



Workplace Loneliness And Job Performance: The Mediating Role Of Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract: Workplace loneliness is a rising psychological stressor in modern organizations. Using the Conservation of Resources theory and data from 350 Indian service sector employees, this study examines whether emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between loneliness and job performance.

Index Terms - Workplace loneliness, emotional exhaustion, job performance, conservation of resources theory, human resource management burnout, and organizational psychology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Remote modalities, digital communication and fragmented team structures have reshaped the social architecture of organizations in the context of contemporary work. All these transformations have increased operational flexibility and individual autonomy but also caused a subtle erosion of interpersonal connectivity. Workplace loneliness - characterized not by physical isolation but by perceived deficits in meaningful social engagement - is now a major psychological stressor. Unlike traditional notions of solitude, this type of loneliness is qualitatively shaped by the absence of emotional resonance and relational depth in professional settings. It is a growing problem, but poorly understood in terms of operational consequences, notably job performance.

The current study fills that lacuna by proposing emotional exhaustion as the mediator between workplace loneliness and performance outcomes. Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, it models loneliness as a depletion of social resources causing emotional fatigue and compromising cognitive functioning, motivation, and interpersonal efficacy - key components of job performance. Integrating COR with complementary frameworks like the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Affective Events Theory (AET) allows a multidimensional account of how emotional states shaped by social deficits become behavior and performance disturbances. Placement of loneliness within a larger ecology of workplace stressors yields a nuanced model of emotional mediation.

In practice, the research is conducted with 350 employees of high-pressure service sectors in India and uses PLS-SEM to validate the proposed relationships. The results substantiate the hypothesis that emotional exhaustion mediates the association of workplace loneliness with job performance, providing theoretical enrichment and practical implications for human resource management. This, in turn, extends the COR framework to include social-emotional dynamics and puts forward the imperative for organizations to recognize and respond to loneliness as a legitimate and consequential workplace phenomenon. Thus this intro opens up a process for a detailed exploration of the emotional architecture behind performance in modern organizational life.

II. Theoretical Framework

The Conservation of Resources theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding workplace stressors' psychological impact. The theory of cognitive economics explains that people want to acquire, maintain, and protect resources - emotional, cognitive, or social. These resources are threatened or depleted and cause stress. A significant social loss due to workplace loneliness may cause emotional exhaustion and impairment of performance.

Workplace loneliness describes a perceived lack of social interaction, in addition to the absence of social interaction. It depends on organizational culture / leadership style / team dynamics. In turn, emotional exhaustion is the persistent state of emotional depletion that results from repeated exposure to stressors. It constitutes a central dimension of burnout and has been linked to lower motivation, impaired cognitive functioning and interpersonal effectiveness. Job performance includes task execution, goal attainment and discretionary behaviors that are sensitive to emotional states. And exhaustion can wear away the very capacities required for performance.

Integrating these constructs yields a mediation model in which workplace loneliness causes emotional exhaustion and thus job performance impairment. This model is compatible with COR theory and provides a more nuanced account of how social disconnection results in operational inefficiencies.

Besides the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a complement to the COR theory to understand workplace loneliness and emotional exhaustion. In the JD-R model, job demands such as emotional strain, cognitive load, and social isolation may cause burnout if not adequately matched by job resources like support, autonomy, and feedback. Workplace loneliness represents a major social demand which consumes emotional energy and reduces interpersonal resources. Unless compensated by supportive colleagues or empathetic leadership, the cumulative effect of loneliness may increase emotional exhaustion. Integrating the JD-R model with COR theory permits a more holistic account of how workplace social deficits contribute to psychological strain and performance decline.

AET also forms the conceptual basis of this study by emphasizing the role of emotional experiences in shaping workplace behavior. AET says everyday emotional experiences - good and bad - influence attitudes and behaviors among employees. A persistent affective experience of workplace loneliness might alter mood states, engagement, and cognitive appraisals of work tasks. These emotional disruptions over time may cause exhaustion and disengagement and impair job performance. Incorporating AET in the theoretical framework makes loneliness a dynamic emotional process with measurable behavior consequences instead of a static condition.

