How is COVID-19 pandemic causing employee withdrawal behavior in the hospitality industry? An empirical investigation

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Abstract
Purpose – This study divulges the new concept of employees' withdrawal behavior during the global pandemic (COVID-19). The study's purpose is to draw new insights into workplace stressors and employee withdrawal behavior. The study also considers the mediating role of aggression and the moderating role of COVID-19 worry and cyberloafing.

Design/methodology/approach – The study's statistical population consists of 384 frontline hotel employees from Pakistan's hospitality industry. Statistical analysis SPSS and AMOS were utilized to conduct Pearson's correlation and multilevel regression analysis. A Hayes process technique has been used for moderation and mediation analysis.

Findings – The results demonstrated that COVID-19 has a psychological effect on the employee's mental health and higher turnover intention during the current pandemic. Workplace stressor is significantly related to aggression and employee withdrawal behavior. Aggression mediates the relationship between workplace stressors and withdrawal behavior. The study results show that COVID-19 worry moderates between workplace stressors and aggression – notably, cyberloafing moderate aggression and withdrawal behavior.

Practical implications – The government and hospitality organizations need to implement crisis management strategies in response to COVID-19. This research can help management in coping with employees' mental and psychological challenges. Employees' mental health has been affected during the current global health crises. Firms should encourage their employees psychologically while going for downsizing.

Originality/value – This study enhances the existing literature on the COVID-19 crisis in Pakistan's hospitality industry. This study contributes to new understandings of employees' withdrawal behavior in the hospitality industry. The research shows how COVID-19 affects employees' turnover, mental health and job performance in the hospitality industry. Employees are facing mental and physiological challenges during COVID-19. The study fills a considerable gap in the hospitality industry by exploring the role organization's crisis management during a global pandemic.

Keywords: Aggression, Withdrawal behavior, Cyberloafing, COVID-19, Hospitality industry

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.
1. Introduction

In December 2019, coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in the Wuhan city of China, and since then, it has been spread to almost 210 countries around the world (Hui et al., 2020). The impact of COVID-19 is unimaginable while agitating the whole world. Since its inception, this pandemic has been deteriorating the tourism sector severely. Countries have launched the lockdown campaign to mitigate its contagious effectiveness, which has caused life to be stagnant, and travelers are forbidden to move to any destination. Significantly, COVID-19 has compelled people to remain isolated, which has affected the world economy. The airline industry has been devastated due to a lack of passengers. The tourism industry has a vital role in the global economy (Sundaram, 2019). The aviation industry and the tourism industry are interlinked (Bieger and Wittmer, 2006). In the recent business world, companies are expanding their business operations and competing in the global market. The hospitality industry plays a significant role in economic growth and development.

The president of the World Travel and Tourism Council stated that COVID-19 has tremendously affected the hospitality and tourism industry. The hospitality industry is trying to survive during the global pandemic (Dayour et al., 2020). The hotels are suffering from financial crises (Gössling et al., 2020). Moreover, the hotel industry would contract drastically as most of the hotels face financial crises due to COVID-19 (Gössling et al., 2020). In that regard, the influence of COVID-19 has caused business closures due to cash inflows (Hall et al., 2020). Organization management has applied alternative strategies to cope with the financial crises as the current economy’s situation worsens due to the pandemic (Dube et al., 2020). Downsizing strategies such as layoff of all part-time employees, reducing staff salaries and ended employees’ contracts have sparked feelings of anxiety, stress and depression (Ashford et al., 1989; Elshaer and Saad, 2017; Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). The organization’s downsizing has caused adverse employee outcomes such as job performance (Agyeiwaah and et al., 2021; Latack et al., 1995). In addition to that, employees are stressed out about the organization’s continuity (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984).

With the increase in the employees downsizing in the hotel industry, employees feel stressed either because of the fear of being laid off or unclear job descriptions. In addition to that, restructuring the workforce causes an increase in job insecurity among employees, resulting in employees’ withdrawal behavior (Ghaderi et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020). Previous studies have revealed that employees’ behaviors and attitudes are affected by job insecurity. Employees withdraw when they doubt their jobs (Karatepe et al., 2020). Job insecurity causes a decrease in trust. Depression, stress, anxiety, job dissatisfaction affect employees’ mental health, well-being and aggravate absenteeism; thus, employee turnover has increased (Chirumbolo and Areni, 2010; Hellgren et al., 1999; Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018; Karatepe et al., 2020; Richter and Näswall, 2019). In this context, there is a need to examine employees’ perceptions regarding their job withdrawal. Workers’ mental health is quite vital for work efficiency, and it also helps the organization to maintain sustainability. COVID-19 affects employees’ mental and psychological health, which causes higher nervousness and depression, including isolation and frustration (Ahmed et al., 2020; Lai and Wong, 2020; Sarfraz et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020). Employee wellness is considered a vital source of productivity and effectiveness (Berry et al., 2010; Jiang and Wen, 2020; Mirabito and Berry, 2015). Occupational health’s effectiveness is vital for employee’s wellness.

