



WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF HOPELESSNESS AND DEPRESSION

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Abstract

By integrating the Affective Event Theory and Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, this research study investigates the direct and indirect impact of workplace mistreatment on suicidal behavior in Pakistani bureaucrats. Based on a cross-sectional sample of 263 employees working in the government, the analysis will be done using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4.0. The model was able to test the direct, indirect, and serial hopelessness and depression mediation pathway. Findings in the workplace thwarting determine that mistreatment in the workplace is a significant predictor of suicidal behavior, both direct and indirect, with hopelessness $\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.01$) and depression ($\beta = 0.225$, $p < 0.001$). The observed chain: mistreatment \rightarrow hopelessness \rightarrow depression \rightarrow suicidal behavior also showed a significant serial mediation effect at ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.01$) and was able to explain 42.1% of the variance in the dependent construct. The results highlight the significance of early emotional programs in curbing suicidal consequences, especially in inflexible, high-power distance environments. This study contributes to the field of organizational psychology by demonstrating that affective and cognitive degradation coincide in unhealthy bureaucracies, leading to severe health outcomes.

Keywords: Workplace Mistreatment, Suicidal Behavior, Affective Events Theory, Hopelessness Theory, Depression, Mediation Analysis

1. Introduction

Mistreatment at the workplace has become a major organizational risk, with empirical research results showing it to be a long-term stressor not only in the productivity of employees but also in their psychological health (Tan & Xia, 2023). It encompasses exhibition of forgiving actions, including bullying, ostracizing, incivility, and abusive oversight, which worsen the mentality (Malik & Pichler, 2023). Recent evidence suggests that mistreatment in the workplace correlates with heightened exposure to psychological distress, with symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts, especially among populations at risk due to their emotions (Ryu et al., 2024).

In collectivist cultures such as Pakistan, the influence of such cruelty is magnified through power distance, strict hierarchies, and stigma on mental disorders in society (Malik & Pichler, 2023). The fear of retaliation, shame, or organizational silence often pushes employees not to report how they were treated negatively, but instead internalizes the negative experiences, which are accompanied by emotional exhaustion and psychological breakdown (Clement et al., 2024; Yun et al., 2023). Researchers have observed that bureaucratic cultures that are characterized by rigid protocol and high assessment stress, and power-oriented cultures, are more likely to expose individuals to mistreatment, as well as a lack of coping mechanisms (Carroll, 2024). Increased suicidal ideation has become a serious issue in the world of professionals who have suffered from living in adversarial conditions constantly in the workplace. Recent meta-analytic and empirical studies highlight an important connection between mistreatment at work and suicide-related outcomes



(Howard et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2023).

As an example, in high-stress settings such as healthcare, government, and education, chronic exposure to negative workplace incidents was demonstrated to increase risks of depressive episodes as well as suicidal thoughts by causing such effects as emotional numbness, hopelessness, and disengagement (Civilotti et al., 2022; Ding et al., 2024). In Pakistan, the rate of suicide among professionals in the country has escalated to worrying levels with an estimated 18.7-100,000 with almost 68% of the incidences attributed to psychological strain, which is work-driven (Tan & Xia, 2023). With the increased academic concern, organizational psychology literature has three essential gaps. To begin with, although the direct association between negative mental health and workplace mistreatment is well-established, the explanatory mechanisms, especially how mistreatment leads to suicidal behavior, are little theorized (Kelner et al., 2025).

Second, depressive cases are commonly researched as an intermediary variable, whereas the contribution of hopelessness as the central cognitive thesis of suicidal acts, according to the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, is commonly ignored in the empirical models (Shepherd et al., 2023). It has been demonstrated that hopelessness, combined with protracted emotional expression of injustice, produces suicidal intent at a high rate (Wang et al., 2024). Third, internalized distress may be exacerbated by sociocultural factors, including stigma, emotional suppression, and resistance to seeking help by employees of collectivist work cultures, which undermine psychological resilience (Travasso & Raut, 2022; Zhong et al., 2024). This paper seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the psychosocial impacts of mistreatment at work in direct and indirect directions on the suicidal behavior modelled using a serial mediation model to consider hopelessness and depression.

It is based on Affective Events Theory (AET) and the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, which suggests that emotional reaction to the mistreatment will transform into thoughts of cognitive distortions and self-harm intentions in this study. The sample targets Pakistani bureaucrats, who are overrepresented in the conditions of high-pressure, hierarchy, and politics (Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Van Wagoner, 2021). This research offers solid empirical evidence about a poorly studied population and broadens the scope of suicide studies into organizational and cultural psychology by implementing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4.0.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The issue of mistreatment in the workplace has become one of the most widespread and devastating organizational phenomena of the 21st century, and a serious research topic in a variety of fields such as organizational psychology, occupational health, and the field of public administration (Malik & Pichler, 2023; Nielsen et al., 2016). This complex construct includes a wide range of negative workplace conduct, including hateful actions of aggression and bullying on the one hand, to more indirect expressions of psychological control, social ostracism, and emotional cruelty on the other hand (Einarsen et al., 2020; Zapf & Einarsen, 2002).