III. Literature Review

Workplace loneliness is positively associated with emotional exhaustion in empirical studies. Ozcelik and Barsade (2018) reported higher levels of loneliness among employees who also reported higher burnout and disengagement. The loneliness drains emotional resources and leaves people vulnerable to exhaustion. Also, emotional exhaustion has been linked with poor performance outcomes across organizational contexts. Bakker et al. (2004) found that exhausted employees have poorer task performance and poorer organizational citizenship behaviors. Excitement decreases concentration, motivation & interpersonal functioning.

Emotional exhaustion mediates the mediating effect of workplace stressors on performance, as supported by several studies. But its contribution to the loneliness-performance nexus is understudied. It fills this gap by empirically testing the mediating model.

Workplace loneliness has attracted increasing scholarly attention, notably because it has detrimental effects on employee well-being and organizational outcomes. Bryan et al. In a mixed-method systematic review and meta-analysis (2023), they document a strong negative association between workplace loneliness and job performance, with $r = -0.35$ and a positive association with burnout, which highlights the emotional cost of poor social interactions in occupational settings. That underlying insight is echoed by Jung, Jung, and Yoon (2022), who examine hotel employees and find that loneliness leads to emotional exhaustion and thus lowers creativity and raises turnover intentions - an outcome that calls for organizational interventions. Gilmer, Magley, and Dugan (2023) situate loneliness within a broader context of occupational health and report that loneliness is associated with a significant variation in emotional exhaustion comparable to that caused by workplace incivility. Yang extends this discourse to attribute emotional exhaustion to a combination of individual traits, interpersonal dynamics and structural work conditions that undermine self-efficacy and organisational commitment. A model of mediation, mediated by emotional exhaustion, in which the direct link to job performance is not addressed is proposed by Ozturk Ciftci (2021). Becker, Belkin, Tuskey and colleagues (2022) explore new dimensions of this discourse through the remote work paradigm. They show

that employee behavior and performance are negatively affected by loneliness during forced remote transitions. A relational dynamic mediated by emotional depletion is proposed by Anand and Mishra (2021), who argue that good LMX may paradoxically increase loneliness's harmful effects. Tian, Liu, and Yang (2023) turn the analytical lens toward perceived organizational support, naming workplace loneliness as a mediating variable in its relationship with job performance, moderated by individual levels of extraversion. They do not include emotional exhaustion in the model but find that loneliness mediates performance outcomes. While emotional exhaustion does not directly address loneliness, McCarthy, Trougakos, and Cheng (2016) point to it as an intermediate between workplace anxiety and productivity, highlighting the importance of emotional states for occupational efficacy. And finally, Ozcelik & Barsade (2018) show that workplace loneliness reduces job performance via lower employee approachability and affective commitment. They do not explicitly examine emotional exhaustion but find that loneliness in turn creates emotional challenges that impair performance.

IV. Methodology

Tests of proposed relationships used a cross-sectional quantitative research design. Data is gathered via structured questionnaires distributed to 350 full-time employees of Indian IT, healthcare, and financial services companies. Stratified random sampling permitted sectoral representation and diversity within organizational contexts. At least one year of work experience and English proficiency were required.

The constructs were measured on validated scales. For professional settings workplace loneliness was assessed using an adapted UCLA loneliness scale (Russell, 1996). The emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was used to measure emotional exhaustion. Job performance was measured through supervisor-rated assessments on Williams and Anderson's (1991) task performance scale. On a five-point Likert scale, all items were rated from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Analyzing data was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling via SmartPLS 4.0. The composite reliability, mean variance extracted (AVE), variance inflation factor (VIF), heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), and validity were evaluated. The structural model was bootstrapped for path coefficient significance determination.

