Job Satisfaction as a Mediating Variable between Workplace Factors and Absenteeism: A Proposed Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Absenteeism is one of the major concerns for all types of organizations, from the public to private types and from small to big ones. Absenteeism is considered to be one of the underlying factors of loss of productivity, waste of resources, and fragile structure of the organizations and industries around the world. Therefore, it shows the necessity of research and investigation to find out factors that are related to this costly phenomenon of absenteeism not only among developed nations but also among developing and less developed countries such as Afghanistan where the organizations of the public sector are facing a high level of absenteeism. Therefore, this paper aims to study the relationship between workplace factors, job satisfaction, and absenteeism. This study thusly proposes a framework to investigate the effect of workplace factors on absenteeism via the mediating role of job satisfaction. Further, the direct effect between the variables has been discussed. Hence this paper is expected to fill the research gap and contribute to the body of knowledge in this area of research.

Keywords: Absenteeism, workplace factors, job satisfaction, Afghanistan

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Introduction

Absenteeism comes from the Latin word "absentia" referring to the nonattendance status of the employee at the work (ikeš, 2018). Absenteeism is present in all types of organizations, public and private, small and big, profit, and non-profit (Beheshtifar, 2016). There are two types of absenteeism, culpable and non-culpable (Kocakulah, 2016). Non-culpable absenteeism refers to an employee's authorized leave or absenteeism and there is no charge or penalty for that such as annual leave quota, sickness leave, paternity, and maternity leaves. Culpable absenteeism means unauthorized and non-allowed absenteeism of the employees. The type of absenteeism in the literature and past studies refers to the kind of absenteeism which is un-authorized. Unauthorized or not-allowed absenteeism has been perceived as a major management problem for the organization and poor performance indicator for individuals within the organization (Raja, 2019; ikeš, 2018; Kuma, 2014)

Employee absenteeism is considered as a costly phenomenon to the organizations and the economy as a whole in terms of loss of productivity (Kocakulah, 2016; Nicola, 2017; Martin, 2017). Statistics Canada reports that the average rate of absenteeism per worker in 2013 was about 9.1 days and it cost around \$16.6B directly to the Canadian economy (Eric, 2013). US Bureau of Labour Statistics reports the rate of absenteeism around 2.9% which imposed a total cost of \$74B to the US economy in 2013 (Akgeyik, 2014). The estimated cost of absenteeism becomes more severe when we consider it in the developing world where absenteeism is not taken seriously and there are no disciplinary measures or queries for being absent from work (Beheshtifar, 2016). To find a solution to this costly phenomenon in the organizations, first, we should identify the underlying workplace factors contributing to high absenteeism. What workplace factors cause employees to be absent from work? What workplace factors increase the employees' satisfaction with their job and how this relates to decreasing the level of absenteeism? The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the body of knowledge and practices related to human resource management by shedding light on workplace factors that are assumed to affect job satisfaction and absenteeism. Based on the extensive theoretical review on what has been advanced in the literature about absenteeism, arguments, and logical justifications, this study suggests a conceptual framework with propositions and invites researchers to test it empirically. This study will not only explain the effect of workplace factors on job satisfaction and absenteeism only but also will focus on the mediating effect of job

satisfaction on the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism.

There are several studies conducted on employee absenteeism. For instance, Martin (2017) conducted a study to find the relationship between behavioural factors and absenteeism. Similarly, Raja (2019) studied transformational leadership contributors to lowering absenteeism, while Beheshtifar (2016) and Bakotić (2016) found the impact of perceived organizational support on absenteeism. Relatedly, Banks's (2012) study showed the link between perceived inequity and absenteeism, whereas the study by Isabel (2019) revealed the link between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Considering the importance of absenteeism phenomena among previous studies, it highlights the need to study other factors, rather than mentioned in the previous studies on absenteeism. Investigating the link between workplace factors, job satisfaction, and absenteeism will be a significant contributor to the pool of previous literature. Also, certain studies including Beheshtifar (2016), Raja (2019), and Rebecca (2017) highlighted the need of studying the relation of workplace factors, such as pay level, working condition, supervisory support and job satisfaction on absenteeism for the future researchers.

In Afghanistan, there are also concerning issues regarding the employees' performance and capacity, especially in the public sector. According to a report published by the Policy Department of the Ministry of Finance (DM Policy, 2015), Afghans employees in the public sector have been rated low in working performance. The fundamental causes of low performance have been indicated as low capacity, lack of commitment, lack of interest, and absenteeism. This report highlights that the Government of Afghanistan has taken a capacity-building development program under "Effective Governance" (one of the pillars of National Priority Program (NPP)) to increase the rate of performance of employees and lowering the rate of absenteeism and implicit waste of resources. Besides, the World Bank jointly with the Ministry of Finance (MoF) initiated TAGHIR (Tacking Afghanistan Government HRM and Institutional Reform) project with a cost of around \$25M (World Bank Report, 2018). Under this initiative, an electronic attendance system has been installed to lower the rate of absenteeism in the public sector. Considering the importance of employees' performance, attendance, and productivity in the public sector of Afghanistan, there are certainly rooms available to investigate this issue more and find workplace factors directly or indirectly affecting employee's job satisfaction and absenteeism.