The existing knowledge of COVID-19 is mainly related to health and safety (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). The research on the COVID-19 crisis in the hospitality and tourism industry is starting to emerge (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Hoque et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Past studies have also determined the predictor variables regarding work-related stressors in Pakistan’s academic arena (Nasir et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). However, the study of workplace stressors in the COVID-19 crisis is unexplored in Pakistan’s hospitality industry. It is expected that the hospitality sector will contribute 2.9% toward Pakistan’s GDP. The
hospitality sector was booming in the country before the emergence of COVID-19. The current global pandemic has a severe impact on the Pakistani hospitality industry. Businesses are closing, and employees are under severe mental stress. Studies have examined the association among organizational justice and deviant workplace behavior in the Pakistan public sector. However, the influence of workplace stressors and COVID-19 worry on employees’ withdrawal behavior is understudied in the hospitality industry of Pakistan. There are fewer studies on employees’ withdrawal behavior during COVID-19 (Filimonau et al., 2020; Jung et al., 2021). In this regard, there is a need to study the associations between workplace stressors, aggression, withdrawal behavior, the role of COVID-19 worry and cyberloafing. The current research objective is to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the relationship between workplace stressors and withdrawal behavior among employees in Pakistan’s hospitality industry. The study examines the effect of workplace stressors on employees’ attitudes, especially withdrawal behavior.

The study illustrates how a behavioral perspective is necessary and valuable by providing a deep understanding of how employees’ cyberloafing behavior can lower employees’ workplace stress and aggression, hence lowering employees’ withdrawal behavior. The study can help to obtain organizational goals during COVID-19. In short, the study assesses the effect of workplace stressors due to downsizing and restructuring. This research uses the transactional model of stress and coping theory to explain the proposed model and relationships (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984a). The theory indicates that individuals may exhibit adaptive coping or maladaptive coping behaviors when individuals experience workplace stressors. The moderating role of cyberloafing is based on the transactional model of stress and coping theory. The current research incorporates and adds to the transactional model of stress and coping theory. The study can help to obtain organizational goals during COVID-19. In short, the study assesses the effect of workplace stressors due to downsizing and restructuring. This research uses the transactional model of stress and coping theory to explain the proposed model and relationships (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984a). The theory indicates that individuals may exhibit adaptive coping or maladaptive coping behaviors when individuals experience workplace stressors. The moderating role of cyberloafing is based on the transactional model of stress and coping theory. The current research incorporates and adds to the transactional model of stress and coping theory.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1 Workplace stressor
Hurrell et al. (1998) have defined workplace stressors as a work environment that decreases employees’ well-being and health. Stress is a common human reaction in a working environment when faced with challenging or threatening situations (Keskin et al., 2016). Workplace stressors lead to negative behavior among individuals (Vranjes et al., 2018). Work environments are considered stressful, such as an employee may perceive some degree of conflict with other employees or a threat to his/her well-being in the workplace (Barling et al., 2009). Researchers have highlighted several stressors common within the workplace environment, including the pace of work, emotional workload, varied work, skill use, social support, role conflict, role ambiguity, participation and autonomy (Notelaers et al., 2007).

2.2 Aggression
Barling et al. (2004) described workplace aggression as any physical or verbal behavior to cause harm directed toward another employee. According to Neuman and Keashly (2004), verbal aggression includes several behaviors like being yelled at or verbally threatening someone. Physical aggression contains behaviors like attacked with a weapon, being hit or slapped by someone. In many sectors of the economy, workplace aggression is widespread and is thought to cause 30% of all company failures (Bolin and Heatherly, 2001). Therefore, there is a significant need for scholarly attention to conclude the costs and prevalence of employee aggression and workplace stressors in the workplace (Taylor and Kluemper, 2012). Research indicates that workplace aggression follows an escalatory trend in which
increasingly violent actions may be triggered by perceived stressors (Baron, 2004). Employees with low agreeableness, conscientiousness and high neuroticism levels tend to respond toward perceived aggression (Miller et al., 2003).

