

# Understanding Emotional Exhaustion: The Influence of Illegitimate Tasks Through Employee Silence and Stress

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## Abstract

*Illegitimate tasks, considered unnecessary or outside the scope of an employee's role, can negatively impact their well-being in modern environments. Currently, the work examines the association between employee silences and stress, emotional fatigue, and illegal behavior. Despite legitimate ones, illegitimate chores can be classified into two types — unreasonable tasks that are beyond the normal scope of an employee's job duties and needless tasks that employees believe are redundant in nature. These responsibilities can lead employees to feel overworked and underappreciated, increasing stress levels. Employee silence, the deliberate avoidance of voicing concerns or suggestions related to work topics, can arise as an adaptive response. Factors like fear of retaliation, organizational culture, and power dynamic can suppress employees from speaking up. Ongoing exposure to these stressors leads to emotional exhaustion, a leading feature of burnout, which is defined as the fatigue, diminished motivation, and decreased work performance that people can experience. As we read the study, we were intrigued with the concept of illegitimate tasks — things that employees feel they shouldn't have to do, have to do but not at work and waste time doing, and ultimately how in this case, being disrespected and forced to balance what is legitimate and illegitimate became a problem where silence beat confrontation causing employees to feel even more stressed. The knock-on impact is emotional depletion, impacting personal output and business performance negatively. Future studies should explore factors that might moderate these relationships (e.g., leadership style, workplace support systems) in order to craft more effective intervention strategies.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Exhaustion, Illegitimate Tasks, Employee Stress.

## Introduction

The relationship among these factors, illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion, is crucial since illegitimate tasks can act as work stressors that may cause employee silence and eventually lead to emotional exhaustion. Doing so can give organizations insights to guide their engagement, mental health, and organizational efficiency strategies. Illegitimate tasks are those that employees feel are unreasonable, unnecessary, or outside the scope of their jobs. These tasks are not required in the role and are of two types: unnecessary tasks (that do not serve a proper purpose) and unreasonable tasks (which are not part of the person's role/expertise)

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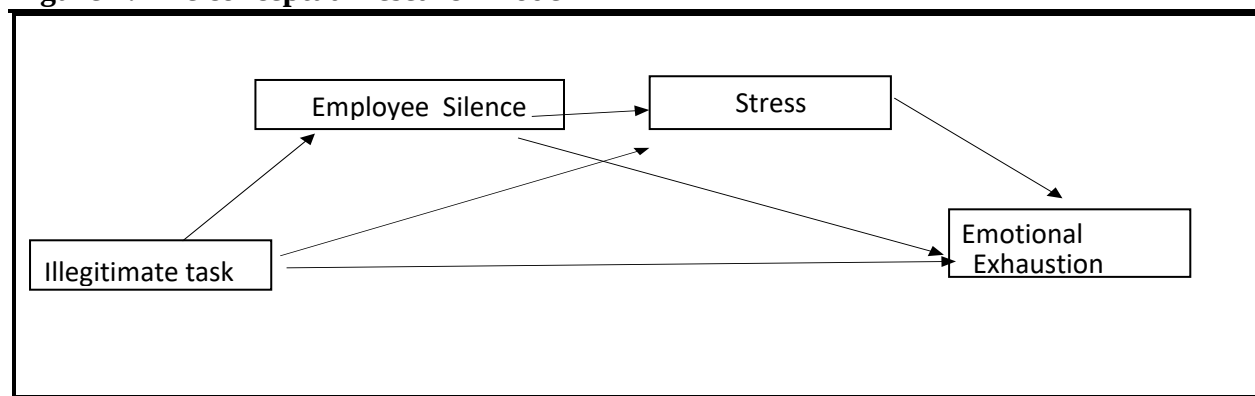
(Semmer et al., 2010). Work illegitimacy can lead to feelings of injustice and frustration, thereby creating stress and job dissatisfaction (Eatough et al., 2016), as employees are frequently assigned illegitimate tasks. Silence occurs when employees intentionally refrain from speaking up about issues of opinion, concern, or information due to fear of backlash, perceived organizational apathy, or perceived lack of psychological safety (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Research indicates that those who are faced with too much illegitimate task demands may opt for silence as a coping mechanism, as they feel this avoids conflict or alternatively, feel they have no power to instigate meaningful change (Knoll & van Dick, 2013) and therefore, do not voice their grievances. Work-related stress is a psychological and physiological response when job demands exceed an individual's ability to manage (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Dr. Daniel P. O'Connell, MD, discusses how "illegitimate tasks" and employee silence can increase stress, because employees may feel undervalued, overburdened or unsupported. Chronic exposure to stressors can lead to emotional exhaustion, one of the central facets of burnout, which is defined as a chronic cycle of emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, and decreased job-related effectiveness.

