

Role of Politics, Discrimination and Favouritism in Stress and Job Performance in Pakistani Public Sector

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and favoritism on workplace stress and employee performance within public sector organizations in Pakistan. Data collection involved 390 employees using structured questionnaires, and the analysis utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling to explore the relationships. The findings indicate that elevated perceptions of organizational politics, discrimination, and favoritism significantly heighten workplace stress, leading to a detrimental impact on employee performance. The study highlights the importance of equitable, transparent, and meritocratic approaches to reduce stress and improve employee performance.

Keywords: Organizational Politics, Workplace Discrimination, Favouritism, Workplace Stress, Job Performance, Public Sector.

Introduction

Public sector employees are the backbone of governmental operations as the vital conduit between state policies and their actual application for citizens (Ahmed, 2024). Acting as the executive branch of the government, they translate policies into tangible services and guarantee the effective delivery of public services in every sphere of life (Jilani et al., 2024). The performance of these public sector employees, who handle a range of tasks ranging from implementing policies to offering direct public services, determines most of the effectiveness and efficiency of government operations (Sheikh et al., 2016). Like many other developing countries, Pakistan's public sector is still the main delivery mechanism for public services and employs the greatest number of people. Public sector organizations have major obstacles that compromise organizational performance and employee performance in spite of their critical relevance (Wild et al., 2014). These difficulties show up as organizational politics, favouritism, and workplace discrimination, which taken together produce a complex work environment influencing employee performance and well-being (Asif & Rathore, 2021; Levine, 2018). Organisational politics presents special difficulties for public sector organisations since it often results in decision-making procedures that give personal interests higher priority than organisational goals (Christensen et al., 2020). For employees, this political activity causes stress and uncertainty that could compromise their capacity to carry out their responsibilities (Landells & Albrecht, 2019; Perrewé et al., 2000, 2012). Zhang (2017) claims that workplace discrimination in all its manifestations influences employee morale in addition to building obstacles to merit-based career advancement. Particularly in "sifarish" culture, favouritism has become rather ingrained in Pakistani public sector organizations (Mushash Malik et al., 2021). This practice not only undercuts merit-based systems but also fosters an environment in which professional development and appreciation are sometimes based on interpersonal relationships rather than ability and performance (Nawaz & Naseem, 2023). These elements taken together

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produce a more demanding workplace, which finally influences public service delivery standards and employee job performance.

Workplace discrimination, favoritism, and organizational politics are pervasive issues that significantly impact employee well-being and performance. A staggering 91% of workers report experiencing workplace discrimination (Monster, 2023), with Māori and Pacific employees in particular perceiving high levels of bias, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and decreased job satisfaction (Massey, 2023). Favoritism further exacerbates workplace disengagement as nearly half (47%) of employees believe their supervisors have favorites, creating a sense of undervaluation and limiting fair opportunities (Boatman, 2024). Studies indicate that favoritism not only disconnects skilled employees from their organizations but also serves as a significant workplace stressor, shaping negative perceptions of the work environment (Lasisi et al., 2022). In competitive settings, favoritism reduces cooperation among employees, further hindering organizational cohesion (Mollestrom, 2022). Additionally, the prevalence of office politics cannot be overlooked, with 53% of employees feeling compelled to engage in political behaviour to advance their careers (Pollack, 2022). The consequences of such an environment are severe 77% of employees report burnout resulting from negative office politics, while 91% indicate that excessive stress and frustration deteriorate their work quality (Deloitte, 2015). Given these alarming trends, understanding the relationship between workplace politics, favoritism, and discrimination is critical for fostering healthier and more productive organizational environments. The Pakistani government's privatization strategy seeks to lessen the load on the national budget by privatizing non-performing companies like Pakistan International Airlines and Pakistan Steel Mills, which represent inefficiencies resulting from organizational politics, favoritism, nepotism, and discrimination. These issues have limited output, so depriving the government of the required public services (Hussain, 2005; Altaf & Altıntaş, 2014; World Bank, 2023; Ministry of Privatization, 2024). This study addresses the knowledge gap of relationship among organizational politics, discrimination, favoritism, workplace stress, employee job performance in Pakistani public sector. The results highlight the perception of these factors and their impact on stress and performance of employees. By analyzing these interactions, the study adds to both theoretical knowledge and pragmatic solutions for enhancing workplace conditions and raising employee job performance, so strengthening the standards of service delivery in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this paper combines Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) to explain how workplace dynamics influence employee behaviour in public sector organizations. SET emphasizes that by withdrawing effort and lowering performance, employees return perceived unfair treatment including organizational politics, discrimination, and favoritism that they experience (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). COR theory emphasizes how psychological resources are depleted by workplace pressures, which causes workers to save energy and withdraw from performance. Equity Theory holds that perceived injustices cause changes in effort to bring about fairness, usually at the cost of productivity of the employees. The JD-R Model highlights that while the lack of merit-based practices indicates insufficient resources, so aggravating stress and undermining performance; organizational politics and discrimination act as job demands. By raising the negative reciprocity described by SET and increasing resource loss cycles as proposed by COR theory, favoritism elevates these losses at higher level. This

combined approach provides a strong knowledge of how unfair policies raise stress and lower performance in Pakistani public sector companies.