This paper by developing a conceptual framework about the relationship of workplace factors with absenteeism through job satisfaction as a mediator will not only contribute to enriching existing literature but also will provide a road-map for policy workers in Afghanistan to identify underlying workplace factors which are linked with job satisfaction as well as employees' absenteeism.

2. Literature Review

This section will study relevant theories about absenteeism and studies regarding the relationship between workplace factors, job satisfaction, and absenteeism. Variables conceptualized in the framework are inferred from the extant literature available on the issue.

2.1 Absenteeism Related Theories

As discussed in the beginning that absenteeism refers to un-authorized leaves of employees. Alexander (2019) in his study, referred to absenteeism as a "deviation of cooperative states". He argued that due to perceived dissatisfaction in the workplace, employees intend to be absent from the work. In the short term, it can be named as absenteeism and in the long term, it ends on withdrawal from the job and workplace. This is consistent with Maslow's (1958) theory of motivation which states that human beings are mostly concerned with psychological and job-related needs (cited in Alexander, 2019). This theory implies that besides food, sleep, and shelter, human beings are in need to have job security, good working conditions, and satisfactory compensation for the time and energy they are using.

In the same vein, the Herzberg theory of motivation states that workrelated factors are categorized as motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1957). He stated that motivators are recognition and appreciation and hygiene factors are pay level, relationship with supervisors, good working conditions. Herzberg's (1957) theory of motivation postulates that the absence of these hygiene factors causes employees to lose interest in their job which results in absenteeism in the short term and quitting the job in the long term.

2.2.1 Workplace Factors and Absenteeism

Workplace factors generally include pay level, nature of the work, working condition, supervisory relationship, relation with co-workers, and fairness. Many studies recently conducted have found a direct and indirect impact of these workplace factors on absenteeism (Abuhashesh, 2019; Nicola, 2017; Rebecca, 2017). A short description of each of the above-mentioned workplace factors has been provided below.

Pay-level: Pay level refers to the amount of financial compensation an employee receives in exchange for the work and contribution he or she makes to an organization (Nicola, 2017). The paper by Alisson (2017) argues that pay level is not all about the amount of salary, it is mostly about the perception of equity in terms of compensation. If an employee has a perception that the pay level is sound and equitable to him/her compared to other employees, he/she has the higher level of interest and satisfaction in his/her work and it leads to the lower level of being deprived of work in terms of absenteeism (Verma, 2016).

The nature of the work: Employees always feel uncomfortable and boring when they are hired in a position or job which they have no interest in and knowledge about it (Kuma, 2014). Organizational discipline and working routines are the most important factors which determine the regular attendance of the employees (Kuma, 2014). A study conducted by Beheshtifar (2016) among 251 employees of public sectors revealed that the nature of the job is one of the significant factors on employee satisfaction and absenteeism.

Working condition: Working condition refers to the working environment, lighting, modern working equipment, noise, and distractions (Nicola, 2017). Employees with the satisfying working condition are likely to be satisfied with their job which, in turn, lead to lowering their level of absenteeism (Abuhashesh, 2019). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Kuma (2014) showed that increasing working facilities such as transport facilities will substantially decrease the level of absenteeism among the employees.

Supervisory relationship: Researches show that employees enjoy and appreciate working and receiving support from their supervisors (Isabel, 2019). The better relationship of employees with their supervisors causes a higher level of productivity, lower level of turnover, and absenteeism (Abuhashesh, 2019). A study conducted by ikeš (2018) indicated that employees who have a better relationship with their supervisors perceive better opportunities to learn new skills and rooms to be promoted. It increases employees' level of interest and satisfaction in their job and lowers their level of absenteeism.

Relation with co-workers: Strong employee-employee relation is an important factor that contributes enormously to the fact that employees will show up at work (Sathyapriya, 2019). Related to this, the study of Sathyapriya (2019) among employees of an IT company, reported a significantly higher correlation (i.e., 0.62) between employee-to-employee relationship and level of absenteeism. It shows that employees who enjoy a

friendly environment and support from their other co-workers are less interested to be absent at work. Also, Verma (2016) stated in his research about absenteeism that employees who experienced harassment or felt discriminated against because of their gender and nationalities showed a higher level of absenteeism.