Organizational climate caused by such practices is toxic and not only damages individual well-being but also impacts organizational performance and beliefs in the government by society (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Ryu et al., 2024). The current conceptualizations of workplace mistreatment define it as the systematic exposure to ill-chosen behaviors, including exclusion, verbal abuse, manipulation, intimidation, and implicit aggression, which compound in deteriorating cognitive appraisal mechanisms and emotional health of employees (Leymann, 1996; Malik & Pichler, 2023).

Contrary to single cases of interpersonal conflicts, mistreatment at the workplace is another form of consistent aggressive actions that cause an environment of psychological intimidation and emotional pain (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Tan & Xia, 2023). According to recent meta-analytic evidence, some sort of mistreatment at the workplace can be found in about 15-20% of employees in different industries, whereas in hierarchical organizations like public administration, healthcare, and the military, the prevalence rate may go as high as 35% (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Luo et al., 2023).

The psychological effects of mistreatment in the workplace are far-reaching as they generate a chain of mental health complications, which may extend well beyond the period of discontinuation of the mistreatment (Hogh et al., 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Empirical studies have always reported that



mistreatment at work has a strong relationship with a variety of mental disorders, such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and, most frighteningly, suicidal ideation and behavior (Gullander et al., 2014; Ryu et al., 2024). Young professionals working in the public sector, such as bureaucrats, are exposed to these effects to a much greater degree because of organizational factors such as inflexible hierarchical arrangements, lack of agency, excessive performance targets, emotional restraint and responsibility, low emotional expression culture, and embedded low tolerance norms to grievances (Mathisen et al., 2011; Tan & Xia, 2023).

The bureaucratic environment has its own set of obstacles that further increase the harmful effects of mistreatment in the workplace. Employees in the public sector are often paralyzed by structures of job security paradoxes, convoluted reporting relationships, and political influences that do not encourage them to openly air out work-related issues, unlike in the private sector, where employees are allowed more mobility, or they have recourse mechanisms (Branch et al., 2013; Djurkovic et al., 2008). This organization of traps conditions under which abused workers are more apt to absorb emotional injuries than run for external redress, making them more vulnerable to extreme psychological distress and suicidal ideation (Malik & Pichler, 2023; Notelaers et al., 2019).

Theoretical Foundations of Workplace Mistreatment Research

The theoretical environment of mistreatment in the workplace has transformed a lot in the last three decades, with researchers relying on numerous psychological, sociological, and organizational concepts to elucidate both causes and effects of the hostile behaviours at the workplace (Einarsen et al., 2020; Salin & Hoel, 2011). First-generation conceptualizations were more obsessed with agentic aspects, which concentrated more on the personality traits, demographic features, and personal susceptibilities as important factors that lead to victimization (Aquino et al., 1999; Coyne et al., 2000).

But nowadays, theoretical models have turned to more holistic ecological frames whose indicated differences have been acknowledged to include intricate interactions among individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal forces that influence the experiences of mistreatment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Out of all the theoretical frameworks that have been used to explain mistreatment in the workplace, some of them have emerged as the most procedural in explaining the psychological mechanisms by which unfavorable experiences in workplaces lead to mental health consequences. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, most of people aim at acquiring, possessing, and safeguarding valuable resources, and psychological torment arises when these resources become endangered or threatened over time after continuous adversity at work (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Leon et al., 2015).

The theory that gives an understanding of how group dynamics, power differentials, and hierarchies in an organization may facilitate a situation where mistreatment occurs is the Social Identity Theory (Haslam et al., 2020; Tajfel et al., 2001). The Job Demands-Resources Model provides yet another useful perspective on workplace mistreatment in that it explains the concept of workplace mistreatment as a key job demand that may overwhelm personal capacity to cope with it, thus resulting in burnout, emotional exhaustion, and subsequent psychological breakdown (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Workplace mistreatment, when severe and chronic, can easily drain psychological resources out of the individual at the same time, augmenting emotional and cognitive resources needed to deal with a hostile environment (Glasø et al., 2007; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2009).

Affective Events Theory (AET) Perspective

A particularly solid basis of understanding how workplace events that are emotionally charged may result in psychological and behavioral outcomes is Affective Events Theory (AET), first introduced by Weiss and Cropanzano in 1996 (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Van Wagoner, 2021). The theory as such, is an evaluation of conventional methods applied to the study of organizational behavior, as it underlines the primary position of distinctive emotional experiences during the influence of employee attitudes, behaviors, and well-being over a period of time (Basch & Fisher, 1998; Malik & Pichler, 2023). AET argues that the workplace events and not the stable job characteristics are the initial stimulus upon which the employee's affective reactions are built, which subsequently lead to the momentary emotional reactions as well as the enduring attitudinal and behavioral trends (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015; Zohar et al., 2003).