2.3 Withdrawal behavior
(Rosse and Hulin, 1985) defined withdrawal behavior as acts leading to the psychological or physical distance between the work environment and employees. Workplace behavior includes turnover and absenteeism (Dalton and Todor, 1993). Work withdrawal behavior consists of an employee’s psychological and behavioral withdrawal from the workplace (Lehman and Simpson, 1992). Withdrawal behavior is not one behavior but several behaviors, containing multiple behaviors (Liu et al., 2019). It begins with occasional psychological withdrawal behavior, eventually expands to behavioral withdrawal, and successively increases withdrawal (Lehman and Simpson, 1992).

2.4 COVID-19 worry
Employees can be worried about their health if any physical infection symptoms appear (Desclaux et al., 2017). The study suggests that employees’ depression, anxiety and stress have been increased due to high COVID-19 worry, which will affect an individual’s routine life as this outbreak continues (Ahmed et al., 2020). Stress and worry are generally predicted by lower mental well-being, anxiety and depression. Lower well-being in mental health complements the deviant behaviors by precisely indicating psychological problems such as frustration (Grant et al., 2013).

2.5 Cyberloafing
Cyberloafing is also called cyberslacking, which means employees perform activities that are not related to work, such as internet surfing, using the net for personal purposes during office work hours through smartphones, which negatively affect the organization (Vahdati and Yasini, 2015). The most common threat to any organization is cyberloafing. The organization provides Web facilities to employees and uses them for unrelated activities during work hours (Lim, 2002). According to Ugrin et al. (2008), cyberloafing means that employees spend time on the internet inefficiently. Cyberloafing includes several activities such as downloading music, email jokes, Web surfing, visiting new websites, instant messages and online shopping (Mastrangelo et al., 2006). Cyberloafing is one of the deviant forms of withdrawal, and organizations are increasingly investigating new ways to discourage employees from engaging in such deviant behaviors (Ugrin and Pearson, 2013). Individuals at the workplace involve in cyberloafing activities due to stressful work conditions (Pindek et al., 2018). Cyberloafing serves as a way for individuals to handle work stress (Henle and Blanchard, 2008).

2.6 Workplace stressors, aggression, withdrawal behavior
The new norm of avoiding social interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic combined with maintaining a balance between professional and personal needs and stressful psychological effects triggered counterproductive work behaviors (Malik et al., 2020). Hospitality industries adhered to hierarchical downsizing and restructuring strategies due to increased competition and opened economies due to globalization, which has given rise to factors like job insecurity, increased turnover rate and job dissatisfaction in employees. Researchers have investigated that workplace aggression is the source of job stressors (Cortina and Magley, 2009). Research has shown that job stress, lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction lead to workplace withdrawal behavior (Peachey et al., 2014). Previous studies show a positive association of
interpersonal hostility, workplace aggression and withdrawal behaviors with job stress and frustration (Avey et al., 2009; Storms and Spector, 1987).

The hospitality industry is considered aggressive because of intensive workload, long working hours and pressure to maintain reputation through high-quality work within a short period. Researchers have found that an aggressive work climate causes to increase in the turnover rates in employees (Mohsin et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2012). It has been observed that layoffs and downsizings directly affect aggression due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies have suggested that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the downsizing organizations have significantly caused stress and anxiety for managers (Graf-Vlachy et al., 2020). Workplace withdrawal behavior is strongly related to financial need (Van Hoye et al., 2015). The pandemic’s anxiety and financial insecurity have caused workplace stress, leading to workplace aggression and employees’ withdrawal behaviors. Based on the transactional model of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984b), employees act to cope with such events when exposed to stressful events. This exposure to stressful events will negatively influence the employees in the form of a strain response. In the current study, we investigate two strain responses that are workplace aggression and withdrawal behavior. Based on the above arguments, it has been hypothesized:

**H1.** Aggression mediates the relationship between workplace stressors and withdrawal behavior.

### 2.7 Aggression, cyber loafing, withdrawal behavior

Employees’ aggression at the workplace has adverse outcomes for organizations and individuals. Researchers have investigated that headache, depression, anxiety, burnout, job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions are the physical, behavioral and psychological outcomes of aggression (Beehr et al., 2006; Barling et al., 2009). Strain outcomes at the workplace are the causes of workplace stressors (Spector et al., 1988). Strain outcomes can be psychological. For instance, anger or behavior that is leaving the situation. Employees reported a lack of organizational commitment and job satisfaction due to workplace aggression. Moreover, employees engaged in withdrawal behavior-related activities are more dissatisfied (Elrehail et al., 2019; Kanfer et al., 2001). Workplace aggression and stress cause employees to transfer to another job or leaving the organization.