Understanding how illegitimate tasks impact employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion is important for employee well-being and productivity in workplaces. Illegitimate tasks within an organization not only have impacts on individual workers but also on aggregate workplace culture and organizational productivity. Employee voice can stifle innovation, deter co-operation and detrimentally affect the decision process. In addition, a strong negative association was found between stress and emotional exhaustion, and the job performance, absence, and turnover of employees (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). This study addresses this deficiency by investigating how these factors are directly and indirectly related in a work site environment. Eatough, Fila, and Omansky (2016) The investigation focuses on illegitimate tasks—those that employees believe are unwanted or irrational. It looks at how these jobs have a negative influence on work engagement and job satisfaction, showing their part in workplace anxiety and burnout.

The purpose of this research is to explore the link between illegitimate tasks and employee silence, determining the effect of unreasonable or unnecessary job responsibilities on employees' readiness to speak up. This research investigates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and workplace stress, examining whether illegitimate tasks are a source of psychological strain and contribute to work dissatisfaction. The study investigates the relationship between stress and emotional exhaustion, how prolonged exposure to stress helps develop burnout as well as the most effective ways to motivate employees.

## Research Model

**Figure 1: The conceptual research model**



Illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion have serious consequences for workers and organizations. While so, such factors are mostly the isolated categories for the study that reduces the understanding of their cumulative impact. This is a complex problem that can adequately be addressed by exploring how all of these factors work together and can best support employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

### **Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development**

The term illegitimate tasks generally describe work-related tasks which employees view as unreasonable/unnecessary, violating their role identity at the workplace and causing stress and frustration at the same time (Simmel et al., 2007). These may include: Unreasonable task: Outside of employee's job scope/ skill. Unnecessary tasks: Unnecessary tasks are work tasks assigned by employees, which are perceived as repetitive, unproductive, or senseless illegitimate tasks which violate employees and professional responsibility (Simmel et al. The term Employee silence is used for work-related ideas, concerns, or choices that are intentionally not voicing by a worker because of its fear of negative consequences, culture of the organization, or relative inability (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). It is the antithesis of employee voice, and can inhibit innovation, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness.

Employee silence refers to a conscious or unconscious choice to withhold work-related data, problems, or ideas. Employee silence can be divided into the types of acquiescent silence (resignation), defensive silence (due to fear) and prosocial silence (for the benefit of others or the organization by (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero 2003). Making illegitimate tasks go away is one of the first steps to promoting a climate of honesty and psychological safety in organizations. When employees believe that their roles align with their work and that their work has meaning, they are more likely to share their ideas and worries, leading to a healthier and more productive workplace culture (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Illegitimate tasks, in other words, unreasonable or unnecessary job assignments, undermine employee morale and foster silence in the workplace (Simmel et al., 2015). This fear is especially intense in hierarchical or authoritarian workplaces (Dedham et al., 2016). As there is a gradual build-up of unresolved discontent, they are often prompt to explore other job opportunities, which ultimately results in higher turnover and hiring costs (Schmitt et al., 2017). Feldman & Ng (2012) Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) concept, this study offers a meta-analysis of employee voice behavior, looking at how employees engage themselves in offices. It looks at how consumers weigh time and energy but picking whether or not to voice their thoughts at work.

*H1: Accelerated pilfering: incomplete task will positively correlate with the employee silence.*

### **Employee Silence and Stress**

Stress tends to be both a psychological and physiological reaction to perceived environmental challenges or threats that can alter an individual's well-being and performance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It occurs when the stressors of a specific situation outweigh a person's perceived ability to adapt. Silence is a by-product of inadequate psychological safety, when employees find it easier not to speak up because they are afraid to lose their jobs or be alienated (Edmondson, 1999). Many resort to a deafening silence out of fear, but this fear-based silence leads to internal tension and emotional depletion, and eventual dissatisfaction with the workplace.