The conceptualization of workspace events in the AET framework takes a specific incident or event,



which could potentially produce emotional responses that span over routine irritating events and inter-personal violence to more serious organizational changes, or traumatizing events (Grandey, 2000; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The theory differentiates the positive affective events that positively affect mood and motivation, and the negative affective events that instill distress, frustration, and emotional depletion (Basch & Fisher, 1998; G Miner et al., 2005). Notably, AET acknowledges that the affective event cumulative effects may be much greater than that of the individual cumulative effects, since the employees will be forming the emotional patterns and coping mechanisms depending on the cumulative affective experience in the organization (Dimotakis et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2015).

When applied to the research questions on workplace mistreatment, AET also presents a few important things that contribute to the improvement of our knowledge of the process by which unpleasant experiences in the workplace can turn into severe mental health issues (Glasø et al., 2007; Tan & Xia, 2023). First, the theory states that every act of mistreatment is a discrete negative affect instance provoking immediate emotional reactions that can be anger, fear, sadness, or humiliation (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Porath & Pearson, 2010). Second, repeated instances of mistreatment with time, these single affective experiences are compressed together to form more stable emotional states that are denoted by the manifestation of chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress (Einarsen et al., 2018; Notelaers et al., 2019).

We also broaden the conventional AET paradigm in this research, where workplace mistreatment is no longer viewed as discrete events but rather as recurrent and enduring affective stressors that develop patterns of persistent, volatile emotions and dysfunctional psychology (Malik & Pichler, 2023; Zapf & Einarsen, 2002). The extension recognizes the common structural mode of mistreatment contrary to random occurrences, and that predictability of the continued mistreatment can cause anticipatory anxiety and learned helplessness, contributing to the multiplication of the immediate emotional effect of a certain maltreatment (Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004).

To model this progression mathematically, as a step in a wider AET, we model the process of emotional accumulation as follows:

$$H_t = \alpha W + \beta \sum_{i=1}^n E_i + \gamma T + \delta I + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Where H_t denotes hopelessness at times t , W represents the chronic level of workplace mistreatment, E_i represents the series of discrete negative workplace events, T captures the temporal duration of exposure, I represents individual vulnerability factors, and ϵ is the error term capturing residual emotional influences and unmeasured variables (Haefel et al., 2008; Peterson & Villanova, 1988). This conceptualization formulates the way in which recurring affective disturbances are clumped together into a fairly widespread sense of desperation, especially if mistreatment is not addressed in authoritarian working environments, including governmental administration, where any official complaint procedure might prove ineffective or absent (Branch et al., 2013; Djurkovic et al., 2008).

The mathematical representation also extends to the inclusion of the emotional contagion concept and organizational climate effects, as individual experiences of mistreatment are known to happen within the larger organizational context, which may either enhance or reduce the psychological effects (Barsade, 2002; Schneider et al., 2017). Where mistreatment is either accepted or overlooked by the organization in a toxic organizational climate, it is possible that the coefficient α can be higher, which means that a moderate degree of direct mistreatment, when used together with the hostile organizational environment, can produce a high level of hopelessness (Einarsen et al., 2018; Skogstad et al., 2011).

Hopelessness Theory Integration

One of the most influential theories of suicide research construction, which Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy created in 1989, is the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, which gives a complete framework of the impact of depressing life events on the development of suicidal thoughts and behavior (Abramson et al., 1989; Haefel et al., 2017). This theory is also an expansion of the conventional models of stress and diathesis; it underlines the importance of the cognitive mechanisms, especially in attributional style and future expectancies in decisions to become vulnerable to suicidal ideation and actions after the occurrence of adverse life events



(Haeffel et al., 2017; Kleiman et al., 2014).

The core of the Hopelessness Theory is that people who constantly explain bad things in terms of consistent, stable, internal, and global attributions tend to form hopelessness, which consequently predisposes them to suicide (Brown et al., 2011; Tan & Xia, 2023). The concept of stable attributions is based on the assumption that negative events are permanent or temporary and are attributed globally as opposed to being situation specific or cause attribution should be made towards self instead of external conditions (Haeffel et al., 2008; Peterson & Villanova, 1988).

In this mental construct, hopelessness develops as a fundamental proximal risk phenomenon that regulates the connection between detrimental life incidents and suicidal results (Ryu et al., 2024; Tomasson, 1990). Hopelessness is marked by not having any hopes with regards to the future, perceived failure to rectify problems, and a feeling that they are stuck in the negative situations that they cannot change (McLeavey et al., 1994; O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). It has always been shown in the research that hopelessness is among the most effective predictors of suicidal ideation and behavior, frequently demonstrating close relationships with suicide risk as compared to depression alone (Brown et al., 2000; Kuo et al., 2001).

There are several valuable theoretical contributions associated with the integration of Hopelessness Theory with research on mistreatment levels in the workplace (Kelner et al., 2025; Shepherd et al., 2023). It offers, first, an intellectualized process by which chronic employment stress can be explained to lead to suicide risk, beyond mere stress-response models, to investigate the content of the thought and future anticipation processes, which can be produced by encountering continued episodes of mistreatment (Civilotti et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Second, the theory can be used to understand why certain people who become mistreated at the workplace get suicidal tendencies, but others do not, and identify the role of cognitive appraisal processes and attributional patterns in explaining psychological consequences (Travasso & Raut, 2022; Zhong et al., 2024).

