	0.76	0.81
4- Psychological empowerment	0.25**	0.45**	0.15**	1	3.21	0.72	0.78

*Note: ** P < 0.01,*

Table 2: Hypotheses testing through Regression

Associations	B	S.E	p-value
EL→OC	0.38	0.031	0.000
OC→LI	-0.49	0.055	0.000
EL→LI	-0.32	0.053	0.000
PE→OC	0.25	0.021	0.654

The moderating role of psychological empowerment was examined using hierarchical regression in three steps, shown in table 4. We noted that psychological empowerment positively moderated between ethical leadership and occupational commitment (β = 0.45, p<0.01). The interactional term (EL*PE)

was observed to have a significant impact on leave intention (β = 0.14, p<0.01), explaining a 2 % variance.

Discussion

The findings identified that under the supervision of ethical leaders, employees feel strong selfefficacy as they understand the work significance. In addition, findings suggest that psychological empowerment act as motivation between ethical leadership and occupational commitment as in the high power distance culture of Pakistan, sometimes ethical leadership lacks in creating a positive environment at the workplace. The study helps understandthe positive effects of ethical leadership at the workplace, which ultimately reduces leave intention among employees. In addition, psychological empowerment moderation also boosts occupational commitment among employees.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis

	Leave Intention		
Control variables	M1(β)	M2(β)	M3(β)
Gender	-0.07	-0.12	-0.15
Age	-0.04	-0.03	-0.02
Qualification	0.15**	0.07	0.08
Work-Experience	-0.03	-0.00	0.02
Independent Variable			
Ethical Leadership		0.32**	0.45**
Mediating Variable			
Occupational commitment			0.55**
R^2	0.01	0.32	0.40
ϰ R^2	--	0.31	0.08

Table 4: Hierarchical regression for moderation

Variables	M1 (B)	M2 (B)
Step 1		
EL	0.45**	
PE	0.26**	
R2	0.31	
Step 2		
EL*PE		0.14**
R2		0.32
Δ R2		0.02

The results supported the results of various previous studies that predicted ethical leadership's positive role in creating a peaceful work environment at the workplace (Dust et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2019; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Mayer et al., 2009; Kalshoven et al., 2011). The study presents a workable model using ethical leadership and psychological empowerment for boosting the commitment of nursing staff towards their occupation, which ultimately leads to a reduction in leave intention.

The study extended past studies (Ugwu et al., 2014) by enriching literature on relationships between focal constructs. Therefore, we examined the moderating role of psychological empowerment between the focused constructs. Through their credible role-modeling, ethical leaders inspire employees to be highly committed to the organizations leading to occupational commitment (Abuzaid, 2018). Further, consistent with past studies' findings (Jha, 2014), psychological empowerment could develop a sense of meaningfulness, determination, competence, and impact in the employees, ultimately leading to job commitment. According to Thomas and Velthouse (1990), PE can be a facilitator of commitment among employees at the workplace. Thus, empowered employees are considered committed and satisfied people with a lower level of leave intention (Suifan et al., 2020). Second, the study contributes to ethical leadership literature by examining its impact on employee leave intention. The results first revealed the effectiveness of ethical leadership on employee's commitment, ultimately resulting in a reduction in leave intention. When employees observe their ethical leader's commitment towards their job, they also try to be committed to their job by observing their leaders' conduct. Ethical leaders develop a sense of commitment in their subordinates that reduces leave intention in employees in any challenging circumstances (Islam et al., 2019).

Third, this study is inline with Blau's (1964) social exchange theory (SET)by relating our findings to the positive relationship between ethical leadership and occupational commitment leading to negative leave intention. The study further revealed the moderating role of psychological empowerment between ethical leadership and occupational commitment. According to SET, employees reciprocate to the

organization's gestures by displaying positive attitudes and behaviours at the workplace (Blau, 1964).The findings suggest that ethical leadership with a moderating role of psychological empowerment could bring numerous positive changes at the workplace. Therefore, employees could likely reciprocate to the organization's conduct by displaying higher commitment towards organizations.

Finally, the present study contributed to the literature by testing focused relationships in the developing country's health sector, i.e., Pakistan. This ethical leadership and psychological empowerment played a crucial role in enhancing occupational commitment in the employees and reducing leave intention. Furthermore, Spreitzer (1995) psychological empowerment helps employees' commitment where the employees do not properly understand the perception of ethical leadership. Therefore, the study contributes to the previous literature by its findings of creating a positive work environment and enforcing employees' commitment.

The findings suggest various practical implications for developing countries with varying cross-culture as this study itself was collected in a developing country with high-power distance culture (Islam & Irfan, 2020). First, the present study suggests that empowered employees are more likely to have higher organizational and work commitments. Organizations should understand the importance of the multi-dimensional construct of psychological empowerment; therefore, a strong organizational emphasis is needed on the implementation of psychological empowerment at the workplace.

Second, hospital management could focus on the dimensions of psychological empowerment at the time of the recruitment process, to hire employees that understand the impact and meaning of their work and are also self-capable of performing in uncertain circumstances to overcome the leave intention issue rising due to workplace stress and anxiety.Third, in this (COVID-19) pandemic situation, the health sector could not afford to leave intention among employees as there is already a shortage of nurses in Pakistan (Mokhtar et al., 2018). The current study suggests that employees' commitment to their job could increase through ethical leadership and psychological empowerment, ultimately reducing leave intention among employees. Psychological empowerment builds self-efficacy and self-determination in employees and develops a sense of meaningfulness in

their job, finally changing employees' thinking to consider their job impactful.Therefore, empowering employeescould be highly beneficial for the organizationsas in this critical time, nurses are required to be highly empowered to face this difficult covid-19 pandemic situation.

Limitations and future research

Although the study attempted to contribute in several ways, there are stilla few limitations. First, the study data were collected in a time-lagged cross-sectional design to measure the nursing staff's attitudes and behaviours in 15 days intervals to reduce common method bias (CMB). Further research could measure employees' perceptions in three to four months intervals as nursing staff perceptions might change with passing time (Islam et al., 2020).The second limitation was that data was collected only from health sectors of three big cities of Pakistan, and these populations do not represent the culture of rural regions as the culture of urban areas is far different from the rural areas. Furthermore, generalizing one sector result is not possible in the other sector as employee perception varies from one organization to another (Islam & Irfan, 2020). Finally, the study only examined ethical leadership's impact on leave intention through the mediation of occupational commitment and moderation of psychological empowerment.However, researchers report various other health sector problems, i.e., bullying (Islam et al., 2019) and sexual harassment (Lu et al., 2020). Therefore, the study mechanism could further be used to address these adverse problems in the health sector.

Conclusion

The above discussionconfirmed that ethical leadership and psychological empowermenthad become an essential and emerging topic in the management sciences. The study's purpose was to measure the attitudes and behaviours of nursing staff at the workplace by investigating nursing staff's perception of ethical leadership and its impact on leave intention through the mediating role of occupational commitment and moderation of psychological empowerment. The findings suggested a strong negative association between ethical leadership and leave intention through psychological empowerment moderation and occupational commitment mediation and also reveals a positive association between ethical leadership and occupational commitment. The findings approve positive psychological empowerment

results on job-related outcomes in the absence of ethical leadership. Hence the study fully supports all proposed hypotheses.

Moreover, the findings are also supported by Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. The present study was purely conducted for public and private hospitals across Pakistan. To summarize all in the end, a workable model was presented to the administrative staff of hospitals, which could enhance commitment and reduce leave intention among employees in this severe pandemic covid- 19 situation. The study is surely useful for hospitals and is highly recommended for implementation in the covid-19 pandemic situation.

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