Hypothesis Development

Organizational Politics

Organizational politics significantly impacts workplace dynamics and employee outcomes, particularly in public sector organizations. Organizational politics affects workplace dynamics and employee outcomes, especially in public sector organizations. Unapproved self-serving actions can undermine organizations' goals. Bureaucratic structures and stakeholder interactions particularly influence political behaviour in the public sector (Vigoda-Gadot, 2003). These dynamics increase uncertainty, anxiety, and occupational stress (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). Cultural norms and informal power structures influence Pakistan's public sector organizational politics, which increases employee stress and lowers performance (Islam, 2004; Ullah & Hashim, 2015). Such environments damage trust and collaboration, encouraging competition and defensiveness (Randall et al., 1999; Vigoda, 2000). Stress mediates lower employee performance and job satisfaction (Soomro et al., 2020; Ullah & Ahmed, 2018). Organizational politics lowers job satisfaction (Khan et al., 2022), and affective organizational commitment mediates this relationship (Butt et al., 2019). These perspectives emphasize effective management to improve employee well-being and performance and reduce organizational politics. Therefore, following hypothesis are formulated;

H1: Organizational politics increases workplace stress.

H2: Organizational politics reduces employee performance.

Workplace Discrimination

Workplace discrimination remains a significant challenge, particularly in public sector institutions where cultural norms and institutional structures often perpetuate discriminatory practices. Discrimination takes various forms, including those based on gender, age, ethnicity, and social background (Cheung et al., 2006). Subtle everyday discriminatory interactions, as highlighted by Deitch et al. (2003), can adversely affect employee well-being and performance. In Pakistani public sector organizations, cultural practices and social hierarchies deeply embedded in organizational structures contribute to discriminatory behaviors (Khilji, 2002). Such environments create psychological strain, increasing stress and reducing job satisfaction (Fiske & Lee, 2008; Ensher et al., 2001). Institutional discrimination often becomes normalized through routines and practices, complicating reform efforts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). While studies like Mohamad (2019) show the negative impact of discrimination on task and contextual performance in Egyptian culture, contrasting evidence from Dwomoh et al. (2015) in Ghanaian contexts suggests employees may not always perceive discrimination as harmful. Gender discrimination has been identified as a significant barrier to growth, particularly in educational settings (Rajeswari et al., 2024). Goldman et al. (2006) further established that discrimination fosters a cycle where reduced performance reinforces biased attitudes, and Triana et al. (2015) demonstrated that these negative effects can persist long-term, damaging organizational culture and morale. Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Workplace discrimination increases workplace stress.

H4: Workplace discrimination reduces employee performance.

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress is a critical factor influencing employee performance and organizational outcomes, particularly in public sector settings. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified

workplace stress as arising from the perception that work demands exceed coping resources, while Parker and DeCotiis (1983) highlighted its detrimental effects, including reduced decision-making capabilities and lower job performance. In public sector organizations, workplace stress has been shown to negatively impact productivity and cognitive functioning (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Bashir & Ramay, 2010). High levels of stress are often linked to organizational politics and discrimination, exacerbating absenteeism and diminishing work quality (Jamal, 1984; Imtiaz & Ahmad, 2009). Stress also mediates the effects of organizational factors on employee outcomes. Studies reveal that favoritism (Türker & Altuntaş, 2015) and organizational politics (Montgomery et al., 1996; Shahid et al., 2011) contribute to elevated stress, which in turn reduces job performance. Malik et al. (2010) confirmed that workplace stress mediates the impact of discrimination on performance in Pakistani organizations, while Haque and Aslam (2011) found stress to be a central mechanism through which various factors, including favoritism and discrimination, impair public sector employee performance. Additionally, Rubab (2017) and Settles et al. (2013) demonstrated how stress links family conflict and workplace discrimination to adverse employee behaviors and outcomes. Workplace stress significantly hampers employee job performance, as demonstrated by Basit and Hassan (2017) and Febrian and Nurhalisah (2024). Similarly, Ismail et al. (2015) and Vijayan (2017) found that elevated stress levels impair employees' efficiency and productivity. Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Workplace stress reduces employee job performance.

H6: Workplace stress mediates the relationship between favoritism and employee job performance.

H7: Workplace stress mediates the relationship between organizational politics and employee job performance .

H8: Workplace stress mediates the relationship between workplace discrimination and employee job performance.

Favoritism

Favoritism in organizational settings, particularly in public sector institutions, represents a significant challenge that affects workplace dynamics and employee outcomes through multiple direct and indirect mechanisms. Favoritism leads to inefficient resource allocation and reduced organizational effectiveness (Prendergast & Topel, 1996). In Pakistani organizations, practices like "sifarish" (recommendation-based preferential treatment) create an environment where merit is subordinated to personal connections and relationships, fundamentally altering workplace dynamics and the psychological contracts between employees and their organizations (Khilji, 2003). The presence of favoritism has been strongly linked to increased workplace stress, particularly for employees who perceive themselves as outsiders to favored groups (Arasli & Tumer, 2008). This creates an environment of uncertainty and anxiety that significantly impacts employee well-being (Sadozai et al., 2012). Favoritism compromises merit-based systems, so reducing output and demoralizing unselected employees (Ozler & Buyukarslan, 2011). Employees who feel powerless as a result lose engagement and productivity (Büte, 2011). Favoritism helps to balance organizational politics, so improving employee performance and reducing workplace stress (Daskin & Tezer, 2012). The effect of political activities on employee well-being is strengthened by more interaction between discriminating policies and negative workplace results (Arasli et al., 2006; Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Particularly detrimental in popular settings, favoritism aggravates the consequences of discriminating policies on stress and performance, so worsening their effects (Kwon, 2006; Keles et al., 2011). Employee handling of workplace discrimination influences their performance and stress level (Hernandez & Chen, 2014). Complex organizational interactions are much influenced by favoritism. By influencing stress levels and coping mechanisms, which

