

Expressive Suppression and Job Performance Among Employees of Textile Mills in Pakistan

Arjmand Naz¹, Rukhshinda Begum², Samia Shafiq³, Rizwana Samreen⁴,
Saba Akmal⁵, Muhammad Faizan⁶ and Salman Qureshi⁷

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance among employees in textile mills in Pakistan. It aims to fill this gap and provide practical implications for workers; many of whom work long shifts from morning until evening or night and frequently suppress their emotions. A cross-sectional correlational research design with purposive sampling is employed to collect data from workers across various departments of textile mills in Pakistan. The minimum age criterion is 18 years, and both male and female employees who have been working in the textile mill for at least one year are included. Two scales are used: the Expressive Suppression subscale of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and the short version of the Self-Assessment Scale of Job Performance. Findings revealed a significant negative relationship between expressive suppression and job performance, and regression analysis further indicated that expressive suppression significantly and negatively predicts job performance among textile mill employees in Pakistan. The study offers comprehensive implications, including the need for legal and legislative reforms, the involvement of mental health professionals in raising awareness among managers and owners, encouragement for labour departments to implement effective measures, and support for employees in seeking mental health assistance.

Keywords: Expressive Suppression, Job Performance, Employee, Textile Mills.

Introduction

In organisational psychology, emotion regulation has been extensively studied as a crucial factor influencing employees' mental health, interpersonal relationships, and overall job performance. A critical form of emotion regulation is expressive suppression, defined as the conscious effort to inhibit outward emotional expressions after an emotion has already been triggered (Gross, 1998,

¹School Owner, Pakistan Education Initiative Management Authority, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Email: arjmandnaz@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6191-5714>

²Lecturer, Department of Commerce, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: rukshinda.b@uok.edu.pk, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4316-4078>

³MPhil Psychology, Specialities in Validation/ Industrial Psychology/ Research Methods, Wah Cantt, Pakistan. Email: samiashafiq88@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/00009-0002-7246-6099>

⁴Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Pakistan. Email: rizwana.samreen@uow.edu.pk, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8007-7339>

⁵English Lecturer, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan. Email: akmalsaba69@gmail.com

⁶Assistant Manager HR & A/ Training Lead, Human Resources Department, National Grid Company of Pakistan (formerly NTDC), Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: mianmuhammadfaizan@gmail.com

⁷Research Scholar, Motivational Speaker, Practitioner at CMH, Trainer in Rehabilitation and Private Organizations, Karachi, Pakistan. Email: salmanhanzala@gmail.com



2002). Expressive suppression can involve controlling facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language to conceal feelings of anger, frustration, or sadness in the workplace. While such regulation may prevent conflicts or maintain professionalism in certain situations, it often incurs psychological costs, including increased stress, cognitive load, and reduced authenticity in social interactions (Wang et al., 2025). Job performance, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which employees fulfil their assigned duties, meet organisational expectations, and contribute to the achievement of workplace outcomes (Bayona et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence has suggested that the role of expressive suppression in workplace performance is context-dependent. Schraub et al. (2011) surveyed 153 German employees from various occupational backgrounds and found that workplace changes increased strain, which in turn reduced adaptive performance. Interestingly, expressive suppression acted as a buffer, reducing strain among those who practised it more frequently. This finding highlights that suppression may not always be detrimental, especially when employees face organisational instability. Another study investigated the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance among American office workers. Using a correlational design, participants completed the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and the Need Satisfaction at Work, Job Strain, and Performance Diary (NJP) to assess workplace outcomes. Results indicated no significant association between expressive suppression and job performance. These findings suggest that expressive suppression may not directly influence employees' performance in organisational settings (Duffy, 2024).

Gan et al. (2014) reported in a study of Chinese medical staff following the Sichuan earthquake that expressive suppression was associated with higher job engagement and lower burnout among rescue workers, mediated by positive reappraisal. However, for non-rescue staff, suppression increased both engagement and burnout, suggesting that context and stress levels influence the impact of suppression. Likewise, Taesillapasathit and Arikatt (2024) tested an intervention combining Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) among professional workers in Thailand. Results showed that training enhanced cognitive reappraisal and reduced reliance on suppression, which improved emotional well-being and stress management. These findings suggest that although suppression can sometimes serve adaptive purposes, relying on it in the long term may undermine well-being and performance.

Yeung and Wong (2020) investigated 141 Chinese managerial employees using a daily diary method. They found that expressive suppression was more beneficial for older employees, who tend to prioritise emotional goals, compared to younger employees. These studies suggest that age and work context moderate the effects of suppression on job outcomes. Two Colombian field studies and a scenario experiment examined expressive suppression, showing that suppressing emotions in creative team environments significantly predicted higher job satisfaction and performance, highlighting the role of suppression in workplace well-being within Latin American organisational contexts (González & Richter, 2015).

Age-related dynamics also play a role in how suppression is experienced. Szczygieł and Maruszewski (2015) examined Chinese workers across two samples ($N = 340$ and $N = 280$). They found that suppression reduced physical strain and improved affective well-being among older workers, but not among younger workers. This aligns with socioemotional selectivity theory, which argues that older adults value emotional regulation more than younger individuals, potentially making suppression more functional in later life. However, such findings also demonstrate cultural variations in how suppression operates across occupational groups and age ranges.

Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation (1998, 2002) conceptualises expressive suppression as a response-focused strategy that occurs late in the emotion-generative process. Because suppression occurs after emotions are fully activated, it requires greater cognitive effort, which may reduce efficiency and deplete the resources needed for optimal job performance. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) further explains these dynamics by positing that individuals strive to preserve their limited personal resources, such as time, energy, and emotional stability. Suppression consumes psychological resources, which may lead to exhaustion and lower job performance. Additionally, Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) emphasises that workplace events elicit emotional responses, which in turn influence job attitudes and performance. If suppression becomes the dominant way of handling adverse events, employees' long-term satisfaction, motivation, and productivity may suffer.

Despite these insights, little research has been conducted in Pakistan, particularly within the textile sector, which is one of the country's largest industries employing millions of workers. Textile mill employees often endure long working hours, inadequate labour protections, and power imbalances that prevent them from challenging managers' demands. Under such conditions, expressive suppression becomes a common coping strategy; however, this strategy may ultimately have a negative impact on employees' job performance. Despite its relevance, the implications of expressive suppression for job performance in this specific cultural and organisational context remained largely unexamined. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by exploring the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance among textile mill employees in Pakistan, using standardised measures of both constructs.

Hypotheses

H1: Expressive suppression will be negatively correlated with job performance among employees of textile mills in Pakistan.

H2: Expressive suppression will negatively and significantly predict job performance among textile mill employees.

Methodology

Research Design and Sampling

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance among textile mill employees in Pakistan. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants from various departments, including stitching, sampling, quality control, cutting, store handling, boiling, washing, and mechanical operations. The minimum age criterion was 18 years, and both male and female employees who had been working in textile mills in Pakistan for at least one year were eligible for inclusion.

Instruments

Expressive suppression was measured using the expressive suppression subscale of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003). This subscale consists of four items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha of the expressive suppression subscale ranges from .76 to .80 (Preece et al., 2020). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha of this subscale was .84, indicating high internal consistency.

Job performance was assessed using the short version of the Self-Assessment Scale of Job Performance. This instrument consists of 10 items that measure employees' self-perceived ability

to complete tasks efficiently. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting better job performance. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was .86 (de Azevedo Andrade et al., 2020). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.70, which is lower than the original value but still considered satisfactory.

Ethical Considerations and Procedure

Before data Collection, permission was obtained from the mill administration, and the ethical standards of APA (7th edition) were followed. Participants were briefed on the study's objectives and assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained before administering the questionnaires. The survey was distributed in paper format during work breaks, and participants took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete it. Assistance was provided to participants as needed to help them understand the questionnaire. Demographic information, including age group (young adulthood, middle adulthood), age, gender, department, and work shift (morning or night), was recorded. A total of 250 employees were approached in textile mills located in Lahore, Faisalabad, Karachi, and Islamabad. Of these, 180 participants completed the questionnaire and met the inclusion criteria. All participants were thanked for their cooperation. The collected data were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) for correlation and regression analyses.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=180)

Characteristics	<i>F</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age			31.23	12.36
Age Group				
Young Adults (18-39)	112	62.2		
Middle Adults (40-65)	68	37.8		
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower Class	105	58.3		
Middle Class	39	21.7		
Upper Class	36	20		
Shifts				
Morning	141	78.3		
Night	39	21.7		
Gender				
Men	164	91.1		
Women	16	8.9		
Departments				
Spinning	29	16.1		
Knitting	15	8.3		
Dyeing & Bleaching	12	6.7		
Printing / Designing	4	2.2		
Sampling	4	2.2		
Product Development	9	5		
Graphical Designing	13	7.2		
Cutting	15	8.3		
Stitching (Sewing)	14	7.8		

Washing	4	2.2
Finishing	5	2.8
Quality Assurance	4	2.2
Mechanical & Electrical	4	2.2
Industrial Engineering	6	5.6
Procurement & Inventory (Stores)	10	5.6
Merchandising	10	4.4
Human Resources	8	4.4
Finance & Accounting	8	3.3
Marketing & Export	6	3.3

Note: *f*= Frequency, %= Percentage, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation

The demographic characteristics of the respondents ($N = 180$) are presented in Table 1. The mean age was 31.23 years ($SD = 12.36$). Most participants were young adults aged 18–39 years ($n = 112$, 62.2%), while 68 (37.8%) were middle adults aged 40–65 years. With respect to socioeconomic status, 105 employees (58.3%) belonged to the lower class, 39 (21.7%) to the middle class, and 36 (20%) to the upper class. The sample was predominantly male ($n = 164$, 91.1%), with 16 female participants (8.9%). Regarding work shifts, 141 employees (78.3%) worked in morning shifts, whereas 39 (21.7%) worked in night shifts. In terms of departmental distribution, 29 employees (16.1%) worked in spinning, 15 (8.3%) in knitting, 12 (6.7%) in dyeing and bleaching, 4 (2.2%) in printing/designing, 4 (2.2%) in sampling, 9 (5%) in product development, 13 (7.2%) in graphical designing, 15 (8.3%) in cutting, 14 (7.8%) in stitching/sewing, 4 (2.2%) in washing, 5 (2.8%) in finishing, 4 (2.2%) in quality assurance, 4 (2.2%) in mechanical and electrical, 6 (3.3%) in industrial engineering, 10 (5.6%) in procurement and inventory, 10 (5.6%) in merchandising, 8 (4.4%) in human resources, 8 (4.4%) in finance and accounting, and 6 (3.3%) in marketing and export.