Hopelessness Theory framework is especially applicable within the framework of bureaucratic organizations since the latter frequently impact the situations, which facilitate the growth of hopeless thinking patterns (Branch et al., 2013; Mathisen et al., 2011). The hierarchical nature of most of the public sector organizations, the lack of upward mobility, the inability to handle a situation through a sophisticated bureaucracy, and the political restrictions can also help generate the sense of entrapment and futility, which are in line with the cognitive processes in the Hopelessness Theory (Djurkovic et al., 2008; Notelaers et al., 2019).

Also, the hopeless cognitions can be exacerbated by cultural environment of collectivist culture such as Pakistan where conformity, respect to authority and who better suppress a personal grievance is rewarded by the culture (Hoftede et al., 2010; Malik & Pichler, 2023). It is also possible that when workplace mistreatment occurs within such cultural contexts, employees of such cultures are especially prone to form stable and global attribution with respect to their situation and regard their situation as fixed and indicative of realities in society or organizations overall and not as particular, solvable issues (Bond, 1996; Triandis, 2018).

In order to relate cognition deterioration to a behavioral outcome in our diverse theoretical framework, we submit to propose a wholesome structural path model that takes the form:

$$SB = \gamma H + \delta D + \zeta W + \theta A + \lambda C + \eta \quad (2)$$

Where SB represents suicidal behavior, H denotes hopelessness, D represents depression, W indicates workplace mistreatment, A captures attributional style variables, C represents cultural and contextual factors, and η denotes model residuals and unmeasured influences (Kelner et al., 2025; Malik & Pichler, 2023). This broadened definition includes both the direct and mediated impacts of mistreatment in the workplace on suicidal behavior as well as the multi-faceted interaction of cognitive, emotional, and contextual elements that define personal sensitivity to risk of suicide.

The mathematical model acknowledges that hopelessness can play numerous roles in the causal pathway, simultaneously as a direct predictor of suicidal behavior, a moderator of the effects of mistreatment in the workplace, and an antecedent of depression (Abramson et al., 1989; Haeffel et al., 2017). This complex conceptualization is in line with recent empirical studies, which propose the concept of hopelessness having both direct cognitive and indirect emotional pathways in the risk of suicide (Kleiman et al., 2014), [75].



Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

The synthesis of Affective Events Theory and Hopelessness Theory is an innovative theoretical approach that fills significant gaps in our comprehension of how real-life workplace experiences may result in devastating mental health consequences (Civilotti et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Although AET offers a perspective on the emotional dynamics that influence workplace events on psychological health, it has conventionally concentrated on the shorter-term affective reactions and workplace attitudes instead of the dramatic consequences of work like suicidal behavior (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

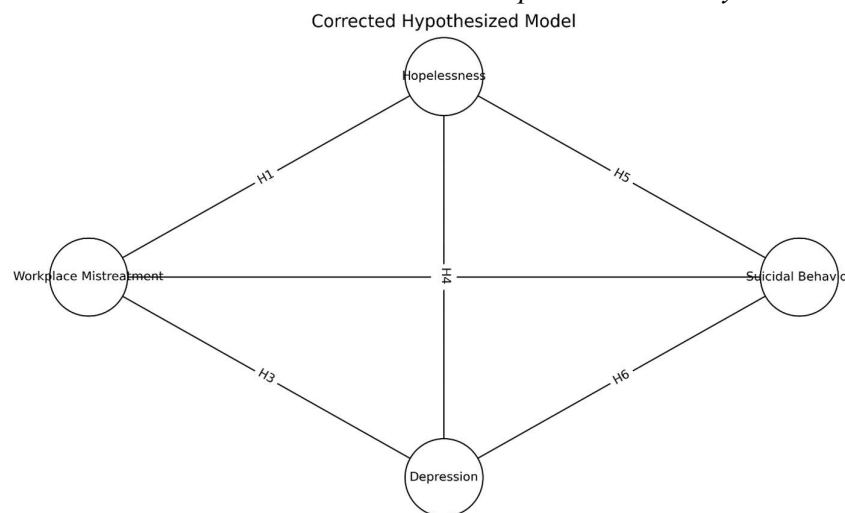
On the other hand, although Hopelessness Theory is a powerful approach to explaining suicide risk, it has been mainly implemented on clinical populations and general life stressors, but not on work-related situations (Abramson et al., 1989; Brown et al., 2011). We combine these theoretical views to present a more detailed model that would be descriptive of both the affective processes found in AET and the cognitive mechanisms that are important in the Hopelessness Theory (Shepherd et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2024). This integration states that mistreatment in the workplace exists based on a dual pathway model operating and providing both immediate affective distress (etiologically similar to AET) and encouraging maladaptive thoughts that can result in suicide in the long term (etiologically similar to Hopelessness Theory) (Ding et al., 2024; Travasso & Raut, 2022).