shapes occupational stress driving organizational politics and reduces employee performance, the variable moderates the indirect effects of workplace discrimination on employee performance (Turhan, 2014; Pelletier & Bligh, 2008). In public sector organizations, favoritism creates a complex web of interactions that affects both direct and indirect relationships between organizational factors and employee outcomes (Büte, 2011). The mediation mechanism of workplace stress between organizational practices and employee performance outcomes is further moderated by favoritism (Karatepe, 2013). Favoritism plays a significant role in determining how organizational stressors translate into performance outcomes through various psychological mechanisms (Naz, 2020). Perceptions of favoritism are negatively associated with employee trust in their organizations and coworkers, organizational commitment, willingness to speak up, and pay satisfaction, with friendship favoritism dominating other forms (Pearce et al., 2023). Additionally, team leaders, supervisors, managers, and executives tend to report less favoritism in public sector organizations due to their greater knowledge of organizational processes. Perceptions of tribalism and favoritism practices can also affect job satisfaction and service delivery in federal university libraries (CLN et al., 2024). These findings support a comprehensive model where favoritism not only directly affects workplace stress and employee productivity but also moderates the relationships between organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and their outcomes. Favoritism influences how these factors interact through workplace stress to affect employee performance, suggesting a complex pattern of moderated mediation effects in organizational settings. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9: Favoritism enhances the workplace stress.

H10: Favoritism reduces the employee productivity.

H11: Favoritism moderates the relationship between organizational politics and workplace stress.

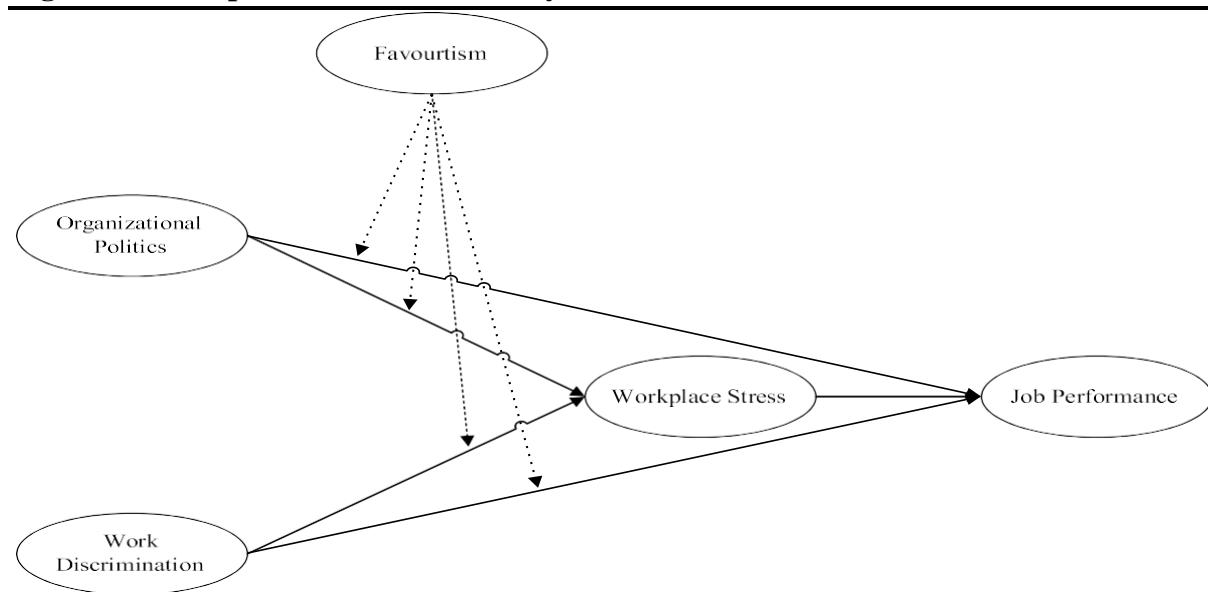
H12: Favoritism moderates the relationship between organizational politics and employee performance.

H13: Favoritism moderates the relationship between workplace discrimination and workplace stress.

H14: Favoritism moderates the relationship between workplace discrimination and employee performance.

H15: Favoritism moderates the mediation mechanism of workplace stress between workplace discrimination and employee job performance.