Studies have found some unexpected positive workplace outcomes of cyberloafing for employees (Andel et al., 2019). Researchers have found that using social media, surfing the internet are often used to reduce stress and anxiety (Király et al., 2020). Researchers have investigated that to cope with work stress, workers participate in cyberloafing activities to alleviate stressful work conditions (Henle and Blanchard, 2008; Pindak et al., 2018). Cyberloafing acts as a coping strategy that distracts employees from the stressful experience to handle the demands of stressful events (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984b). Psychological withdrawal means an employee’s mental escape from work (Lehman and Simpson, 1992). For example, employees are engaged in personal matters at the workplace instead of doing their work-related activities. Social activities can help to reduce stress, and it leads employees to cyberloafing (Lehman and Simpson, 1992).

Moreover, research has found that cyberloafing lessened workplace aggression, and it has consequences on employees’ job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Andel et al., 2019). Based on previous research, it has been proposed that cyberloafing works as an emotion-focused coping mechanism that serves as a psychological detachment from workplace aggression. The employees would engage in cyberloafing and use the internet for non-work-related activities to cope with the stress, which would buffer the detrimental effects of aggression on withdrawal behaviors. In light of the preceding arguments, we hypothesize the following hypothesis:

**Employee withdrawal behavior**
H2. Cyberloafing moderates the relationship negatively between aggression and withdrawal behavior.

2.8 Workplace stressors, COVID-19 worry, aggression

Previous research has studied the adverse effects of work stress on employees. Workplace aggression is a form of a stressor (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). Workplace aggression is likely to have a negative impact on job stress. (Caillier, 2020). Other researchers have found that work stress causes deviant workplace behavior among employees, including work aggression (Mojoyinola, 2008; Salami, 2010). Some researchers have stated that stress can be a source of aggression (Rodell and Judge, 2009). Studies have found that anxiety, stress and aggression are positively and significantly related (Grandey et al., 2004; Mohiyeddini et al., 2014).

Based on the transactional model of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984b), employees assess unfavorable workplace events as negative stressors, which leads to aggression (Andel et al., 2019). The anxiety and depression among employees related to their work performance and job insecurity have significantly caused economic crises, workplace changes and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic’s future. According to researchers, hospitality industries have higher fixed costs. They are prone to instabilities in the market, such as foodservice and lodging service sectors (Dimitropoulos, 2018), as many industries are going toward downsizing of employees to cut the cost in employee reduction layoffs (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). Due to downsizing, the employees are facing work stressors and heavy workloads. Distress about job insecurity among employees and changing organizational policies are associated with negative emotions (Kiefer, 2005). Researchers have also shown increased levels of boredom and anger quarantined because of lockdown situations (Brooks et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020). Moreover, experiencing a stressful workplace climate may increase job stress in employees (Vigoda, 2000). The employees facing workplace stressors and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 situation leads to workplace-deviant behavior, including aggression. In light of the previous research, it has been hypothesized:

H3. COVID-19 worry moderates the relationship positively between workplace stressors and aggression.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Participants and procedure

Using the convenience sampling technique, one of the co-authors of this study collected data from frontline employees (including managers) of four- and five-star hotels located in Islamabad and major cities of Punjab, Pakistan. For four months (April–July), the hotel industry suffered a significant loss due to the lockdown imposed by Pakistan’s government to prevent the spread of COVID-19. People associated with the said industry (owners and workers) suffered financially and mentally, resulting in aggression, fear and negative behavior. Later, on August 10, 2020, the lockdown was lifted (Umar Bacha, August 27, 2020), but hotel management was instructed to follow the standard operating procedure. The study purpose is to investigate during the COVID-19 pandemics, what may cause the frontline employees’ withdrawal behavior, how the fear of getting exposed to the contagious virus may cause negative emotions and how this negative behavior can be controlled (Figure 1).

A pilot study was conducted on a random sample of 60 frontline employees of the hotel industry to determine the survey scale’s reliability. This sample was not included in the main study. The results revealed internal consistency reliability value above the threshold value, i.e. above 0.7 (workplace stressor (0.76), COVID-19 worry (0.82), aggression (0.79),
cyberloafing (0.85), withdrawal behavior (0.81)). Thus, the scale was found reliable and can be used further for conducting the actual survey. The present final study self-administered survey from September 2020 to November 2020 was conducted at three different periods with a two-week gap between each interval. This method was adopted to handle biasness issues that might occur due to the common measuring criterion during the same period. Behavior is developed over a period and should be measured after a gap of 15–30 days (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Hence, the time-lagged study was adopted for the current research.