The impact of employee silence on stress can be major. In fact, avoiding workplace thoughts and emotions heightens psychological distress — leading people to lash out, be anxious, and get emotionally burnt out (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Research suggests that if employees cannot voice

their concerns, unmet workplace stressors build-up, making them susceptible to burnout and decreased well-being (Zhou & George, 2001). Furthermore, silence hampers both innovation and creativity, as good ideas and feedback go uncommunicated, restricting an organization's performance improvement and problem-solving (Milliken et al., 2003). The problem of employee silence needs to be tackled, and it may just be the key to unhealthy workplaces. Stress-provoking silence could be prevented by nurturing a culture of open communication with leadership that promotes psychological safety in an organization (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

*H2: Employee silence will be positively related to stress.*

### **Stress and Emotional Exhaustion**

There is a direct and positive connection between stress and emotional exhaustion, and the presence of workplace stressors for a long time will lead to burnout and mental fatigue. Stress arises when some aspect of job requirements is considered by the employees to exceed their ability to cope, resulting in cognitive, emotional, and physiological strain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This workplace chronic stress that is not counterbalanced with proper recovery leads to emotional burnout where individuals manifest symptoms of extreme fatigue, detachments, and diminished work performance (Maslach & Leiter 1997). Chronic stress consumes employees' psychological resources, thus making it harder to effectively cope with daily work demands (Hobfoll, 1989). In addition, emotional strain due to stress is linked with negative psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression and less job commitment (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Coping workplace stress is critical to the prevention of emotional exhaustion and individuals' well-being. By offering social support and implementing stress management strategies, Specifically, those who are exposed to high demands of emotional interaction over a prolonged period of time (i.e., service-based jobs or caregiving) are at an increased risk for emotional exhaustion as they are always required to manage their emotions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Stress influence on emotion exhaustion translates into its psychological, physical and behavioral consequences. One of the most immediate consequences is increased psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and irritability, which degrades a person's functioning (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Those suffering from emotional exhaustion are also prone to attention and memory problems and decision-making difficulties, which diminishes work efficiency and increases errors (McEwen, 2007). Similarly, high levels of stress may lead to high absenteeism and turnover as individuals take extended sick leaves or search for jobs away from the stressful environment (Hobfoll, 2001). In the long run, failure to deal with workplace stress and emotional depletion decreases employee productivity, increases medical costs and reduces employees' global well-being pan (Demerouti et al., 2001).

*H3: Stress will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.*

### **Illegitimate Task and Emotional Exhaustion**

According to (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), emotional exhaustion is general lack of emotional resources that are long-term correlated with stress in kind of one's job. As in to be in a state of emotional depletion, tiredness and chaos due to extended exposure to stressors, particularly across stressful job or personal circumstances (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). When employees are given tasks that are outside the framework of their professional roles, frustration, demotivation and psychological strain occurs which all contribute to emotional exhaustion (Schmitt et al., 2015). Such tasks erode employees' sense of meaning and professional identity which lead to negative effects such as resentment, helplessness and withdrawal (Eatough et al., 2016). Over time, this

continued emotional strain exhausts psychological resources, making it difficult for employees to recover from work-related stress, leading to emotional exhaustion (Kottwitz et al. 2013).

The association of illegitimate tasks with emotional exhaustion may also be explained by Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory, which posits that stressors that are considered offensive to an individual's self-concept—such as being compelled to carry out inappropriate activities—leads to burnout (Semmer et al., 2019). Illegitimate tasks have significant, multi-faceted effects on emotional exhaustion. Based on the previous literature on workload, the first-order consequences of work overload are manifested in terms of psychological, social, and physical aspects, and can be seen as an outcome of the perceived unfairness between the amount of work completed and the workload assigned (Semmer et al., 2019), which results in increased psychological distress (mood based distress), manifesting itself in feelings of frustration, aloofness, demotivation, and even changes in work-self related perceptions associated with anxiety and depression. This can lead to less organizational commitment over time, where the employees become increasingly removed from their workplace, and they find themselves becoming less and less invested in the workplace with a decrease in doing meaningful work (Thun et al., 2018). Cognitive deficits like lack of concentration, memory issues, and impaired decision making are also prevalent as workers utilize cognitive resources on work they deem superfluous or exasperating and, therefore, are less efficient with more errors (Kottwitz et al., 2019). Organizations that do not address the issue of illegitimate tasks risk creating a work environment characterized by chronic emotional exhaustion among employees, resulting in higher levels of absenteeism and turnover intention and lower performance (van Schie et al., 2020).