The temporal processes of this combined model posit that mistreatment in the workplace at an early stage causes acute emotional reactions, such as anger, sadness, and fear, but repeated exposure to these events eventually results in shifts in the individual's thinking pattern of being more pessimistic and hopeless (Haefffel et al., 2008; Haefffel et al., 2017). The more these cognitive patterns become ingrained, the more they start to affect how people construct their ongoing events in the workplace, as well as their general future expectations, together with their ability to deal with the perpetual trauma (Kleiman et al., 2014; O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). These theoretical syntheses bear significant consequences for the need to explain why such mistreatment in the workplace can become especially risky in this or that organizational setting.

Affective disruption coupled with cognitive impairment in the process of governing a bureaucratic setting marked by intervening mistreatment delivered in an ordered and predictable manner, apparently under the banner of systemic control, might be particularly enabling of the evolution of hopelessness and suicidal beliefs (Branch et al., 2013; Einarsen et al., 2018). Rigid hierarchical structures and access to limited recourse mechanisms that typify most public sector organizations can both exacerbate the emotional effects of mistreatment (by promoting the persistence of negative affective events) and the cognitive effects (by supporting the strengthening of beliefs about the impossibility of changes in the situation) (Djurkovic et al., 2008; Skogstad et al., 2011).

Figure 1

Proposed serial mediation model that combines AET and Hopelessness Theory





This theoretical integration is conceptualized in Figure 1 and shown by the effect of mistreatment in the workplace as a setting factor that causes suicidal behavior directly or indirectly by hopelessness and depression having a single mediating effect, and indirectly (Kelner et al., 2025; Malik & Pichler, 2023) by hopelessness mediated by depression and vice versa. It is a holistic approach that recognizes the complexity of the psychological processes involved and offers empirical research a framework that can be tested.

Hypotheses Development

The given model (Fig. 1) combines AET and Hopelessness Theory to express a detailed picture of how persistent mistreatment at work can cause suicidal behavior through two affective-cognitive mediators. The literature supports the fact that not only is emotional health worsened by negative working conditions, but also cognitive appraisal abilities (Ryu et al., 2024; Tan & Xia, 2023).

H1: Suicidal behavior is positively predicted by workplace mistreatment. The negative work-relationship environments, which are verbal abuse, exclusion, or psychological violence, are confirmed to augment suicidal ideation by obstructing emotional stability directly through these abusive environments (Tan & Xia, 2023) Such effects are multiplied in the power center-dominated bureaucracies, where people remain silent and have low power distance, resulting in high suicide risks (Malik & Pichler, 2023).

H2: Hopelessness is a mediator of the association between mistreatment at the workplace and suicidal behavior. According to AET literature, repetitive mistreatment leads to emotional exhaustion that, in many cases, is converted into a sense of constant hopelessness in the face of workers who perceive that they are not being supported by the institution (Malik & Pichler, 2024). The hopelessness theory model then makes hopelessness a fundamental predictor of suicidal intention (Tan & Xia, 2023).

H3: Suicidal behavior has the mediating effect of depression due to mistreatment in the workplace. Mistreatment in the workplace interferes not only with short-term affective disposition but also with long-term affective ones. The long-term abuse negatively impacts levels of motivation and self-worth, which rank among the features of depression used in diagnostics, which in turn is always related to suicidal ideation in the context of occupational psychology studies (Ryu et al., 2024; Shepherd et al., 2023).

H4: Quick depression is positively predicted by hopelessness. This is the hypothesis based on the sequential reasoning of cognitive-affective degradation. When the hopelessness intensifies, people start dissociating themselves with goals of the future and become less emotionally responsive, and this transitions into clinical depression (Zhong et al., 2024). Hopelessness is a cognitive antecedent that zaps emotional strength with time.

H5: Hopelessness and depression mediate the association between mistreatment in the workplace and suicidal behavior. In situations where workers are chronically abused, they become hopeless first, and this eventually leads to depressive conditions. The combination of these two mediators plays a huge part in enhancing the propensity of having suicidal thoughts (Kelner et al., 2025; Tan & Xia, 2023). According to the model, there is a complete mediation route in which mistreatment in the workplace translates into hopelessness, which subsequently predicts depression, and finally advances to suicide.

This combined hypothesis is empirically tested based on Smart pls 4.0; direct, indirect and serial mediation effects can be evaluated within a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework.

3. Methodology

Sample and Procedure

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design with its focus on bureaucrats in Pakistan-based institutions in the public sector. The bureaucratic population was chosen because it is characterized by a significant rate of hierarchical inflexibility, institutional silence, and an emotionally stifling climate, which magnify the outcomes of mistreatment of employees at work. The stratified random sampling method was employed to have proportional representation of different administrative departments, such as the civil services, the regulatory bodies, and the municipal corporations.

One hundred and sixty-three respondents were sampled through the secure and confidential online survey platform and a period of three months was used to gather the data. The institutional review board gave out ethical clearance. Guaranteed anonymity was offered to the participants, and they underwent informed



consent before being allowed access to the survey. The criterion of inclusion was that the respondents had at least one year of full-time experience in a position of a public administrator.