H16: Favoritism moderates the mediation mechanism of workplace stress between organizational politics and employee job performance.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The study utilized a correlational quantitative survey design with a deductive approach, targeting employees of federal and provincial government organizations in Pakistan. A probability sampling technique was employed to recruit participants. As of December 2022, the Pakistani government employed 1.379 million individuals (Haque et al., 2023), and based on the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table, a sample size of 384 was deemed appropriate for populations exceeding one million. Therefore, data was collected from 390 participants, slightly exceeding the required sample size. The demographic breakdown of respondents indicated 60.5% were male ($n = 236$) and 39.5% female ($n = 154$). In terms of education, 19.5% held an intermediate qualification ($n = 76$), 62.1% held bachelor's degrees ($n = 242$), 18.2% held master's degrees ($n = 71$), and 0.3% had a Ph.D. ($n = 1$). Work experience ranged from 1–5 years (32%, $n = 125$) to 6–10 years (56%, $n = 218$), with 12% ($n = 47$) having served for more than 11 years. Data was collected via physical survey questionnaires and subsequently entered into Microsoft Excel for initial processing and data cleaning (Curran, 2016). Partial Least Square Regression analysis was performed using SMART PLS Version 4.1 for examination of the hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2017).

Instruments

The study utilized validated scales to measure key constructs. Workplace stress was assessed using an 8-item scale developed by Marlin Company and the American Institute of Stress (1978), capturing participants' stress levels in workplace settings. Organizational politics was measured with the 14-item Perception of Politics Scale by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), which evaluates employees' perceptions of political behaviors in organizations. Workplace discrimination was measured using a 3-item Chronic Work Discrimination Scale by Sternthal et al. (2011), focusing on the frequency of discriminatory experiences. Favoritism was assessed through a 4-item scale by Daskin (2013), gauging employees' perceptions of preferential treatment. Finally, employee job performance was measured as a second-order construct using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) by Koopmans et al. (2012), encompassing task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work

behavior. These instruments were chosen for their reliability and relevance to the research objectives.

Results

Model Fitness

Indices in Table 1 showed the model's fitness was good and above acceptable threshold. The estimated and saturated models had SRMRs of 0.038, meeting the optimal range (≈ 0) and below the acceptable threshold (< 0.05 ; Hair et al., 2017). The estimated and saturated models had squared Euclidean distances of 0.772 and 0.777, respectively, which were close to the optimal threshold (≈ 1 ; Henseler et al., 2014). The geodesic distance values of 0.316 and 0.320 for the estimated and saturated models are near the optimal range (≈ 0 ; Henseler et al., 2014). The estimated and saturated models had Normed Fit Indexes (NFIs) of 0.912 and 0.911, respectively, exceeding the threshold (> 0.90 ; Hu & Bentler, 1999). These results prove the model's structural equation modelling suitability.

Table 1: Fitness Indices

Fitness Index	Estimated Model	Saturated Model	Threshold	Fitness
SRMR	0.038	0.038	≈ 0 SRMR $< .05$	Good
Squared Euclidean Distance	0.772	0.777	≈ 1	Good
Geodesic Distance	0.316	0.320	≈ 0	Good
NFI	0.912	0.911	> 0.90	Good

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the constructs were confirmed through multiple measures, all meeting established thresholds (Table-2). Ranging from 0.773 to 0.946, Cronbach's alpha (α) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, so indicating internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017). Further proving construct reliability, composite reliability (ρ_c) values for all constructions ranged from 0.868 to 0.955, above the benchmark of 0.70. Average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the 0.50 threshold established the convergent validity of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Except for a few rather lower but still acceptable values, factor loadings for all items ranged from 0.696 to 0.934, meeting the recommended level of 0.70 or higher. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values ran from 1.541 to 3.572 below than the upper threshold criteria of 5 suggesting no multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2017). These results support the reliability, convergent validity, and fit for additional structural analysis of the constructs.

Table 2: Reliability, Validity Statistics

Latent Construct	Items	Loadings	α	ρ_a	ρ_c	AVE	VIF
Job Performance	JP1	0.931	0.919	0.920	0.949	0.860	3.426
	JP2	0.934					3.572
	JP3	0.917					3.041
Favoritism	FAVO1	0.798	0.837	0.874	0.889	0.668	1.799
	FAVO2	0.832					1.880
	FAVO3	0.768					1.700
	FAVO4	0.867					1.873
	OP1	0.773	0.937	0.939	0.945	0.551	2.192

Organizational Politics	OP2	0.749					2.186
	OP3	0.737					2.123
	OP4	0.712					2.193
	OP5	0.736					1.816
	OP6	0.696					2.133
	OP7	0.726					2.007
	OP8	0.779					1.963
	OP9	0.741					1.886
	OP10	0.765					1.915
	OP11	0.755					1.769
	OP12	0.755					1.871
	OP13	0.709					2.198
	OP14	0.757					1.970
	Workplace Discrimination	WPD1	0.832				
WPD2		0.826	0.773	0.773	0.868	0.687	1.541
WPD3		0.829					1.626
Workplace Stress	WPS1	0.853					2.888
	WPS2	0.857					2.978
	WPS3	0.871					3.234
	WPS4	0.835	0.946	0.946	0.955	0.725	2.625
	WPS5	0.844					2.761
	WPS6	0.854					2.895
	WPS7	0.862					3.021
	WPS8	0.832					2.613

Discriminant Validity

HTMT

Using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, discriminant validity was evaluated; all values satisfied the designated threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values in Table 3 confirm the uniqueness of the constructs by falling between constructs with ranges from 0.041 to 0.771. Particularly, the highest HTMT value was found between job performance (0.771) and occupational stress, which stays within the allowed limit and guarantees discriminant validity. These findings verify that the constructions are suitable for structural model analysis and sufficiently different.