*H4: Illegitimate task will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.*

### **The Sequential Mediation Model of Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Specifically, illegitimate tasks lead to emotional exhaustion by the serial mediating effects of employee silence and stress. Task illegitimacy, which breaches the expectations of employee roles, causes frustration and perceived inequity, leading employees to silence for fear of retribution, feelings that reporting would make no difference, or disengagement (Semmer et al., 2010, Knoll & van Dick, 2013). The Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) Theory identifies how illegitimate tasks threaten employees' self-worth, resulting in negative emotional responses and stress (Semmer et al., 2019), whilst the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model focuses on excessive job demands resulting in burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Such pathway could be supported by empirical research, demonstrating that illegitimate tasks are associated with counterproductive work behaviors, psychological distress, and burnout symptoms (Eatough et al., 2016; van Schie et al., 2020). Effective discussion of illegitimate tasks, stress management, and fair task distribution can break this vicious cycle and increase employee well-being.

*H5: Status quo is that illegitimate task in employee silence will mediate the relationship between illegitimate task and stress.*

*H6: Stress acts as a mediator in the relationship between employee silence and emotional exhaustion.*

*H7: Employee silence and stress will have sequential mediating role in the relationship between illegitimate task and emotional exhaustion.*

## Methodology

### Process of Data and Sampling

Objective: to understand the relationship of illegitimate tasks with silence and its effects on stress and emotional exhaustion of private nursing staff. This quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among a sample of 450 nursing staff working in private hospitals and health care facilities. The sample indicates that the study adopted stratified random sampling method to enable various classes of nursing professionals namely, registered nurses, assistant nurses, and nursing aides to enhance the generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This helps to standardize the measurement scales used in the research for ensuring the reliability and validity of data. The assessment of illegitimate tasks was carried out using the Bern Illegitimate Task Scale (BITS) (Semmer et al., 2010), and employee silence was measured using the Employee Silence Scale (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Stress was measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) (Cohen et al., 1983), and emotional exhaustion was measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-EE) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). All instruments used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to quantitatively assess participants' responses. Data collection occurred over a period of three months, specifically during the months of [insert months], and was approved by the relevant hospital administrations as well as receiving ethical clearance from a research ethics board. To minimize disruption during duties, participants were approached within their break hours or after shifts. An online version of the questionnaire offered an option for remote participation. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality assured, to promote honest responses (Bryman, 2016). Data were analyzed using AMOS/SPSS and structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore direct and mediated relations between variables (Kline, 2015). Hypotheses were tested utilizing descriptive statistics, correlation analyses and regression techniques. To decrease response bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), given the sensitive nature of topics like stress and emotional exhaustion, responses were kept anonymous.

**Table 1: Sample characteristics**

| Demographic Variables | Frequency (N = 241) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Gender Male           | 0                   | 95             |
| Female                | 450                 | 75             |
| Age                   | 18                  | 9              |
| 18–20 years           | 54                  | 35             |
| 20–28 years           | 111                 | 30             |
| 30–35 years           | 41                  | 29             |
| 35–38 years           | 24                  | 5              |
| 38+ years             |                     |                |
| Education             | 52                  | 26             |
| High School           | 100                 | 44             |
| College Degree        | 50                  | 30             |

### Measures

Measures and their corresponding Cronbach's coefficients are reported in Table 2, and were drawn from throughout the literature and had strong alphas. In this research, illicit tasks, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion of the private nursing staff are evaluated using standard measurement scales. The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS; Semmer et al., 2010), composed of