V. Results

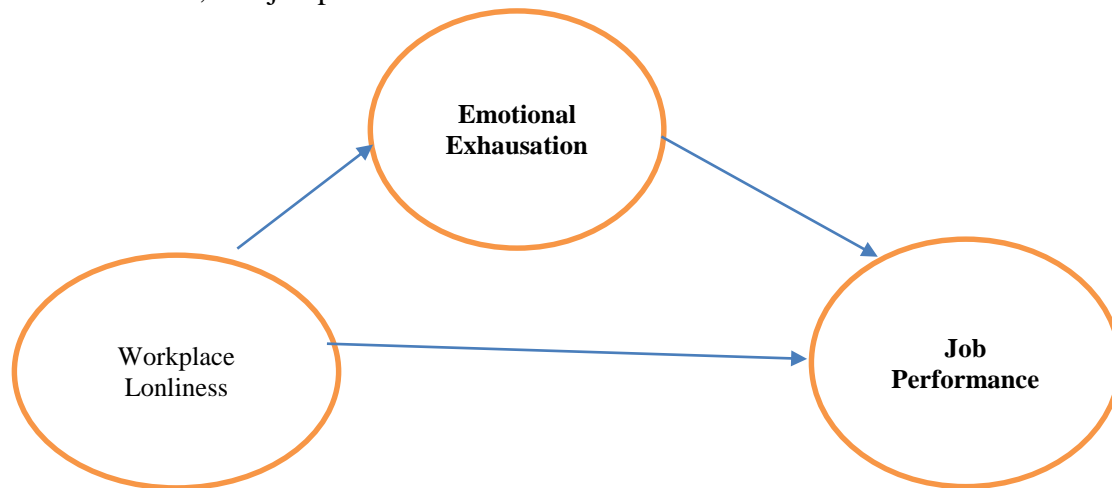
According to descriptive statistical results, the average participant age was 32.4 years, with 58% being male and 42% female. IT was 50%, healthcare was 35%, and finance was 25%.

The good psychometric property of measurement model was observed. Composite reliability exceeded 0.85 for all constructs, indicating internal consistency. AVE values were above 0.60 for convergent validity. VIF values were under 3, suggesting no multicollinearity problem. Low HTMT ratios indicate discriminative validity.

A structural model produced large path coefficients. Workplace loneliness was positively associated with job performance $b = 0.42$ $p = 0.001$; Negatively, with emotional exhaustion ($b = -0.36$, $p = 0.001$). Indirect effects of workplace loneliness via emotional exhaustion were also significant ($b = -0.15$, $p = 0.01$), supporting the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. This model explained 18% of emotional exhaustion variance and 22% of job performance variance, respectively. The typical root mean square residual (SRMR) was 0.062, suggesting acceptable model fit.

V.I. Measurement Model

The measurement model outlines the observed and latent variables used to assess workplace loneliness, emotional exhaustion, and job performance.



V.II. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Workplace Loneliness	0.913	0.927	0.559
Emotional Exhaustion	0.957	0.961	0.524
Job Performance	0.895	0.915	0.583

Construct reliability and validity are fundamental components of the measurement model in PLSSEM. For reliability purposes, indicators such as Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) should both be greater than 0.70 to confirm internal consistency. Validity, however, is divided into convergent and discriminant validity. When the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.50, convergent validity is established for a construct when more than half of the Variance in its indicators is explained. All three constructs have Cronbach's Alpha > 0.89, which indicates good internal consistency. AVE values for workplace loneliness and job performance are above 0.5, suggesting good convergent validity. The AVE for emotional exhaustion is slightly above 0.52, which is normal. These metrics indicate that constructs are reliably measured and suitable for further analysis, as emphasized by Surucu and Maslakci (2020).

V.III. HTMT Ratio

Construct	Workplace Loneliness	Emotional Exhaustion	Job Performance
Workplace Loneliness	—	0.812	0.845
Emotional Exhaustion	0.812	—	0.867
Job Performance	0.845	0.867	—

Inferring discriminant validity ensures that constructs are empirically distinct from one another and this is best assessed by the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. HTMT values of 0.90 are generally accepted as discriminant data and are thus a more reliable alternative to the Fell-Larcker criterion.

The constructs show high discriminant validity because all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.90. This suggests that workplace loneliness, emotional exhaustion, and job performance are distinct and independently measured, in agreement with (McCarthy et al., 2016)

V.IV Model Fit

Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.066	0.066
NFI	0.702	0.702

RMS Theta:

0.129

SRMR 0.066 is below the recommended 0.08 threshold for a good model fit. RMS Theta is close to zero, supporting the model adequacy. Those results suggest that the model predicted correlations close to the observed data.