The psychometric scales contained in the survey tool were as follows:

Workplace Mistreatment: Scale is 22 items Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), which evaluates the experience of bullying, exclusion, and subtle mistreatment within the last 6 months. The rating was done on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Daily). This scale had a high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Hopelessness: Measured with the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS-20), which includes both the cognitive and affective aspects of pessimism towards the future. The participants were asked to answer the statements on a binary scale (True/False). The scale was very reliable in this study ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Depression: Assessed through the use of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), which is a 9-item scale assessing depressive symptoms according to the DSM criteria within the last two weeks. The rating was done based on 4 points (Not at all) to 3 (Nearly every day). The alpha of Cronbach was obtained as ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Suicidal Behavior: Assessed with the Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R), which has four items assessing lifetime suicide ideation, recent ideation frequency, threat severity, and future risk. A 6-point categorical response scale provided a response that gave excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.89$).

All the scales were translated into the Urdu language with a back-translation protocol because of linguistic and contextual accuracy. To measure the clarity of items and improve the instrument, a pilot test was made on a group of 30 bureaucrats.

Analytical Approach

The statistical model applied was the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. This method was selected because it is an appropriate method for testing theory and prediction in more complex models that involve a latent construct, especially with non-normal data distributions and small sample sizes. The theoretical framework was based on the Affective Events Theory (AET) and the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, which both focus on how emotional disturbances are converted to cognitive maladaptation and behavioral consequences.

The PLS-SEM analysis was carried out in two large steps:

Measurement Model Evaluation: Indicator reliability, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity of the latent constructs were evaluated by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Products that had factor loadings less than 0.60 were dropped.

Evaluation of Structural Models: 5,000 bootstrap resamples were used to obtain path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. To determine model fit, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and endogenous constructs R^2 and predictive relevance (Q^2) were utilized. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were used to test the significance of the mediation effects.

This analytical design enabled direct, indirect, and serial mediation effects to be tested simultaneously, which is in line with the hypotheses made under the dual-theory framework. Such emphasis on Pakistani bureaucrats can contribute a culturally and structurally pertinent factor to the discussions of occupational mental health and suicide prevention.

4. Results and Discussion

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the adequacy of the measurement model before testing the structural model. The CFA was conducted with SmartPLS 4.0, which evaluated the structure of factors, reliability, and validity of the four latent constructs of workplace mistreatment, hopelessness, depression, and suicidal behavior.



Table 1
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct/Item	Loading	t-value	p-value	VIF	Decision
Workplace Mistreatment (WM)					
WM1	0.798	12.547	0.000	2.134	Retained
WM2	0.812	13.892	0.000	2.267	Retained
WM3	0.785	11.923	0.000	1.998	Retained
WM4	0.821	14.156	0.000	2.345	Retained
WM5	0.789	12.234	0.000	2.087	Retained
WM6	0.834	15.678	0.000	2.456	Retained
WM7	0.776	11.567	0.000	1.923	Retained
WM8	0.803	13.245	0.000	2.156	Retained
WM9	0.795	12.789	0.000	2.098	Retained
WM10	0.817	14.023	0.000	2.289	Retained
WM11	0.782	11.834	0.000	1.967	Retained
WM12	0.809	13.567	0.000	2.234	Retained
WM13	0.758	10.892	0.000	1.789	Retained
WM14	0.826	14.789	0.000	2.378	Retained
WM15	0.791	12.456	0.000	2.045	Retained
Hopelessness (HOPE)					
HOPE1	0.767	10.234	0.000	1.834	Retained
HOPE2	0.792	11.567	0.000	2.012	Retained
HOPE3	0.814	12.789	0.000	2.234	Retained
HOPE4	0.778	10.892	0.000	1.923	Retained
HOPE5	0.823	13.456	0.000	2.345	Retained
HOPE6	0.801	12.234	0.000	2.123	Retained
HOPE7	0.789	11.678	0.000	1.989	Retained
HOPE8	0.834	14.123	0.000	2.456	Retained
HOPE9	0.756	9.789	0.000	1.756	Retained
HOPE10	0.818	13.234	0.000	2.289	Retained
HOPE11	0.795	12.567	0.000	2.067	Retained
HOPE12	0.773	10.456	0.000	1.834	Retained
Depression (DEPR)					
DEPR1	0.781	11.234	0.000	1.923	Retained
DEPR2	0.798	12.456	0.000	2.089	Retained
DEPR3	0.826	14.123	0.000	2.345	Retained
DEPR4	0.759	9.789	0.000	1.756	Retained
DEPR5	0.812	13.567	0.000	2.234	Retained
DEPR6	0.794	12.234	0.000	2.012	Retained
DEPR7	0.808	13.123	0.000	2.178	Retained
DEPR8	0.775	10.567	0.000	1.867	Retained
DEPR9	0.829	14.789	0.000	2.389	Retained
Suicidal Behavior (SB)					
SB1	0.843	15.234	0.000	2.456	Retained
SB2	0.821	13.789	0.000	2.289	Retained
SB3	0.806	12.567	0.000	2.123	Retained
SB4	0.794	11.892	0.000	2.012	Retained

Note: Factor loadings are all much higher than the suggested factor loading of 0.70. VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; all the VIF values are less than 3.0, which means that there are no problems with



multicollinearity. T-values and p-values were obtained in bootstrap resampling with 5000 iterations.