6 items with subscales for unreasonable (e.g. “I have to carry out tasks that I feel should be done by someone else”, three items; in the original German: “Ich muss vor Aufgaben stehen, von denen ich finde, dass sie andere erledigen sollten”) and unnecessary tasks (e.g., “I have to complete tasks that do not make much sense”, three items; in the original German: “Ich muss Aufgaben erledigen, die irgendwie unsinnig erscheinen”) was used to assess illegitimate tasks. Employee silence is measured based on the Employee Silence Scale with 8 items (Knoll & van Dick, 2013), which include acquiescent silence (2 items such as “I remain silent about work-related problems because expressing my concerns will not make a difference”), defensive silence (2 items such as “I do not share my thoughts on workplace issues because I fear negative consequences”), prosocial silence (2 items such as “I keep certain information to myself to protect my colleagues from stress”) and opportunistic silence (2 items such as “I remain silent about issues that could benefit me personally in the future”). The PSS-10 measures stress level with a series of 10 items like “In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?” and “During the past month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?” (Cohen et al., 1983). Emotional exhaustion was assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Emotional Exhaustion (MBI-EE, 9 items, e.g., “I feel emotionally drained from my work” and “I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job”) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Cronbach’s alpha values of these validated scales range from 0.75 to 0.92, indicating the scales’ high internal consistency (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Used in private nursing staff research, they pull strong insights into the influence of illegitimate tasks on employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion in health care. So, we controlled these three demographic variables: gender, age, and education in this research. Gender was dummy coded 0= “male” and 1= “female”. Age was categorized in five groups (18= “18-20 years” to 24= “38+years”). Lastly, education was assessed with two categories (100= “high school,” 50= “college degree,”).

## Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to relationships among illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress and emotional exhaustion. The measurement scales are validated with descriptive statistics and reliability tests (Cronbach’s alpha). Correlation is used to find and assesses the strength between relations of variables. This is tested through mediation analysis (either PROCESS Macro or AMOS), which tests if employee silence and stress mediate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and emotional exhaustion. When conducting regression analysis, we identify significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. Using a sequential mediation model, we investigate if illegitimate tasks lead to employee silence due to increasing stress that ultimately entails higher emotional exhaustion (Semmer et al., 2010; Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and zero-order correlations are shown in Table 2. All hypothesized path correlations were significant  $p = .001$ . Illegitimate task was significantly positively associated with both employee silence ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), stress ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Likewise, employee silence had a positive relationship with stress ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), respectively. Finally, stress had a significant positive relationship with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to assess the reliability. Cronbach  $\alpha$ , indexes the internal consistency and all the internal consistency reliabilities of the study variables were well

above the minimum acceptable level (greater than 0.70). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of illegitimate task, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion were 0.91, 0.80, 0.84, and 0.88, respectively.

**Table 2: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities, (N = 241)**

| Variables    | M    | SD   | 1      | 2     | 3       | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7     |
|--------------|------|------|--------|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1- IT        | 3.47 | .91  | (.81)  | .44** | .66**** | .59**  | -.37   | -.62** | .32** |
| 2- S         | 3.97 | .58  | .48**  | (.94) | .62**   | .54**  | -.34   | -.12   | .32   |
| 3- ES        | 3.48 | .57  | .56**  | .55** | (.60)   | .55**  | -.53** | -.26   | .41   |
| 4- EE        | 3.58 | .86  | .54**  | .55** | .58**   | (.58)  | -.50** | -.12** | .61** |
| 5- Female    | .46  | .44  | -.37** | -.22  | -.82**  | -.39** | -      | .13    | -.12  |
| 6- Age       | 2    | 1.44 | -.42** | -.22  | -.35*   | -.32** | .17    | -      | .12   |
| 7- Education | 4.12 | .43  | .26**  | .23*  | .23**   | .22**  | -.12*  | .13    | -     |

*Note:* M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Boldfaced diagonal elements are reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha); Gender: 0 = Female; Age: 1= 18 – 20 years, 2= 20 – 28 years, 3= 30 - 35 years, 4= 35 38 years, 5= "38+ years; Education: 1= high school, 2= college degree, IT= Illegitimate task; ES = Employee Silence; S = Stress; EE = Employee exhaustion. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs after controlling the marker variable.

\*\* P < .01.