Fairness : Fairness refers to the comprehensive implementation of policy, discipline, and regulations in the organization (Rebecca, 2017). Rebecca (2017) stated that when an employee is being appreciated and promoted just because he/she is a relative of supervisor or director, it decreases the level of commitment and satisfaction among other employees in the same organization and it also causes the employees to show a higher level of absenteeism. In the same study it is further argued that if an employee feels that his/her work does not contribute to his/her personal development and organizational achievement, he/she perceives attendance to be un-useful at work. In the same connection, Nicola (2017) stated in her research about absenteeism that when employees feel that the policies and regulation are implemented fairly in the organization, it motivates employees not only but they also feel that their rights are secured and there is no injustice and inequality in their working environment.

Even though there are numerous studies on the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism in the context of developed and developing nations, yet there is a dire need to undertake further studies to understand the association between the variables particularly in the context of less developed countries such as Afghanistan. As per the best knowledge of the researcher, in the Afghanistan context particularly among employees in the public sector organizations, there are limited studies that have examined the association between workplace factors and absenteeism. Consequently, investigating more on the nature of this relationship is worthy. Therefore, the following proposition was formulated:

Proposition 1: Workplace factors, if satisfactory, have a significant negative effect on absenteeism.

2.2.2 Workplace Factors and Job Satisfaction

Several studies show that job satisfaction is an explanatory variable resulting from individual and organizational interaction (Akgeyik, 2014; Bakotić, 2016; Raja, 2019). Job satisfaction refers to the overall perception of well-being and satisfaction at the workplace (Bakotić, 2016). Danica (2016) states that job satisfaction is the overall judgment of employees related to the working-based experience. According to the Mc Gregor's theory of motivation (theory X and theory Y) (as cited in Alexander, 2019), employees are irresponsible and lack the willingness to work in general

(Theory X) and must be persuaded to do the work. While Theory Y of Mc Gregor states that given an appropriate financial reward and satisfying working conditions increase the interest of employees at their work.

Working on the same line, Akgeyik (2014) in his research about the relationship between job satisfaction and level of absenteeism stated that job satisfaction is a psychological factor coming out of several workplace factors. In this study, Tekin (2014) indicated that the source of job satisfaction is pay level, working condition, supervisory relationship, co-worker relation, and fairness perception at the working place. Besides, Raja (2019) in his research about job satisfaction argued that improved and satisfying levels of workplace factors are positively related to employees' job satisfaction and their psychological empowerment. Based on the findings of the aforementioned studies, it can be argued that workplace factors result in superior job satisfaction.

It is worth to mention here that most of the above-mentioned studies on the relationship between workplace factors and job satisfaction were conducted in the context of both developed and developed countries. Very limited studies on the relationship between the aforementioned variables have been conducted in the Afghanistan context, particularly in the public sector organizations. Thus, more studies are needed to investigate the relationship between the variables and to fill the literature gap. Based on the above discussion, this study assumed that workplace factors have a significant and positive effect on job satisfaction. Based on this assumption, the following proposition was formulated:

Proposition 2: Workplace factors have a positive effect on job satisfaction.

2.2.3 Job Satisfaction and Level of Absenteeism

A plethora of previous studies have established a link between job satisfaction and absenteeism. For instance, in a study by Kocakulah (2016), it was derived that absenteeism can be reduced by increasing the level of job satisfaction, while job satisfaction is promoted by creating a good culture in the organization. The study further revealed that good organizational culture comes out of positive working conditions, a satisfactory level of payment, and a sense of receiving positive support from the employer and other employees. Hence, it can be argued that job satisfaction is an important factor that links workplace factors with absenteeism. Related to this, Verma (2016) conducted an empirical study on the relationship between job satisfaction and level of absenteeism involving a sample of 100 employees selected from the public sector organizations in China. The study concluded that job satisfaction in combination with pay level, working condition, support level, and other workplace factors is negatively related to absenteeism. Working along the same lines, Abuhashesh (2019) used job satisfaction in his research to find the link between workplace factors and absenteeism. The study found a negative relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

Concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism, a growing number of studies both in developed and developing countries is an indication of the fact that the said relationship has to be further explored in the context of Afghanistan being a less developed country. To the best of researcher's knowledge, in the Afghanistan context particularly in the public sector organizations, there are limited studies that have examined the association between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Based on the above discussion, this study assumed that job satisfaction has a significant negative effect on absenteeism. Accordingly, the following proposition was formulated:

Proposition 3: Job satisfaction has a negative effect on absenteeism.