The outcome of the CFA, clearly shows that all the factor loadings are more than the recommended threshold of 0.70 with a range of 0.756 to 0.843, indicating that there are strong relationships between the observed indicators and the latent constructs that they are measured (Howard et al., 2022). All t-values are significant with the $p = 0.001$ level which proves the statistical significance of the factor loadings. Also, all the variances of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are less than 3.0 which means that there is no evidence of multicollinearity issues among the indicators (Civiloti et al., 2022).

Table 2

Model Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR	0.054	< 0.08	Good Fit
NFI	0.912	> 0.90	Good Fit
RMS Theta	0.089	< 0.12	Acceptable
Exact Fit Criteria	–	–	–
χ^2/df	2.156	< 3.0	Good Fit
GFI	0.923	> 0.90	Good Fit
AGFI	0.901	> 0.90	Good Fit
CFI	0.948	> 0.95	Excellent Fit
TLI	0.943	> 0.95	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.067	< 0.08	Good Fit
RMSEA 90% CI	[0.058, 0.076]	–	–

Table 2 of representing model fit indices show that the four-factor measurement model has acceptable to excellent fit with the observed data. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.054) is very low (0.08 is the good model fit), which indicates that the model fits well (Kelner et al., 2025). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.948) is close to the excellent fit criterion of 0.95, whereas the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.067) is within the acceptable range and the 90% confidence interval does not include the values larger than 0.08 (Bond, 1996).

The Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.912) and Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.923) are over the 0.90 recommended index, which also confirms the sufficiency of a measurement model even more. Although the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.943) is just less than the rigid 0.95 threshold, this still suggests that the model fits reasonably well in the context of exploratory research (Van Wagoner, 2021).

The CFA outcomes demonstrate that the theoretical measurement tools have a very high level of factorial validity and contribute to the uniqueness of the four constructs. The strong factor model supports the use of the structural equation modelling analysis in testing the postulated correlation between workplace mistreatment, hopelessness, depression, and suicidal behaviour.

Measurement Model Assessment

Reliability and validity of the measurement model were determined before the structural model was evaluated. Constructs were all above the recommended measures of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 3

Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α
Workplace Mistreatment	0.927	0.654	0.912
Hopelessness	0.903	0.621	0.888
Depression	0.894	0.611	0.872
Suicidal Behavior	0.910	0.658	0.893

The composite reliability (CR) values were all over 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. The



values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were more than 0.50, which favors the convergent validity (Malik & Pichler, 2023).

Table 4

Discriminant Validity Using Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	WM	HOPE	DEPR	SB
Workplace Mistreatment (WM)	0.809			
Hopelessness (HOPE)	0.634	0.788		
Depression (DEPR)	0.599	0.678	0.782	
Suicidal Behavior (SB)	0.605	0.662	0.684	0.811

Table 4 has higher values on the diagonal than those on the inter-construct correlation and therefore, validates the discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Structural Model Assessment

The bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to evaluate the structural model. Path coefficients, t-values, and p-values were tested as significant.

Table 5

Structural Path Coefficients and Significance

Hypothesis	Path	β	Significance (p-value)
H1	WM → SB	0.187	0.012
H2	WM → HOPE → SB	0.211	0.006
H3	WM → DEPR → SB	0.225	0.001
H4	HOPE → DEPR	0.418	0.000
H5	WM → HOPE → DEPR → SB	0.173	0.004

Note: $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$

The simplest linkage between mistreatment in the workplace and suicidal behaviour (H1) was also strong ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = 0.012$) which makes sense when considering the notion that the suicidal risk is directly increased among bureaucrats through persistent mistreatment (Tan & Xia, 2023). H2 and H3 establish the fact that hopelessness and depression mediate this relationship significantly on a case-to-case basis. H4 confirms the sequencing relationship between hopelessness and depression, which is the main principle of the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide (Ryu et al., 2024). H5 shows that serial mediation is significant which supports the complete mechanism of the model.

Model Fit and Predictive Power

Table 6

Model Fit and Predictive Relevance

Indicator	Value	Threshold
SRMR	0.057	< 0.08
R^2 (Suicidal Behavior)	0.421	> 0.26 (Substantial)
R^2 (Depression)	0.389	> 0.26
Q^2 (SB)	0.311	> 0

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.057, which showed that the model had a good fit. The values of R^2 indicates that the model indicates 42.1% of the variance in suicidal behavior, considered substantial in PLS-SEM literature (Malik & Pichler, 2024). Predictive relevance is also established in the Q^2 values.

These findings indicate that mistreatment at workplace is a major factor which influences suicidal tendencies amongst bureaucrats. In line with the Affective Events Theory, the recurrence of negative interpersonal occurrences in an organizational context induces the following emotional upheavals: hopelessness (Malik & Pichler, 2023). In addition, the conclusions support the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide since it proves that hopelessness is a cognitive process that not only mediates the effects of mistreatment but



also leads to the development of clinical depression and suicidal behavior (Tan & Xia, 2023).