### Common Method Bias Analysis

Simply put, common method bias (CMB) occurs when measurement artifacts, as a result of self-reported data and single-source surveys, affects the relationships between variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This study checks CMB utilizing Harman's single-factor test, wherein an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is performed to see if one factor can account for most of the variance. When more than 50% variance is explained by a single factor, there is a high possibility that CMB is in the data (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The marker variable technique is also employed where a variable unrelated to the study variables is introduced and assessed for noncorrelation with the constructs in the study (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). In regression models, variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis checks that multicollinearity does not cause the relationships among illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion to be artificially inflated (Kock, 2015). Another common approach for statistically controlling CMB is to estimate a latent common method factor (LCMF) in a structural equation model (SEM) by adding a general method factor and examining changes in path coefficients (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Such approaches allow the results to represent the real relationships and not biases from common method variance.

### Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 summarizes the results from the regression analysis tests of hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4. So all the models were not susceptible to multi collinearity as tolerance values were far above 0.2 and its Variance Inflation factors (VIF) were far below 5 (Bowerman & O'Connell, 1990). Results further supported Hypothesis 1 in Model 2, in which illegitimate task positively predicted employee silence ( $b = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 2 was also supported because employee silence significantly predicted stress positively in Model 5 ( $b = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Next, hypothesis 3 was confirmed such that stress positively predicted emotional exhaustion in Model 10 ( $b = 0.78$ ,  $p <$

0.01). Finally, hypothesis 4 was confirmed in that illegitimate task significantly predicted emotional exhaustion in Model 8 ( $b = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; see Fig. 2).

### Mediation Analysis

Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were tested with Hayes's (2013) PROCESS add-on. Hypothesis 5 examined employee silence as a mediator in the relationship between illegitimate task and stress. The results identified a significant simple mediated effect of impact of illegitimate task on stress ( $b = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95% BCa CI [0.07, 0.18]), which supported hypothesis 5. In addition, the direct effect of illegitimate task on employees' stress under the mediation effect was also significant ( $b = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, employee silence served as a partial mediator of the relationship between illegitimate task and stress. The results also indicated that the indirect effect of employee silence on emotional exhaustion through stress was statistically significant ( $b = 0.29$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% BCa CI [0.20, 0.39]), supporting hypothesis 6. Finally, results suggested that the indirect effect of illegitimate task on emotional exhaustion via employee silence and stress were statistically significant (specifically,  $b = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% BCa CI [0.04, 0.10]), which provided support for the serial mediation as proposed in hypothesis 7. We present the mediation analysis summary in table 4.

### Discussion

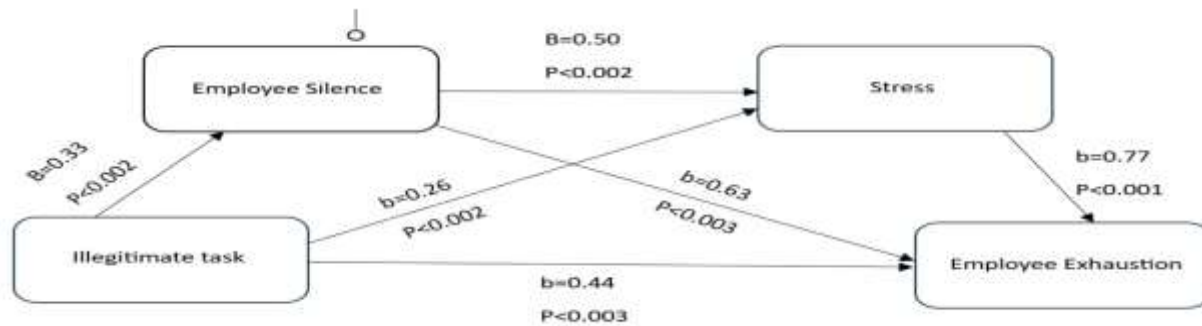
Tasks that are deemed illegitimate, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion have been topics of increasing interest in organizational psychology. Illegitimate tasks, or ones perceived as rote, unreasonable or outside an individual's role, can have an outsized negative impact on employee well-being and workplace dynamics. The objective is not just an additional workload, but they represent a frustration of the professional identity that translates into stress and emotional exhaustion (Semmer et al. 2007). Furthermore, when employees are tasked with such duties, they can elect to keep silent regarding workplace issues, consequently building upon the stress and emotional drain.

