

Workplace Gaslighting in the Organizational Context: The mediation model of Episodic Envy

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ABSTRACT

Purpose—Workplace gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse that causes employees to doubt their perceptions and abilities. When enacted by supervisors, its impact is amplified due to power asymmetries. This study examines workplace gaslighting in Pakistan's service sector and investigates the mediating role of episodic envy in linking gaslighting to time theft and psychological withdrawal behaviors.

Study Design/methodology/approach—Grounded in Affective Events Theory (AET), the study conceptualizes episodic envy as an effective response through which gaslighting influences employee behavior. A three-wave, time-lagged survey design was employed with service sector employees in Pakistan (N = 480), with 2–3-week intervals between waves. Gaslighting was measured at Time 1, episodic envy at Time 2, and time theft and psychological withdrawal at Time 3 using self-reported measures. Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS, and mediation was tested through bootstrapping.

Findings—Results support the proposed relationships. Workplace gaslighting is positively associated with episodic envy, which in turn is linked to increased time theft and psychological withdrawal. Bootstrapped indirect effects confirm the mediating role of episodic envy in these relationships.

Practical Implications—The findings highlight supervisor gaslighting as a critical interpersonal stressor in service organizations. Preventive strategies such as leadership screening, respectful communication training, and clear reporting mechanisms are recommended. Additionally, fostering psychological safety and reducing harmful social comparisons may help mitigate negative behavioral outcomes.

Originality/Value—This study adds to the existing research by examining workplace gaslighting in a non-Western context and by identifying episodic envy as a key mediating mechanism. On the assumptions of AET, this study emphasizes affective responses, offering a more nuanced understanding of how gaslighting translates into withdrawal and deviant behaviors. Limitations include reliance on self-reported data and restricted causal inference.

Keywords: Workplace gaslighting. Episodic envy, psychological withdrawal behavior, time theft, affective events theory AET

JEL Classification Codes: M12, M14, M54, J81

1 | INTRODUCTION

Workplace gaslighting is an emerging yet underexplored form of organizational mistreatment in which employees are led to doubt their own perceptions, memories, and interpretations of work events ([Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#)). Gaslighting has traditionally been researched among intimate or family relationships; recent studies indicate that it also takes place in the organizational context, especially among supervisor-subordinate relationships due to power imbalance ([Darke et al., 2025](#); [Graves & Spencer, 2022](#); [Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#); [Omran & Yousafzai, 2024](#); [Sweet, 2019](#)). Despite its harmful outcomes for the employee's welfare, job satisfaction, motivation, and relationship at work, this phenomenon is under-researched in organizational studies ([Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#); [Stein et al., 2025](#)). This study aims to fill this important research gap by using the assumptions of AET and introducing an effective mechanism of unaddressed workplace gaslighting, which adversely affects employee behavior, distrust in leadership, undermined organizational climate, burnout, disengagement, and turnover intentions ([Moisoglou et al., 2025](#)). Although research has examined related constructs such as abusive supervision, bullying, and incivility, the unique mechanism of gaslighting, systematic reality manipulation, and epistemic invalidation remains insufficiently understood, particularly in relation to employee behavioral outcomes. This creates a critical gap; while prior studies acknowledge gaslighting as harmful, there is limited clarity on how and through which psychological processes it translates into covert forms of employee disengagement.

Workplace gaslighting is included in the same family as other constructs of interpersonal mistreatment, but it is not interchangeable with them. First, abusive supervision refers to sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal supervisory behavior ([Fischer et al., 2021](#)). Gaslighting could occur alongside abusive supervision, but the crucial feature of gaslighting is epistemic invalidation, that is, how it makes the targets doubt what they saw, heard, or meant instead of simply treating them harshly. Second, workplace bullying is usually described as repeatedly being exposed to negative acts for an extended period. Bullying can include work-related obstruction and person-related harassment, but not necessarily systematic fragmentation of an event or denial of the target's perception ([Boudrias et al., 2021](#)). Third, psychological aggression is a generic term used to describe actions (nonphysical, verbal, or symbolic) that are experienced as psychologically unpleasant. Fourth, incivility refers to rude, dismissive behavior. Gaslighting can look "mild" on the surface, but it causes doubt and dependency, not merely disrespect. Fifth Deception/lying (falsehoods for advantage): Deception is part of gaslighting, but it is not enough for it. Gaslighting requires making the target doubtful of his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities (i.e., "you can't trust your own mind"), which is the basic pathway outlined in modern gaslighting theory ([Klein et al., 2026](#)). This distinction is important for its consequences: Due to self-trust and credibility attacks in gaslighting, one can expect gaslighting to trigger identity and self-evaluation-based appraisals (e.g., "Maybe I'm incompetent," "Others are more credible than me"), which are particularly pertinent to envy-based emotional processes. Accordingly, this study examines gaslighting as a concept in the workplace as a mechanism characterized by reality denial and manipulation that destabilizes employees' sense making, regardless of the presence or absence of overt hostility or long-duration harassment.