To control common method biases, first, time lag was used, and employees were asked to respond for workplace stress and COVID-19 worry at Time 1, aggression and cyberloafing at Time 2 and withdrawal behavior at Time 3; second: methodological control with respect to different Likert anchors for variables were used (Podsakoff et al., 2003). At Time 1, 550 respondents were contacted and were asked about demographic, independent and moderating variables, i.e. workplace stressor, COVID-19 worry; however, 472 usable questionnaires were received, i.e. a response rate of 85%. For Time 2, after a gap of 15 days, participants who gave complete responses were requested to fill the second survey containing items on aggression and cyberloafing. Still, this time, 418 usable responses were received, making a response rate of 87%. For Time 3, only those who participated at Times 1 and 2 were requested to participate in the survey, and respondents were asked about the dependent variable, i.e. withdrawal behavior. A total of 384 responses were received, with an overall response rate of 70% for the current study. Employees were ensured that their identity would not be disclosed, and the confidentiality of the respondents will be maintained. The respondents differed in their age, gender, qualification, experience. Statistics revealed that 255 (66.4%) were male respondents, and 129 (33.6%) were female respondents. Descriptive statistics revealed that 198 (51.6%) respondents were below 30, and 161 (41.9%) respondents were from 31 to 40 years old.

### 3.2 Study measures

Previously, numerous research studies on Pakistan’s hotel industry have been conducted from employees’ and consumers’ perspectives, where data were collected using a questionnaire designed in the English language. Therefore, survey items of the English language from previous literature were adapted to conduct the current study. These items were measured based on the five-point Likert scale. We have used a five-point Likert scale in this study. The scale ranging from (1 – never, 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – always) for workplace stressor and withdrawal behavior (psychological and physical withdrawal behavior). COVID-19 worry, aggression, cyberloafing and withdrawal behavior (turnover intention) scale is ranging from (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).
Workplace stressors (WS) was measured using an 18-item scale, inquiring employees about the pace of work, emotional workload, varied work, role conflict, role ambiguity, autonomy (Notelaers et al., 2007). COVID-19 worry is defined as “an unpleasant emotional state triggered by the perception of threatening stimuli” (Broche-Pérez et al., 2020). It was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Ahorsu et al. (2020). Aggression was measured using 15 items of the “expression of hostility” factor of workplace aggression scale suggested by Neuman and Baron (1998). Cyberloafing is defined as employees’ intentional usage of the internet at the workplace for non-work-related activities (Cheng et al., 2020). It was measured by adapting a five-item scale developed by Cheng et al. (2020). Withdrawal behavior (WB) is described as “some form of volitional response to the perceived deterrent conditions designed to increase the psychological and physical distance between the employee and the organization” (Spendolini, 1985). Withdrawal behavior was measured by adapting a 12-item scale developed by Lehman and Simpson (1992). Respondents were asked about their psychological, physical withdrawal behavior and turnover intention.

3.3 Control variables
One-way ANOVA test was conducted to check the impact of demographic variables (gender, age, organization name, qualification, total experience and current organization experience) on employee’s withdrawal behavior. The results revealed that only gender and organization name significantly impact the dependent variable (i.e. withdrawal behavior); therefore, they were controlled.

4. Study results
Table 1 depicts the summary of mean, standard deviation (SD), internal consistency reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability, correlation and discriminant validity of core variables. Workplace stress (WS) is significantly related to COVID-19 worry (CW) (\( r = 0.545^{**}, p < 0.01 \)), aggression (AGG) (\( r = 0.377^{**}, p < 0.01 \)), workplace behavior (WB) (\( r = 0.381^{**}, p < 0.01 \)). The value of correlation also depicts that cyberloafing (CL) is significantly related to WS (\( r = -0.322^{**}, p < 0.01 \)), AGG (\( r = -0.617^{**}, p < 0.01 \)) and WB (\( r = -0.421^{**}, p < 0.01 \)). We also ran confirmatory factor analysis where five-factor model (WS, CW, AGG, CL, WB) and one-factor model (WS, CW, AGG, CL, WB) was compared; revealing that the five-factor model showed a better fit indices \( x^2(505.96, N = 384), \text{CFI} = 0.924; \text{GFI} = 0.873; \text{AGFI} = 0.862; \text{NFI} = 0.891; \text{RMSEA} = 0.05 \) than the one-factor model \( x^2(863.72, N = 384), \text{CFI} = 0.603; \text{GFI} = 0.543; \text{AGFI} = 0.658; \text{NFI} = 0.603; \text{RMSEA} = 0.26 \). Details of the two-factor model (WS, CW) verses one-factor model of Time 1 and two-factor model versus one-factor model of Time 2 is also given in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>ICR</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>CW</th>
<th>AGG</th>
<th>CL</th>
<th>WB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WS</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>(0.655)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW</td>
<td>3.186</td>
<td>0.698</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.545**</td>
<td>(0.547)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>3.344</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>0.571</td>
<td>0.377**</td>
<td>0.267**</td>
<td>(0.756)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>2.620</td>
<td>1.047</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>0.943</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>-0.322**</td>
<td>-0.266**</td>
<td>-0.617**</td>
<td>(0.721)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>3.605</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>0.621</td>
<td>0.381**</td>
<td>0.297**</td>
<td>0.418**</td>
<td>-0.421**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): N = 384; **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed); *correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); \( p < 0.05 \), **\( p < 0.01 \), ***\( p < 0.001 \); ICR = internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha), AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability, WS = workplace stressor, CW = COVID-19 worry, AGG = aggression, CL = cyberloafing, WB = withdrawal behavior. Discriminant validity is presented in diagonal.
4.1 Hypothesis testing