Illegitimate tasks increase stress as they drain an individual's psychological resources. B) In line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), people work on preserving, protecting, and acquiring resources and experience stress when these resources are threatened or lost. This problem is observed in assignments as well, business activities where employees feel that the tasks assigned do not align with their job roles are often regarded as undervalued or disrespected. Such experiences lead to frustration, anxiety, prolonged stress. Stress, in turn, depletes an employee's coping resource to meet the job demand, thus making them more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, the end-state of being emotionally drained as a result of prolonged stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Emotional exhaustion is usually the initial phase of burnout, that can manifest itself as diminishes performance at work, unhappiness, or disengaging from workplace duties.

**Table 3: Summary of the hierarchical regression results (unstandardized coefficients) (N = 241).**

|           | Innovation Climate |         | Employees' Intellectual Agility |         |         | Employees' Innovative Behavior |         |         |         |          |          |          |
|-----------|--------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| Variables | Model 1            | Model 2 | Model 3                         | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6                        | Model 7 | Model 8 | Model 9 | Model 10 | Model 11 | Model 12 |
| Intercept | 3.37**             | 2.43**  | 3.65**                          | 2.67**  | 2.56**  | 2.57**                         | 3.69**  | 1.21**  | 1.38**  | .54      | .04      | .035     |
| Female    | -.30               | -.43    | -.61                            | -.55    | -.06    | .03                            | -.79**  | -.79**  | -.36**  | -.40**   | -.55     | -.94     |
| Age       | -.19               | -.42    | -.61                            | .06     | .06     | .06                            | -.79**  | -.70    | -.43**  | -.38**   | -.45**   | -.91     |
| Education | .13                | .06     | .07                             | .05     | .06     | -.31                           | .33**   | .26**   | .24**   | .32**    | .24**    | .29**    |
| IT        |                    | .33**   |                                 | .26**   |         | .15**                          |         | .46**   |         |          |          | .29**    |
| ES        |                    |         |                                 |         | .46**   | .34**                          |         |         | .66**   |          | .34**    | .19*     |
| S         |                    |         |                                 |         |         |                                |         |         |         | .79**    | .55**    | .47**    |
| R2        | .12                | .33     | .07                             | .26     | .25     | .35                            | .22     | .45     | .36     | .49      | .45      | .57      |
| ΔR2       | -                  | .22     | -                               | .13     | .26     | .51                            | -       | .14     | .17     | .27      | .06      | .06      |
| F         | 9.72**             | 32.84** | 2.77                            | 13.64** | 23.52** | 25.62**                        | 22.90** | 44.38** | 36.61** | 44.79**  | 46.35**  | 44.01**  |
| Df        | 235                | 246     | 236                             | 256     | 235     | 255                            | 227     | 226     | 266     | 237      | 236      | 244      |

Note: Gender: 0 = Male, 1 = Female; Age: 1= 18 - 20 years, 2= 28- 34 years, 3= 30 - 35 years, 4= 35-38years, 5= "38+ years; Education: 1= high school, 2= college degree, 3= graduate degree; IT =illegitimate task, ES=employee silence, S=stress, EE=Emotional exhaustion. \*\* P < 0.01. \* P < 0.05.

**Figure 2: Regression results**

Employee silence is a fundamental part of this dynamic. Silence is when employees fail to share important information, concerns or ideas that could help the organization. Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggest that silence is essentially a defensive reply to organizational conditions that stifle the flow of communication. Such employees may not raise their voice against illegitimate tasks as they may avoid doing so for fear of retaliation, the belief that their concerns won't be addressed, or due to the belief that complaining takes a lot of effort and they have very few resources available due to the illegitimate tasks. Such silence fosters a toxic culture, and stressors remain unaddressed and continue to impact employee health. An important element in this relationship, however, is the role of perceived injustice. Do the tasks assigned to them fit into what they see as their job descriptions and professional identity? When tasks feel illegitimate, violations of fairness can cause stress and emotional depletion among employees (Semmer et al., 2019). Such injustice perception aggravates negative feelings like frustration and helplessness and increases the chances of employees disengaging from their work and not reporting concerns. Moreover, organizational support and leadership also act as important buffer to these effects. Previous research has indicated that supportive leadership can alleviate the adverse effects of illegitimate tasks on stress and emotional exhaustion (Zhou et al., 2021). If employees feel that their leaders hear them and

are doing what they can to support them, this indicates a reduction in the feelings extreme stress and burnout. In contrast, when leaders are both supportive and listening, employees feel safe at work, which makes them less likely to be silenced and more vulnerable to stress.