Table 2: Correlational Analysis (N=180)

Variables	1	2
1.Expressive Suppression	-	-.19**
2.Job Satisfaction		-

Note: ** $p < .01$

The above table depicts significant and negative relationship between expressive suppression and job satisfaction.

Table 3: Regression Analysis (N=180)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	31.01***	1.34		<.001		
Expressive Suppression	-.28**	.10	-.19	.008	-.50	-.07

Note: $R^2 = .03$, $F = 7.22$, ** $p < .01$

The regression analysis revealed that expressive suppression was a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being, $\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.008$. Expressive suppression explained 3% of the variance in psychological well-being, $R^2 = .03$, $F(1, 178) = 7.22$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The literature on the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance is contradictory. Some studies suggest that expressive suppression can be beneficial for performance, as noted by Chauhan and Vijayan (2025). In contrast, studies indicate that it has adverse effects (Uyen et al., 225) or no effects at all (Pal, 24). The present study aims to address this ambiguity and fill the gap in the literature by examining the relationship between expressive suppression and job performance among employees of textile mills in Pakistan. This study also seeks to provide practical implications for both research and practice.

The first hypothesis stated that expressive suppression would have a negative and significant relationship with job satisfaction among employees of textile mills in Pakistan. The correlational analysis supported this assumption, indicating that higher levels of suppression were linked to lower job satisfaction. This finding aligns with prior research emphasising the costs of expressive suppression in occupational contexts. For instance, Yeung and Fung (2012) found that among Chinese insurance workers, younger employees did not benefit from suppression, while older employees showed some emotional gains. Similarly, Yeung and Wong (2020) demonstrated that expressive suppression was less effective for younger employees in managing stress and maintaining satisfaction, suggesting that age moderates the outcomes of emotion regulation strategies.

A possible explanation for the negative and significant relationship observed in the present study is that most employees, as indicated in the demographic data, were young adults. Younger workers are often at an early stage of their careers, where they have less job security, fewer coping resources, and limited experience in managing workplace stress. As a result, the reliance on expressive suppression may drain cognitive and emotional resources, leading to lower job satisfaction. Additionally, cultural dynamics in Pakistani workplaces, where employees are often expected to suppress emotions in response to authoritative management styles, may further reinforce this pattern. Employees risk being reprimanded or even dismissed if they openly express feelings, which makes suppression a common yet exhausting strategy. Over time, the constant need to hide emotions can become overwhelming, mentally tiring, and detrimental to both well-being and satisfaction, especially for young adults who have fewer adaptive strategies and are more vulnerable to stress in hierarchical environments.

The second hypothesis proposed that expressive suppression would negatively predict job performance. Regression analysis confirmed this hypothesis, showing that suppression had a significant and negative influence on job performance among textile mill workers. This finding is consistent with prior evidence suggesting that expressive suppression is associated with greater workplace stress and poorer outcomes. A previous study, conducted by Caramanica et al. (2023), reported that U.S. employees who frequently suppressed their emotions experienced heightened stress, particularly in hierarchical settings, which in turn undermined their performance. A possible explanation for this result could be that expressive suppression depletes cognitive resources, reducing focus and efficiency on job tasks. It also hinders communication and teamwork, which are essential for optimal job performance.

Conclusion

The study found a significant negative correlation between expressive suppression and job performance, with regression analysis confirming expressive suppression as a negative predictor of performance. These results emphasise the detrimental impact of emotion suppression in textile

mill employees. In light of these findings, workplace interventions and support systems should be introduced to enhance employee well-being and productivity.

Implications

This study offers several important implications. Theoretically, it extends cross-cultural evidence by demonstrating that expressive suppression has a negative impact on job performance in Pakistan, consistent with global findings (Yeung & Fung, 2012; Caramanica et al., 2023). Practically, the results underscore the need for workplace interventions, including stress management programs, emotion regulation training, and counselling services, to support employees. At the organisational level, managers and owners should be educated about the psychological costs of suppression and encouraged to foster healthier communication. At the policy level, labour departments in Pakistan should strengthen monitoring mechanisms to protect employees from exploitative practices that exacerbate emotional suppression. Mental health professionals also need to spread awareness and encourage employees to seek support when distress becomes overwhelming. Furthermore, the presence of organisational psychologists in every firm is recommended to help employees manage emotions, thereby improving both productivity and well-being. Finally, the government should introduce legal and legislative reforms to address the mistreatment of employees and violations of workers' rights, to dismantle the prevailing "might is right" culture.

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