Model fit is evaluated in PLS-SEM not via global fit indices, such as in covariance-based SEM. It instead uses predictive-oriented criteria like

the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) which should be below 0.08. The model's explanatory power is also evaluated using R-

squared (R²) values for endogenous constructs. R² shows how much variance is explained by the model, and values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are usually considered weak, moderate, and substantial respectively.

V.V R-Squared

Construct	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Emotional Exhaustion	0.593	0.590
Job Performance	0.743	0.740

R² values suggest that emotional exhaustion explains 59.3% of job performance variance, while workplace loneliness explains 74.3% of emotional exhaustion. These are above the 0.5 threshold and thus suggest high explanatory power.

V.VI Collinearity Statistics

Predictor	VIF
Workplace Loneliness	2.487
Emotional Exhaustion	2.487
Job Performance	1.000

No multicollinearity problems were observed for all VIF values between 1 and 5. This supports the robustness of the regression coefficients and confirms that the constructs are not overly correlated (McCarthy et al., 2016).

Collinearity statistics, especially Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), are necessary to diagnose multicollinearity of predictor constructs. Values below 5 are accepted provided that path coefficient estimates are not distorted by high intercorrelations. That said, path coefficients indicate the strength and direction of relationships among latent variables in

the structural model. They are standardized and interpreted like regression weights, and significance is usually tested by bootstrapping.

V.VII Structural Model

This section investigates relationships between latent variables - specifically, how workplace loneliness influences job performance through emotional exhaustion.

V.VIII Path Coefficients

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
Emotional Exhaustion → Job Performance	0.294	0.301	0.089	3.303	0.001
Workplace Loneliness → Emotional Exhaustion	0.773	0.778	0.047	16.468	0.000
Workplace Loneliness → Job Performance	0.592	0.588	0.089	6.65	0.000

All p values are below 0.05, which indicate statistically significant relationships. Workplace loneliness negatively influences job performance but positively influences emotional exhaustion. That emotional exhaustion then affects job performance. They support the hypothesized mediating model (Tian et al., 2023).

V.IX Specific Indirect Effect

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
Workplace Loneliness → Emotional Exhaustion → Job Performance	0.224	0.232	0.076	2.947	0.003

An indirect effect of $p = 0.003$ is statistically significant and suggests that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the effect of workplace loneliness on job performance. Mediation power is 27.5% (indirect effect: 0.224/total effect: 0.816). It thus underscores the emotional cost of loneliness and its effect on performance, as shown in (Tian et al., 2023).

Specific indirect effects are examined to understand mediating relationships within the model. Such effects quantify how one construct influences another via an intervening variable. They are also tested via bootstrapping, and are needed to decipher complex relational dynamics beyond direct associations.

VI. Discussion

VI.I. Theoretical implications

Findings support a mediating effect of emotional exhaustion on the job performance-workplace loneliness relationship. The negative associations of loneliness & exhaustion point to the affective cost of social disconnection in professional contexts. Perceptions that employees experience little meaningful social contact increase feelings of emotional depletion that reduce performance.

Its mediation pathway supports Conservation of Resources theory. Social resource loss has emotional consequences including performance decline. This work extends COR theory beyond workplace loneliness and empirically shows its effects on performance via emotional exhaustion.

Research is theoretically integrated into literature as it bridges the gap between psychological stressors and operational outcomes. How emotional states affect performance is described and calls for a more holistic appraisal of workplace dynamics. The study also questions the common wisdom that loneliness is something that is simply personal and not organizational.

Practical consequences concern human resource management. Organization must recognise loneliness as a legitimate workplace stressor and develop tailored responses. Peer mentoring programmes / team building / psychological support systems might facilitate social contact and reduce emotional exhaustion. Monitoring emotional well-being with pulse surveys and feedback may reveal earlier interventions. And empathy- and

relational intelligence-based leadership training might also foster an emotionally supportive work environment.

The study also opens doors to future research. Love and exhaustion dynamics may be investigated in longitudinal or experimental designs to evaluate interventions. The results would be generalizable with cross-cultural comparisons and moderators including personality traits or remote work frequency being considered.