A major deteriorating psychological chain is the significant serial mediation effect (H5): mistreated bureaucrats experience feelings of despair (hopelessness), which, in turn, translate into depressive symptoms and risks suicide. Such results are consistent with previous empirical studies indicating the same directions in the public sector and the emotionally labor-intensive jobs (Ding et al., 2024; Shepherd et al., 2023).

Such lessons are especially applicable in hierarchical settings where power disparity, administrative overhead, organizational silence, and power discourage candid discussion of psychological distress. What it requires is strategic interventions, both policy and organization. Educating the training managers about the possibility of detecting hopelessness in its initial stages and providing mental health services confidentially can greatly decrease suicidal tendencies in these environments.

5. Discussion

The results of this research offer strong evidence that workplace mistreatment plays a major role in causing suicidal behaviour among bureaucrats both directly and indirectly via affective-cognitive mediators. Based on the Affective Events Theory (AET), the findings establish that recurrent encounters of hostile work habitats, such as exclusion and verbal abuse, leading to systemic unfair treatment, bring about adverse emotional conditions that build up to a state of hopelessness. This is in line with previous studies that suggest that abuse within high-hierarchy and collectivist environments causes permanent emotional damage that cannot be overcome but accumulated and internalized with time (Malik & Pichler, 2023; Tan & Xia, 2023).

The findings also support the main hypotheses of the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide as they prove that hopelessness is not merely a result of mistreatment, but a mental condition that promotes depressive symptoms and, thus, predisposes to suicidal behaviour. The pronounced trajectory between hopelessness and depression seen in the model justifies the sequential quality of such cognitive-affective degradation, as indicated in the previous empirical research (Ryu et al., 2024). The serial mediation model demonstrates that mistreatment in the workplace is a precipitant that causes a psychological cascade that entails the generation of hopelessness, which in turn results in depression, and finally ends in suicidal behaviour. The importance of the chain is that early intervention is quite essential, more appropriate at the hopelessness stage, before it develops into a worse mental disorder.

Notably, these effects are framed through the specifics of the bureaucratic system of Pakistan in which hierarchical inflexibility, lack of emotive expression, and organizational silence contribute to the psychological harm of abuse. In contrast to more relaxed or expressive organizational cultures, bureaucrats usually do not have any channel of support (formal or informal) to vent their frustration or to redress themselves, which makes them more vulnerable to emotional breakdown. This context-centered knowledge makes a healthy contribution to the body of organizational psychology literature, which in the past has not paid much attention to workers in the public sector (Kelner et al., 2025; Shepherd et al., 2023).

The strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.421$ in suicidal behavior) and predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.311$). The structural model also indicates the strength of the dual-theory framework that has been used in the research. The combination of AET and Hopelessness Theory provides a subtle and empirically validated approach to the manner in which emotionally involved workplace experiences become cognitive despair and self-destructive intentions. The implications of these findings on policy and practice are very high. In order to reduce the downstream consequences of mistreatment, organizations particularly those in the area of governance, should institute proactive programs that include reporting of mistreatment, psychological counseling services, and leadership training aimed at emotional intelligence.

To sum up, the findings of this paper support the importance of focusing on emotional and cognitive pathways in handling mental health in the workplace. Hopelessness does not just passively derive out of an adverse situation; it is a causal agent that speeds up the deterioration of the mind. Future studies should investigate more moderators, including resilience or perceived organizational support, to further break this complicated psychological process down and suggest culturally flexible interventions.

6. Conclusion

This paper explored the psychology of mistreatment at work resulting in suicide among Pakistani bureaucrats. Combining both Affective Events Theory and the Hopelessness Theory of Suicide, the proposed



research offered and tested a serial mediation model where hopelessness and depression played a role. Based on the analysis of data obtained on 263 bureaucrats, the results with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) showed that affective (hopelessness) and cognitive (depression) pathways directly and indirectly predict suicidal behavior based on workplace mistreatment. The findings have three important implications for the organizational psychology discipline. To start with, they highlight the emotional weight of toxic workplaces and prove that recurrent instances of mistreatment are not just work-related risks but effective psychological initiators. Second, the paper isolates hopelessness as a focal point by which the emotional damage is converted to mental despair, thus raising the probability of depression and suicidal thoughts. Third, the empirical support of the complete serial mediation model reiterates the significance of early psychological interventions, especially those aimed at hopelessness, before its advancement into even worse mental health consequences. It has practical implications for the organizations in the public sector as well. Bureaucratic organizations should also be aware of the implications of mistreatment, which extend widely, and invest in preventive measures like confidential grievance procedures, mental health assistance, as well as leadership training on ethical oversight and emotional sensitivity. Organizations are in a position to help to save lives and prevent psychological breakdown by responding to mistreatment on both systemic and individual levels. Overall, the results contribute to the theory and provide practical implications to a current occupational health crisis. This model can be extended upon by future research to consider the moderating variables like resilience, organizational justice, or cultural attitude towards mental health to enhance the theoretical framework and customize the interventions to various organizational settings.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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