Table 3: HTMT Ratio

Construct	Favoritism	Job Performance	Organizational Politics	Workplace Discrimination
Job Performance	0.255			
Organizational Politics	0.057	0.551		
Workplace Discrimination	0.041	0.440	0.055	
Workplace Stress	0.231	0.771	0.549	0.392

Fornell Larcker Criterion

The Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 4) which compares the square root of the AVE for every construct with its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) also tested discriminant validity. All exceeding the inter-construct correlations, the square root of the AVE values diagonal elements ranged from 0.743 to 0.928, so verifying discriminant validity. For workplace stress (0.851), the square root of the AVE was, for instance, higher than its correlations with favoritism (0.211), job performance (-0.719), organizational politics (0.520), and workplace discrimination (0.335). Likewise, the square root of AVE (0.928) outstripped its relationships with every other construct. These findings confirm that every construct is unique and show sufficient discriminant validity as needed for strong structural model analysis (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Favoritism	0.817				
2. Job Performance	-0.234	0.928			
3. Organizational Politics	-0.002	-0.514	0.743		
4. Workplace Discrimination	-0.021	-0.371	0.020	0.829	
5. Workplace Stress	0.211	-0.719	0.520	0.335	0.851

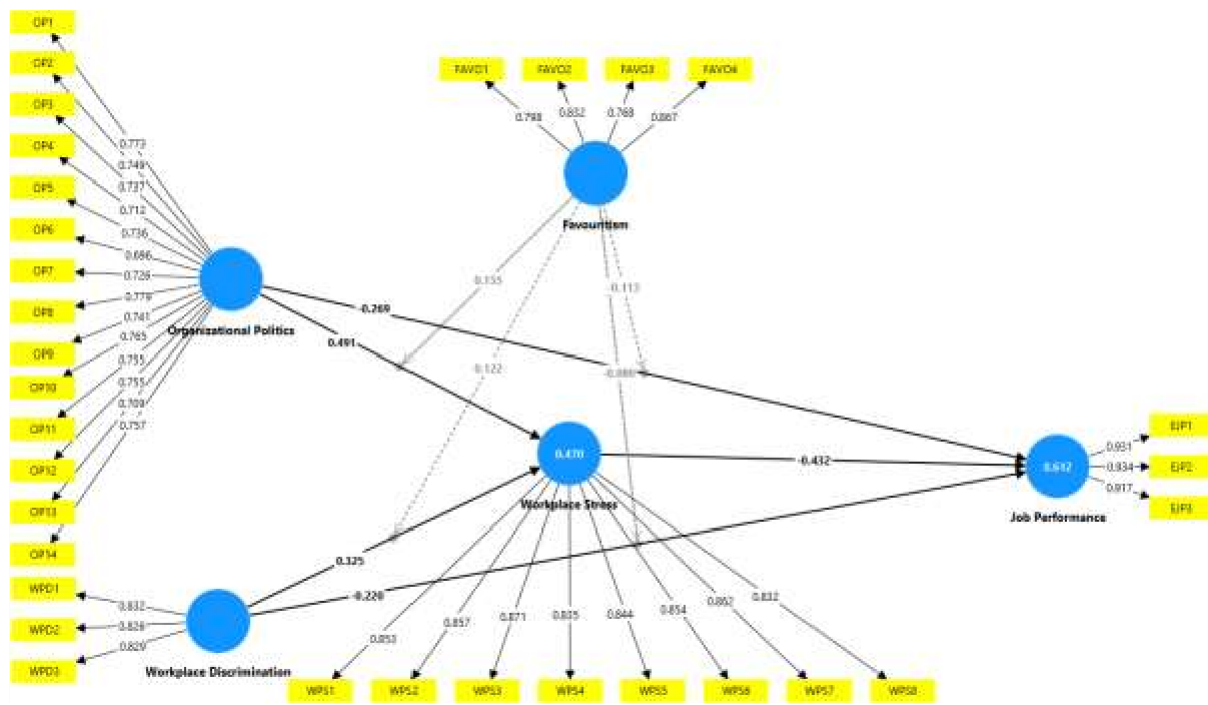
Model Performance

The model's performance was evaluated using R^2 values, which assess the proportion of variance explained by the independent variables (Table 5). Workplace stress (WPS) had an R^2 value of 0.470, indicating that 47% of the variance in WPS is explained by the predictors in the model. Similarly, employee job performance (EJP) had a higher R^2 value of 0.612, showing that 61.2% of the variance in EJP is accounted for by the model. These R^2 values suggest moderate to substantial explanatory power for the constructs, as values above 0.26 are considered substantial in behavioral research (Cohen, 1988; Hair et al., 2017). This demonstrates the model's capability to explain significant portions of variance in the dependent variables.