Workplace culture Workplace culture is another important element behind employee silence. One way organizations can reduce the impacts of illegitimate tasks is to foster a culture of open communication and psychological safety. Employees are more likely to have healthy conversations that lead to a change in the organization when they can voice their concerns without fear of retaliation. However, in workplaces where hierarchical structures dissuade disagreement, silence becomes a strategy of coping that further compounds stress and emotional exhaustion (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). There should be clarity of job roles and expectations Managed by multiple organizations, the key to good employee experience is providing clarity in their work and ensuring that employees are not overburdened with jobs out of their scope. One way to assist this process is to offer training programs designed to foster open dialogue and referee comments from employees at all levels of the organization. In addition, they need to be trained on how to identify stress and emotional exhaustion signs in their employees, taking proactive measures to address them.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Implications of illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress and emotional exhaustion offer both theoretical and practical significance. In a theoretical perspective, illegitimate tasks generate job stress and burn-out as clarified by the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model, which assumes that professional identity infringement and fairness violation lead to psychological strain (Semmer et al., 2015). The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model provides support for the idea that illegitimate tasks lead to emotional exhaustion because they exhaust employees' psychological resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employee silence, or the deliberate withholding of important information or concerns, is associated with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that perceived organizational injustice and fear of punishment inhibit employee voice (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Developed by Hobfoll, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that the stress experienced at work drains both personal and job resources, which can cause emotional exhaustion.

From an application point of view, organizations will need to reduce illegitimate tasks through bifurcation of roles of the employees such that the tasks given to them are as per their knowledge as well as the role they play in the organization. Realignment of tasks, redistribution of workload, and automation of repetitive tasks can alleviate the feelings of perceived inequity and workload stress. To eliminate employee silence, organizations are encouraged to establish open communication policies and provide proper training to their leaders so that employees feel protected to speak up without fear of retaliation. Promoting participatory decision-making guarantees employees' voices are heard, fostering engagement and decreasing stress (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Psychological safety in teams is an environment where employees are able to voice their concerns and ask for help without fear of any negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). More future studies should be conducted to ascertain the long-term effects of these interventions, helping to build an evidence base regarding their effectiveness in a wide range of workplace environments. Supporting specific actions taken by addressing employee mental health through building supportive and transparent from the top down ensuring organizational sustainability.

**Table 4: Summary of the mediation analysis results (N=450)**

| Relation |    |      | Total effect | Direct effect | Indirect effect | Confidence interval |             | T Statistics | Conclusion        |
|----------|----|------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
|          |    |      |              |               |                 | Lower bound         | upper bound |              |                   |
| IT       | ES | S    | 0.34         | 0.12          | 0.13            | 0.06                | 0.19        | 7.09         | partial mediation |
| ES       | S  | EE   | 0.33         | 0.33          | 0.28            | 0.21                | 0.33        | 7.78         | partial mediation |
| IT       | ES | S EE | 0.43         | 0.19          | 0.19            | 0.05                | 0.12        | 9.04         | partial mediation |

## Conclusion

That is, the psychological consequences of illegitimate work are often worsened when employees are stressed out, economically insecure, demotivated and afraid to speak up (emotional exhaustion). Future research should examine long-term effects and strategies for intervening. This leads to stress and emotional exhaustion; this leads to poor employee engagement which performance. These findings reveal that illegitimate tasks increase stress and emotional exhaustion among employees, prompting them to resort to silence as a coping strategy. It creates a negative cycle of well-being and productivity. Ultimately, supportive leadership, equitable task delegation, and open communication can combat the impacts of fatigue, leading to a healthier, more engaged workforce.

## Limitations and Future Research

There are no model sheets for illegitimate tasks, employee silence, stress, and emotional exhaustion. The first limitation is the use of self-reported data that can result in biases like social desirability and common method variance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Furthermore, the majority of studies are based upon cross-sectional designs, inhibiting the achievement of causal relationships between the two (Eatough et al., 2016). Differences in culture and organizational context are further hurdles, as perceptions of illegitimate tasks, their implications for employee silence and well-being can differ in different contexts (Schmitt et al., 2015). Research on industry-wise impacts as well as cultural differences may help in deriving country-specific targeted interventions to enhance occupational well-being.

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