Hayes’s (2017) process technique using the bootstrapping approach was used to test moderation and mediation. Model 1 was used to conduct moderation analysis, and Model 4 for mediation analysis. Results in Table 3 illustrate that workplace stressor is significantly related to aggression and employee withdrawal behavior. In support of H1, workplace stressor was significantly and positively related to workplace behavior, thorough aggression as the indirect effects did not contain zero, i.e. (0.0063, 0.0400). Hence, mediation is approved.

Table 4 shows the moderation results of COVID-19 worry (CW) between workplace stressors and aggression as significant (β = 0.1701, t = 2.34, *p < 0.05). The two-tailed significance test also confirmed this result (effect = 0.627, Boot SE = 0.187, t = 3.343, ***p < 0.001). Hence, H2 was accepted.

Furthermore, the graph was plotted to check the moderation effect of COVID-19 worry (Figure 2), which shows the value at low CW (B = 0.390, P < 0.05) and value at high CW (B = 0.627, P < 0.01). So, our proposed hypothesis that is in the case of high CW, the relationship between workplace stressors and aggression will be stronger has been approved.

Table 5 shows the moderation results of cyberloafing (CL) between aggression and withdrawal behavior as significant (β = -0.0480, t = -1.985, *p < 0.05), and the two-tailed significance test also confirmed this result (effect = 0.1342, Boot SE = 0.0452, t = 2.965, **p < 0.005). Hence, it supports H3.

Furthermore, to check the moderation effect of cyberloafing, the graph was plotted (Figure 3), which shows the value at low CL (B = 0.260, P < 0.05) and value at high CL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 WS on AGG</td>
<td>0.630</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.1637</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>2.948</td>
<td>0.0034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 WS on WB</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>4.442</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 AGG on WB</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bootstrap mediation results through indirect effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>LL 95% CI</th>
<th>UL 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0201</td>
<td>0.0088</td>
<td>0.0063</td>
<td>0.0400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): n = 384, control variables are gender and organization name. WS = workplace stressor, AGG = aggression, WB = withdrawal behavior. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LL = lower limit, CI = confidence interval, UL = upper limit.
So, our proposed hypothesis that is in the case of low CL, the relationship between aggression and withdrawal behavior will be more robust has been approved.

5. Discussion

Pakistan is facing the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The country took severe measures to control this viral disease. Pakistan is trying to boost the hospitality sector. Thousands of tourists from different countries are visiting Pakistan, and the government is trying to facilitate them. Recently, Pakistan has introduced an e-visa and visa on arrival policy for foreign tourists. The government has reduced taxes for the private sector in the hospitality sector. The hotel industry is under severe pressure due to COVID-19. Businesses are shutting down across the country, and workers are losing their jobs. Organizations are under financial crises during the coronavirus pandemic. Countries have imposed travel restrictions on both domestic and international travelers.

The employees are under mental stress due to fear of organizations’ downsizing. The job description has been changed, and employees are performing extra duties. Such situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr#</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CW as a moderator between WS and AGG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.8227</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>2.431</td>
<td>5.2143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CW</td>
<td>-0.876</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>-1.454</td>
<td>-0.299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>WS</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>-0.582</td>
<td>0.5155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>WS * CW</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.0274</td>
<td>0.3128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Moderated regressions analysis for COVID-19 worry (CW)

Note: N = 384; control’s variables are gender, organization name. WS = workplace stressor, AGG = aggression, CW = COVID-19 worry. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000; LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Figure 2. Interaction effects of workplace stressor and COVID-19 worry on aggression

(B = 0.159, P < 0.05). So, our proposed hypothesis that is in the case of low CL, the relationship between aggression and withdrawal behavior will be more robust has been approved.
develop workplace aggression, followed by employee withdrawal behavior (absenteeism, laziness, turnover intention). The employees are worried due to COVID-19. There is an increase in workplace stressors and aggression in hospitality organizations. The relationship between aggression and withdrawal behavior decreases because of cyberloafing (it is a coping mechanism that may divert employees' aggression and negative thoughts and reduce deviant behavior).