Table 5: R Square Values of the Model

Construct	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P values
WPS	0.470	0.478	0.042	11.173	<.001
EJP	0.612	0.617	0.035	17.321	<.001

Figure 2: Hypothesis Testing



Direct Path Analysis

The direct path analysis (Table 6) reveals significant relationships across all tested hypotheses. Organizational politics positively influences workplace stress ($\beta = 0.491$, $T = 16.303$, $p < 0.001$), and negatively impacts employee job performance ($\beta = -0.269$, $T = 6.526$, $p < 0.001$). Workplace discrimination also significantly enhances workplace stress ($\beta = 0.325$, $T = 8.627$, $p < 0.001$), while reducing employee job performance ($\beta = -0.220$, $T = 6.145$, $p < 0.001$). Workplace stress negatively affects job performance ($\beta = -0.432$, $T = 10.162$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, favoritism is shown to increase workplace stress ($\beta = 0.233$, $T = 5.689$, $p < 0.001$) and decrease employee job performance ($\beta = -0.159$, $T = 4.403$, $p < 0.001$). All relationships were significant, supporting the hypotheses and indicating that organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and favoritism influence both workplace stress and employee job performance in significant ways.

Table 6: Direct Path Relationships

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	OP → WPS	0.491	0.491	0.030	16.303	<.001	Accepted
H2	OP → EJP	-0.269	-0.271	0.041	6.526	<.001	Accepted
H3	WPD → WPS	0.325	0.325	0.038	8.627	<.001	Accepted
H4	WPD → EJP	-0.220	-0.219	0.036	6.145	<.001	Accepted
H5	WPS → EJP	-0.432	-0.430	0.043	10.162	<.001	Accepted
H9	FAVO → WPS	0.233	0.231	0.041	5.689	<.001	Accepted
H10	FAVO → EJP	-0.159	-0.159	0.036	4.403	<.001	Accepted

Mediating Paths Analysis

The mediation impact analysis demonstrates significant indirect effects in all tested hypotheses (Table 7). Hypothesis 6 (FAVO \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP) shows that favoritism indirectly impacts employee job performance through workplace stress ($\beta = -0.101$, $T = 4.966$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that favoritism reduces job performance by increasing workplace stress. Hypothesis 7 (OP \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP) reveals a similar indirect relationship, where organizational politics negatively affects job performance through its influence on workplace stress ($\beta = -0.212$, $T = 8.246$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 8 (WPD \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP) also supports the mediating role of workplace stress, with workplace discrimination negatively affecting employee job performance through its impact on workplace stress ($\beta = -0.140$, $T = 6.606$, $p < 0.001$). All mediation hypotheses were accepted, confirming the significant mediating role of workplace stress in the relationships between favoritism, organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and employee job performance.

Table 7: Mediation Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P values	Decision
H6	FAVO \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP	-0.101	-0.099	0.020	4.966	<.001	Accepted
H7	OP \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP	-0.212	-0.211	0.026	8.246	<.001	Accepted
H8	WPD \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP	-0.140	-0.139	0.021	6.606	<.001	Accepted

Moderating Path Analysis

The moderating role of favoritism is evident in all tested hypotheses (Table 8), highlighting its significant impact on the relationships between organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and both workplace stress and employee job performance. Hypothesis 11 (FAVO \times OP \rightarrow WPS) reveals that favoritism strengthens the relationship between organizational politics and workplace stress ($\beta = 0.155$, $T = 4.432$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 12 (FAVO \times OP \rightarrow EJP) shows that favoritism negatively moderates the impact of organizational politics on employee job performance ($\beta = -0.113$, $T = 3.548$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 13 (FAVO \times WPD \rightarrow WPS) indicates that favoritism also enhances the relationship between workplace discrimination and workplace stress ($\beta = 0.122$, $T = 3.060$, $p = 0.002$), while Hypothesis 14 (FAVO \times WPD \rightarrow EJP) suggests that favoritism weakens the effect of workplace discrimination on employee job performance ($\beta = -0.080$, $T = 2.323$, $p = 0.020$). Moreover, Hypothesis 15 (FAVO \times WPD \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP) and Hypothesis 16 (FAVO \times OP \rightarrow WPS \rightarrow EJP) demonstrate that favoritism moderates the mediation mechanism of workplace stress in both the workplace discrimination and organizational politics pathways, respectively ($\beta = -0.053$, $T = 2.952$, $p = 0.003$; $\beta = -0.067$, $T = 3.929$, $p < 0.001$). All moderating hypotheses were accepted, confirming that favoritism plays a critical role in enhancing the effects of organizational politics and workplace discrimination on workplace stress and employee job performance.