2.2.4 Job Satisfaction as a Mediator

Job satisfaction is defined as a "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). Chhabra and Mohanty (2014) defined job satisfaction as "how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs". In other words, it is the degree to which workers satisfy or dissatisfy with their jobs (Spector, 1997). The extant literature revealed that job satisfaction is linked to workers' job level (Robie et al., 1998), job performance (Judge & Klinger, 2010), and workers' turnover intention (Tett & Meyer, 1993; Valentine et al., 2011). Furthermore, "employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to perform better, withdraw less, and lead happier and healthier lives" (Judge & Klinger, 2010, p.119). Working on the same lines, Gamal, Taneo, and Halim (2018) argued that a person who has a high level of Job Satisfaction will have a positive feeling towards his/her job, thereby leading to a lower level of absenteeism.

The above literature mentions the connection between workplace factors and job satisfaction and further the connection between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Thus, job satisfaction is best suited here to be used as a linking mechanism in the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism. Although several studies have considered job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between workplace safety, health, and work environment to employee performance (Gamal, Taneo, & Halim, 2018); organizational justice and employee outcomes (Mashi, 2017); perception of organizational justice and intention to leave (Bayarcelik & Afacan Fındıklı2016). However, there are limited studies that have examined

the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism in general and especially in the context of Afghanistan. As per the best knowledge of the researcher, the literature concerning the phenomena of absenteeism, job satisfaction has not been used before to mediate the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism in the context of Afghanistan especially in the public sector organizations. Therefore, adding job satisfaction as a mediating variable in the model of this study will fill the literature gap. On this score, the present study argues that job satisfaction will have a theoretical mediating effect in predicting and reducing absenteeism when workplace factors are taken into account. This study assumed that job satisfaction plays a role in mediating the effect of workplace factors on absenteeism. Based on this assumption, the following proposition was formulated:

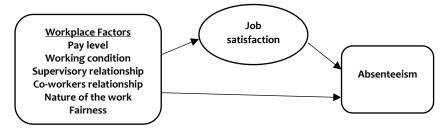
Proposition 4: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of workplace factors on absenteeism.

3. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Given below figure 1 shows the initial research conceptual framework which has been developed based on the extant literates and the support of two motivational theories i.e., A dynamic theory of motivation by Maslow (1958) and motivation-hygiene theory by Herzberg (1957). Maslow's theory implies that besides food, sleep, and shelter, human beings are in need to have job security, good working conditions, and satisfactory compensation for the time and energy they are using. While, Herzberg's theory of motivation states that the absence of hygiene factors such as pay level, relationship with supervisors, good working conditions causes employees to lose interest in their job which results in absenteeism in the short term and quitting the job in the long term. Thus, the provision of satisfactory workplace factors not only increases job satisfaction among employees but they also assist in reducing the level of absenteeism.

This paper significantly contributes to the previous literature by developing a conceptual framework as shown in figure1 that hypothesized the direct effect of the workplace on absenteeism. Furthermore, this paper proposed the investigation of the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism to bring more insights into these effects specifically in the Afghanistan context.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's compilation

4. Methodology

This paper offers a proposed conceptual framework for important factors affecting absenteeism. The researcher proposes a quantitative approach to test the phenomenon. The population of this study is full-time employees working in public sector organizations. According to a recent report published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Dasgupta, Anhal, & Bhatnagar, 2019), a total of 723488 employees are working in the public sector organizations in Afghanistan. Based on the sampling table suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for the mentioned population, 382 participants as minimum sample size is required to carry out the analysis. The survey questionnaire will be distributed among the targeted employees to collect important data. The measurement will be adapted from existing literature. To test the proposed model, the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) will be employed to establish the validity and reliability of the measurements and to test the postulated hypothesis.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned above, this study aimed at investigating the effect of workplace factors on absenteeism, and the mediating role played by job satisfaction on the said relation. By providing empirical evidence on the study's proposed constructs, this research is expected to support managers, practitioners, and decision-makers in the public sector organizations to identify the real sources of absenteeism. In the previous studies, researchers have tried to link workplace factors with absenteeism, but they have ignored the role of job satisfaction as a vital predictor of absenteeism. The main concern of the managers in organizations is to prevent absenteeism. The better way of doing that is to increase the level of job satisfaction among employees. Thus, the addition of job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism will help in minimizing absenteeism on one hand and provide a better understanding of the relationship between the variables on the other hand.

6. Research Limitation and Direction for Future Research

This paper proposes a conceptual framework to investigate the relationship between workplace factors and absenteeism via job satisfaction. There are certain limitations to this paper. This paper proposed to examine the workplace factors affecting the absenteeism directly and indirectly through the mediating role of job satisfaction without considering the demographic factors such as age, experience, and marital status of the employees. Further research is encouraged to consider the demographic factors to investigate the relationship between the variables. It is strongly recommended that future studies should test this research model empirically. Lastly, since this study is conducted for employees in the public sector organization, future researchers should consider studies of similar nature for employees working in the private sector organizations to add to the pool of existing knowledge about the phenomenon of absenteeism.

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