We have proposed three hypotheses in this study. H1: Aggression mediates the relationship between workplace stressors and withdrawal behavior. H2: Cyberloafing moderates the relationship negatively between aggression and withdrawal behavior. H2: COVID-19 worry moderates the relationship positively between workplace stressors and aggression. All these hypotheses were accepted with significant values. Our findings demonstrated that employees' perception of COVID-19 worry, and job insecurity is the primary reason that would trigger stress and aggression, leading to employees' withdrawal behavior. Employees' cyberloafing can reduce stress and withdrawal behavior, lessen the positive impact of aggression on withdrawal behavior. COVID-19 worry moderates the impact of workplace stressors on withdrawal behavior positively.
5.1 Study theoretical and practical implications

This study adds to the existing body of literature on the COVID-19 crisis in Pakistan’s hospitality industry. Our study has several theoretical and practical implications. The current research can help management staff create such strategies to assist employees’ well-being and mental health development. Firstly, this study contributes to the literature by exploring employees’ well-being with the organization’s role during COVID-19 in the relationships between workplace stressors, aggression and withdrawal behavior behavioral research. This study fills a gap by addressing the unexplored topic and the study enhances COVID-19 knowledge and its impact on the tourism-dependent economies. In this regard, employees’ proper work strategies to handle stress during COVID-19 health crises are vital to maintaining employees’ mental well-being. It would ultimately aid firms in controlling fear of job insecurity and employee withdrawal behavior aroused by the downsizing in pandemic and acquiring sustainable development.

This study highlights the significance of stress and coping by explaining the influences of workplace stressors on employees’ aggression and withdrawal behavior, COVID-19 worry and cyberloafing on employees’ withdrawal behavior. The perspective of stress and coping theory is that the employees look for strategies to handle or manage stress and aggression, which would help their organizations manage the crisis better, which would increase the chances to sustain employees’ jobs. Most organizations have restricted employees’ cyberloafing activities because they consider cyberloafing a harmful behavior. That leads to negative morale, and organizations have neglected the positive effects of cyberloafing. Cyberloafing can be a mechanism for micro-breaks, and it can manage workplace stress and aggression at work, especially during COVID-19. Organizations and managers should consider the positive impact of cyberloafing when implementing policies for cyberloafing.

Secondly, this study helps to understand the factors influencing employees’ well-being in the developing countries’ hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. It establishes the explanatory power of stress and coping theory in explaining the relationship between workplace stress with COVID-19 worry and their withdrawal behavior. It is essential to examine the effect of social, cultural, sectoral and economic matters on stress (Hobfoll, 2001). The results illustrated that Pakistanis hotel employees should manage a health emergency by focusing on stress and coping mechanisms. The employees take the economic threat more seriously.

This research can help managers and employers create strategies that can assist employees whose mental health has been affected by the current global health crises. In that regard, suitable precautions should be taken to combat this pandemic fatigue by the hospitality industry. Firstly, several strategies can be implemented to keep employees away from the stress and worries of losing job management. Organizations should create an alternative plan, utilize the firm’s emergency funds to keep paying employees’ salaries, take action instantly to employees’ needs and ensure that COVID-19 standard operating procedures are followed. Training programs should be introduced to protect employees from deadly viruses via emails, newsletters, internal social networks and the provision of protective equipment. These initiatives would aid employees in sustaining their job performance during this pandemic.

Secondly, firms should encourage their employees psychologically, while going for downsizing, each decision should be persuasive. Moreover, employees should be involved in developing the pandemic recovery plan with the management. According to previous studies, employees who are involved in the firm’s strategic reflection feel safer and secure (Pham et al., 2020; Vinodkumar and Bhasi, 2010). The good initiative proposed by employees should be valued and encouraged. Lastly, the hospitality industry should take advantage of the hibernation period by evaluating which employees can overcome job insecurity and job performance during this health crisis.
6. Conclusion

The unprecedented outbreak of COVID-19 has affected the employee’s psychological wellness in the hospitality sector. The presence of perception of getting infected and the lack of protective measures significantly affected employees’ well-being. The current study highlights employees’ mental health due to the fear of being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study focuses extensively on the employee’s psychological constraints during the current pandemic situation. The employee turnover rate is higher during this pandemic, given that many organizations are undergoing downsizing and restricting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study analyzes the harmful impact of employees’ anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several methods can be adopted to mitigate the employee’s anxiety level, such as the following standard operating procedure. The current research offers critical insights into employee’s experiences during this crisis, especially regarding the role of COVID-19 worry.