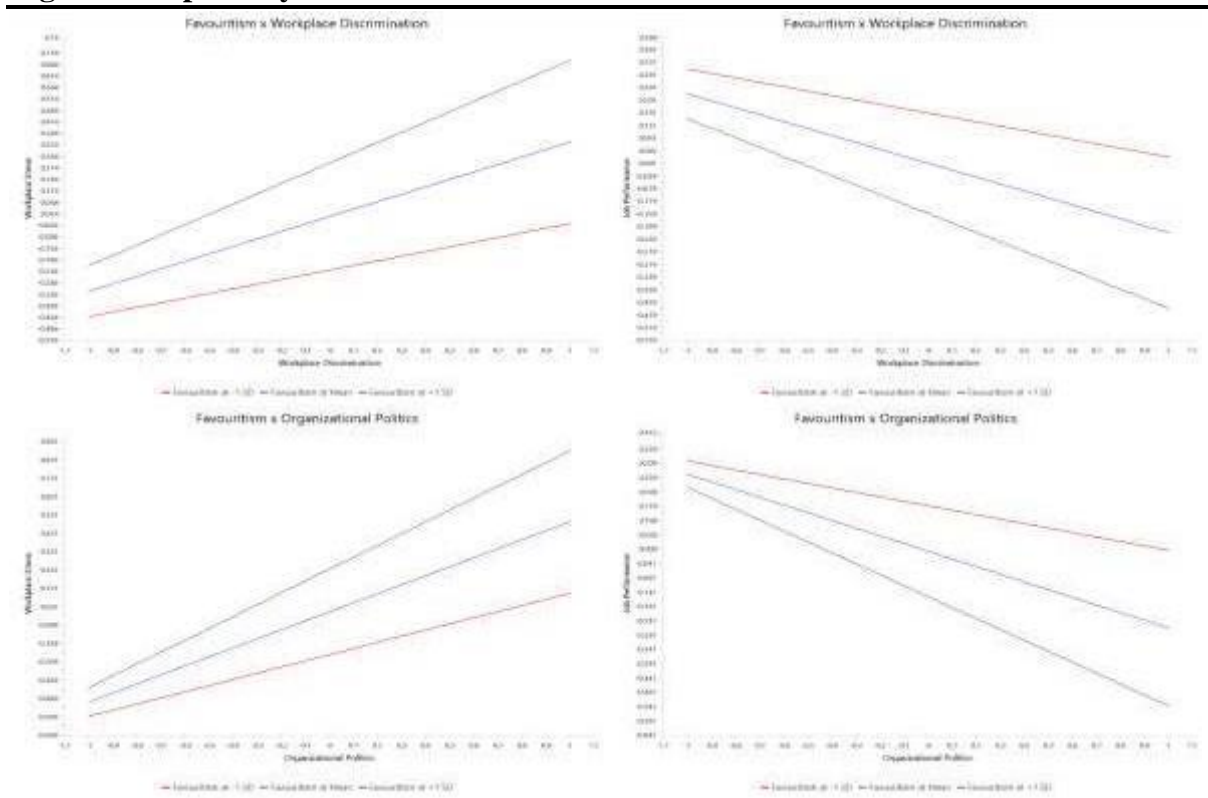
Table 8: Moderation Path analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T statistics	P value	Decision
H11	FAVO x OP → WPS	0.155	0.153	0.035	4.432	<.001	Accepted
H12	FAVO x OP → EJP	-0.113	-0.114	0.032	3.548	<.001	Accepted
H13	FAVO x WPD → WPS	0.122	0.121	0.040	3.060	0.002	Accepted
H14	FAVO x WPD → EJP	-0.080	-0.079	0.035	2.323	0.020	Accepted
H15	FAVO x WPD → WPS → EJP	-0.053	-0.052	0.018	2.952	0.003	Accepted
H16	FAVO x OP → WPS → EJP	-0.067	-0.066	0.017	3.929	<.001	Accepted

Slope Analysis

Slope analysis (figure 3) shows that favoritism significantly moderates organizational politics, workplace discrimination, stress, and employee job performance. Favoritism moderates organizational politics and workplace discrimination, so it increases workplace stress and lowers employee job performance. Favoritism exacerbates the negative effects of organizational politics and workplace discrimination, lowering employee performance and increasing workplace stress. This shows that favoritism exacerbates these negative workplace dynamics, highlighting its crucial role in shaping the workplace.

Figure 3: Slope analysis



Findings

Results reveal the significant impact of organizational politics, workplace discrimination and favoritism on employee stress levels and overall job performance, reinforcing the notion that these workplace dynamics contribute to a psychologically distressing and demotivating

professional environment. Results establishes that organizational politics exerts a substantial influence on workplace stress, wherein employees who perceive decision-making processes as politically driven experience heightened uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. Workplace discrimination further exacerbates this stress by fostering perceptions of marginalization, exclusion, and inequitable treatment, which, in turn, erode employees' sense of belonging and professional self-efficacy. Favoritism emerges as a critical stress-inducing factor that not only amplifies workplace stress but also diminishes employee engagement by reinforcing the belief that performance and merit are secondary to personal affiliations and subjective biases. The mediation analysis further substantiates that workplace stress serves as the principal mechanism through which these organizational constructs adversely affect job performance, as prolonged exposure to stress depletes cognitive and emotional resources, leading to diminished motivation, task commitment, and work efficiency. Additionally, the moderation analysis highlights that favoritism intensifies these negative effects by strengthening the relationship between organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and workplace stress, thereby exacerbating the decline in job performance.