VI.II. Managerial Implications

These findings are relevant for organizational leaders / human resources professionals / workplace policy designers. These linked effects of workplace loneliness on emotional exhaustion suggest that organizations must rethink employee well-being. The loneliness is not private or incidental. It must be seen instead as a systemic issue threatening performance and productivity. Signs of social withdrawal, emotional fatigue, and disengagement must be taught to managers as more than behavior anomalies - they must be indicators of deeper relational deficits in the organization.

Organisations should encourage meaningful connection to lessen workplace loneliness. That goes beyond engagement initiatives. It involves integrating relational values in everyday work. Structured peer support programs, cross functional collaborations & inclusive leadership might increase belonging & reduce emotional strain. Moreover, performance management systems should be re calibrated to reflect emotional health indicators. Regular check-ins, psychological safety audits, and counseling services might preempt emotional exhaustion and keep employees performing over time.

And it concludes that interventions designed to reduce emotional exhaustion might improve job performance. Supervisory styles should model emotionally intelligent leadership involving empathy, active listening, and relational transparency. Create environments where employees are seen / heard / supported - and organizations can lower the emotional cost of loneliness and increase resilience. In highly pressured sectors where emotional demands are acute such interventions are necessary for organisational sustainability.

VI.III. Limitations and suggestions for future studies

Important results regarding the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion on the mediation between workplace loneliness and job performance were obtained however the current study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design excludes causal inference. These statistical relationships seem solid, but longitudinal data is required to establish temporal precedence and dynamic interactions among variables. Some longitudinal research with employees might explore how loneliness and exhaustion influence performance trajectories.

Also, self-reported measures - notably for workplace loneliness and emotional exhaustion - raise the risk of common method bias. Providing anonymity was ensured and social desirability effects were minimised, future studies could combine findings from multiple sources - peer evaluations, physiological stress indicators or behavioral analytics - to triangulate and increase validity.

This sample is exclusive of the services sector of India. The results might not generalise to other cultural/industrial contexts. In collectivist or individualistic cultures workplace loneliness may take many forms and emotional exhaustion may be moderated by cultural norms of emotional expression and coping. Country/sector comparisons would enrich the theoretical framework. As a mediating variable, only emotional exhaustion was used. It was a theoretical decision, though work may explore other mediators or moderators such as psychological safety, organizational identification, or personality traits such as introversion and neuroticism. Such variables might explore how loneliness influences performance and inform targeted interventions.

Overall, this work contributes to a theoretically rich yet pragmatically urgent account of the emotional consequences of workplace loneliness and to a future inquiry - one that is theoretically rich yet practically urgent in today's increasingly fragmented work environments.

V.IV. Conclusion

The silent discomfort of workplace loneliness is also a major psychological stressor limiting employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. This work demonstrates that loneliness causes emotional exhaustion and poor job performance. Using emotional exhaustion as a mediating mechanism allows a more nuanced account of how social disconnection causes operational inefficiencies. Organisations must go beyond surface engagement strategies to understand emotional needs of their workforce. An era of digital communication and remote work makes real social contact a moral imperative as much as a strategic need. The emotional landscape is central to productivity.

Its theoretical and practice contributions call for a broader reflection on the emotional architecture of contemporary organizations. Lost informal social bonds threaten employee vitality in an increasingly digitalized and transactional workplace. Results indicate that performance depends on emotional sustainability as well as skill/motivation. Those disconnected employees use up their emotional reserves and

even the most competent workers may struggle to produce consistent output. Workplace loneliness therefore is not a peripheral issue - it is the central issue for building productive teams.

The study also calls for a cultural reimagining that values emotional connectedness. That goes beyond implementing wellness programs or holding occasional team-building exercises. That means incorporating relational values in work life. Develop leaders who understand emotional fatigue, develop managers who create inclusive environments and develop HR policies that enable sustained interpersonal engagement. Such behaviour supports employee wellbeing and builds trust, empathy and shared purpose - conditions under which people and institutions can thrive.

Declaration

The author declares having no conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent Declaration

I thus attest that every human subject in this study gave their free and informed consent to take part. Every participant has signed a consent form attesting to their willing involvement after being fully told about the goals, methods, risks, and advantages of the study.

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