The study investigated the impact of workplace stressors on withdrawal behavior by taking aggression as a mediator in the COVID-19 pandemic. This research presented a model that embodied workplace stressors with employees’ withdrawal behavior with the mediating role of aggression and the moderating role of COVID-19 worry and cyberloafing. The results revealed that workplace stressor has a positive and significant relationship with withdrawal behavior with full workplace aggression mediation. Additionally, the influence of COVID-19 worry as a moderator is strengthening workplace stressors and aggression, whereas the impact of cyberloafing as a moderator between aggression and withdrawal behavior weakens the relationship.

In this study, some certain limitations should be addressed. First, the research is based on quantitative analysis. The data have been collected from the frontline employees working in the hospitality sector. Further studies may consider both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study’s second limitation is data collection. Online surveys were distributed among the respondents, and data were collected from the hotels located in the Punjab province. Future studies may consider data collection from the various provinces. Thirdly, the most significant limitation that should be addressed is that the study’s respondents are from Pakistan. So, maybe the results of the current study cannot be implemented in other scenarios. Random samples from varied geographical may contribute toward contemporary findings. The COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly across the world. The new scenario can have an impact on the employee’s mental health being. Future studies should address current study limitations.

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Neuman, J.H. and Keashly, L. (2004), Development of the Workplace Aggression Research Questionnaire (WAR-Q): Preliminary Data from the Workplace Stress and Aggression Project. RJ Bennett and CD Crossley (Chairs), Theoretical Advancements in the Study of Anti-social Behavior at Work, Symposium Conducted at the Meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Chicago, IL.


Rodell, J.B. and Judge, T.A. (2009), “Can “good” stressors spark “bad” behaviors? The mediating role of emotions in links of challenge and hindrance stressors with citizenship and...


**Appendix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace stressor</td>
<td>Do you have to work extra hard to complete a task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you work under time constraints?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have to hurry at work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is your work load heavy from an emotional viewpoint?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you confronted in your work with elements that affect you personally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your work put you in emotional situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is your work varied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your work require personal input?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your work make sufficient demands on your skills and capacities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you receive contradictory instructions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have conflict with your colleagues about the content of your tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you know exactly what other people expect of you in your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you know exactly what your tasks are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you know exactly what you can expect from the other people in your department?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have an influence on the pace of work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you interrupt your work if you find it necessary to do so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you decide on the order of priorities for your work activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have to do your work in a way that differs from the method of your choice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 worry</td>
<td>I am most afraid of coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It makes me uncomfortable to think about coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My hands become clammy when I think about coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am afraid of losing my life because of coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When watching news and stories about coronavirus-19 on social media, I become nervous or anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I cannot sleep because I am worrying about getting coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My heart races or palpitates when I think about getting coronavirus-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Staring, dirty looks or other negative eye-contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belittling someone’s opinions to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table A1. Study measurement items (continued)*
## Variable Items

- Giving someone the silent treatment
- Negative or obscene gestures toward the target
- Talking behind the target’s back/spreading rumors
- Interrupting others when they are speaking/working
- Intentionally damning with faint praise
- Holding target, or this person’s work, up to ridicule
- Flaunting status/acting in a condescending manner
- Sending unfairly negative info to higher levels in company
- Leaving the work area when the target enters
- Delivering unfair/negative performance appraisals
- Failing to deny false rumors about the target
- Verbal harassment
- Failing to object to false accusation about the target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cyberloafing</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use internet at work to visit websites and digital newspapers to seek personal information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use internet at work to download software or files for personal or family use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use internet at work to visit the website of my bank to consult my current account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use internet at work to read or send personal (non-professional) emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use internet at work to surf the net and so escape a little</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawal behavior</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thoughts of being absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chat with co-workers about nonwork topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left work station for unnecessary reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daydreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spent work time on personal matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put less effort into job than should have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thoughts of leaving current job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let others do your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left work early without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taken longer lunch or rest break than allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taken supplies or equipment without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fallen asleep at work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A1.

**Corresponding author**

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