Discussion

This study supports extensive research that organizational politics is the main cause of workplace stress. Organisational politics increases stress, which lowers job performance (Khan et al. 2022; Soomro et al., 2020). When employees perceive workplace is political, they withdraw their efforts and reduce contribution due to enhanced stress levels. Political behaviour in public sector organizations, especially in power-imbalanced settings, causes discontent and declining performance (Ullah & Hashim 2015). Stressed workers save psychological resources instead of working, which lowers their performance. These findings support Butt et al. (2019), who found that organizational politics lower job satisfaction and performance. Workplace discrimination decreased employee performance and increased stress which in consistent with previous studies of Triana et al. (2015) and Fiske and Lee (2008) which found that discrimination affects employee well-being. Results further demonstrates that workers exposed to discriminatory policies feel psychologically exhausted resulted in reducing their performance. The findings also support Khilji (2002) and Ensher et al. (2001) that deeply ingrained discriminatory policies cause workplace stress, marginalizing workers and lowering motivation. Discrimination is especially harmful in the public sector where hierarchies support injustices and it hinders career advancement and encouraging disengagement (Rajeswari et al., 2024). According to the results favoritism increases the impact of organizational politics and discrimination on stress. The employees how perceive excluded adds stress and lowers performance. Favoritism creates an anxious, demoralized, and disconnected workplace (Arasli & Tumer, 2023; Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Favoritism in public sector companies disturbs merit-based systems and reduces employee performance when workers believe their efforts will not be fairly rewarded (Keles et al., 2022). It enhances the perceived stress of employees directly but also strengthens the negative impact of organizational politics and discrimination on performance (Arasli et al., 2006; Karakas, 2016). This study adds to the body of knowledge the role of favoritism which acts as a moderator that aggravates the stress employees feel in these high-conflict environments, so causing disengagement and poor performance. The identification of workplace stress as a main mediator between organizational elements and employee performance is a major contribution of this work. Results of the study expands the efforts of Malik et al. (2010) and Rubab (2017), who observed that workplace stress mediates the consequences of organizational pressures including politics and discrimination on performance. Stress rises in line with the JD-R Model as workers manage the twin weight of politics and discrimination, which results in disengagement and reduced performance levels (Demerouti et al., 2001). In the case of favoritism, where workers in favor of groups felt less

stressed while those excluded from these groups claimed more stress, the mediation of stress was especially straightforward (Karatepe, 2013; Kwon (2006).

These findings align with established theories. Conservation of Resources Theory explains that employees facing high workplace stress due to favoritism or discrimination perceive a loss of psychological resources, reducing their ability to perform. Equity Theory supports the argument that favoritism disrupts employees' sense of fairness, leading to dissatisfaction and decreased productivity. Social Identity Theory suggests that workplace discrimination erodes employees' sense of belonging, fostering stress and disengagement. The Job Demands- Resources Model further reinforces that excessive workplace demands exacerbated by favoritism drain employees' energy, ultimately lowering job performance. Addressing these issues through transparent policies and fair treatment can help reduce stress and improve workplace outcomes.

Conclusion

Workplace dynamics significantly influence employee behaviour, productivity, and overall well-being, with unethical practices such as organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and favoritism creating environments that foster stress and disengagement while diminishing job performance. This study contributes to the existing literature on workplace fairness by examining the impact of these factors on employee outcomes within the public sector, highlighting the necessity of understanding these detrimental workplace elements to develop effective interventions that enhance employee well-being and organizational justice. Given the Pakistani government's privatization strategy aimed at addressing inefficiencies in state-owned enterprises, understanding how these organizational issues affect employee performance is essential for improving service delivery and operational effectiveness in the public sector. The findings demonstrate that workplace politics, discrimination, and favoritism have adverse effects on employee stress levels and job performance, as employees who perceive such inequitable practices experience elevated stress, reduced motivation, and diminished work efficiency, necessitating the implementation of transparent policies and equitable workplace practices that foster a healthier organizational climate. Addressing these challenges through structural interventions and leadership commitment can enhance employee well-being, strengthen organizational commitment, and improve overall productivity, requiring policymakers and organizational leaders to establish frameworks that ensure fairness, inclusivity, and respect for employees, ultimately fostering a work environment that prioritizes performance, job satisfaction, and long-term organizational sustainability.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study underline the major impact on employee performance and stress levels of organizational politics, workplace discrimination, and favoritism. Employees who see high degrees of organizational politics where political agendas rather than merit influences decisions like promotions and pay increases often feel less motivated and more stressed. People who feel their efforts are underappreciated will become less involved and produce less as a result. Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or other elements creates a sense of injustice that causes stress and damages confidence between management and staff, so compromising performance. Moreover, favoritism that stresses personal relationships rather than merit can cause annoyance among staff members who feel underappreciated or excluded. This compromises employee performance and involvement since people are less driven to exert effort in a situation seen as unfair. This lower morale even more. Key intermediary in these dynamics is occupational stress. Negative impressions increase stress, so compromising employee well-being, cognitive capacity, job satisfaction, and ultimately performance potential. Public sector companies must apply proactive policies that support a culture of justice

and openness in order to help to lessen the consequences of organizational politics, discrimination, and favoritism. Stress can be reduced and employee performance improved by means of promotions, incentives, and possibilities based on performance and capability. Establishing policies and practices that support diversity, equity, and inclusion together with offering stress management strategies will help create a workplace where staff members feel valued and in charge. This will increase organizational performance and employee well-being, so fostering a more involved and effective workforce.

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