This study is focused on two outcomes that capture the phenomena of covert employee disengagement, i.e., psychological withdrawal and employee time theft. Psychological withdrawal represents psychological distancing from work roles; employees are still present at work, but they withdraw their mental investment,

attention, and discretionary effort (Chu & Chou, 2024). Employee time theft is the deliberate misuse of pay time for non-work-related activities such as excessive breaks, unnecessary socializing, personal work, work slowdown, or misreporting hours (Harold et al., 2022). These behaviors may be particularly pertinent in the context of gaslighting because gaslighting may result in depleted resources available for self-regulatory control, role ambiguity, and perceived lack of fairness and respect, due to which employees may choose to disengage or recapture time in ways that may not be readily visible to supervisors.

Affective Events Theory (AET) proposes that events occurring at work elicit discrete emotional responses, which in turn have impacts on subsequent attitude and behavior (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Contemporary applications of AET emphasize its usefulness in understanding the role of negative interpersonal events in provoking emotional responses that will predict avoidance and unethical behavior (Christensen et al., 2023). This study advances the literature in three ways. First, it shifts the focus from direct effects of mistreatment to the affective processes through which gaslighting influences behavior. Second, it introduces episodic envy as a nuanced emotional pathway, extending Affective Events Theory beyond commonly examined emotions such as anger and stress. Third, by examining these relationships in a non-Western service context, the study enhances the contextual relevance and generalizability of workplace mistreatment research. Collectively, these contributions provide a more precise and process-oriented understanding of how subtle psychological abuse shapes employee behavior.

1.1 | Research Gap and Objectives

Despite the increasing conceptualization and measurement of gaslighting in the workplace, some issues remain underdressed in the prior research (Wang et al., 2025). First, the affective pathways between gaslighting and employee behavior are not well researched compared with stress, burnout, and anger. The social comparison emotion envy is relatively under-researched. Second, gaslighting research has given limited focus to behavioral outcomes, which create direct productivity losses (especially time theft and psychological withdrawal), compared to attitudinal and well-being outcomes. Third, empirical evidence is also scarce outside the Western context; without research conducted in contexts such as the service sector in Pakistan, it is hard to establish the cross-cultural generalizability of gaslighting processes and their behavioral implications. To address these gaps, the present study investigates a temporally ordered model in which gaslighting in the workplace is a negative work event that triggers episodic envy, which later predicts employee time theft and psychological withdrawal among employees. This research clarifies conceptual boundaries surrounding gaslighting and reveals an affective mechanism matching AET while studying gaslighting in a non-Western service sector setting.

RQ1: Is gaslighting at work predictive of employee time theft and psychological withdrawal?

RQ2: Is workplace gaslighting a predictive factor of episodic envy over time among employees?

RQ3: Does episodic envy partially mediate gaslighting at work and its relations with (a) time theft by employees and (b) psychological withdrawal?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Workplace Gaslighting

Workplace gaslighting is a pattern of psychologically manipulative behavior (often carried out or supported by supervisors or built into organizational communication) whereby a target's sense of reality is destabilized in the workplace deliberately and intentionally. Unlike ordinary conflict, gaslighting is about engineering doubt: The target is encouraged to mistrust their own memory, perceptions, judgments, and credibility. Recent research emphasizes the importance of power imbalance due to which the supervisor feels entitled to gaslight their employees ([Klein et al., 2026](#)). Workplace gaslighting is defined by: Reality distortion (reality rewriting), a person is manipulated to believe the reality represented by the gaslighter, Epistemic manipulation (credibility undermining); a person doubts themselves and their judgments, in addition to disagreement, gaslighting attacks the target's credibility as a perceiver. The target is treated as irrational, incompetent, overly emotional, or confused, thereby undermining their credibility and limiting their ability to trust themselves or be trusted by other people. This "epistemic" part created the vicious cycle of dependency ([Klein et al., 2026](#)). Erosion of self-trust by power abuse: makes a person unsure about his dealings and makes him doubt his ability to recognize reality by using authority to control, corner, and dominate.

Under AET, workplace events influence behavior by using emotion, but also by immediate coping and regulating strategies. Workplace gaslighting is a particularly toxic class of event precisely because it interferes with employees' sense-making and epistemic confidence ([Popat & Pandey, 2026](#)). Gaslighting at the workplace repeatedly causes "reality violations," which causes the victim to doubt its judgements, self-confidence, and becomes psychologically difficult to engage in work ([Darke et al., 2025](#); [Graves & Spencer, 2022](#); [Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#)). As a result, gaslighting leads to psychological withdrawal behavior, defined as a type of coping behavior where employees mentally distance themselves, expend less effort, and disengage while remaining present physically. Recent research refers to psychological withdrawal as a defense mechanism that allows employees to psychologically distance themselves from stressors while also conserving resources ([Chu & Chou, 2024](#)). Time theft involves employees using their work time for non-work activities without being authorized by management and is usually conceptualized as a form of counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Time theft includes wasting or diverting time towards non-group activities during the paid hours with costs related to the organization ([Wang et al., 2025](#)). AET suggests that, as negative events continue to occur and go unresolved, employees use behavioral regulation strategies that serve to cope temporarily or to provide quiet retaliation. Consequently, time theft is a psychologically "safe" way to quietly retaliate, and employees get autonomy back and reduce exposure to gaslighting by spending time on non-assigned activities.

Hypothesis 1a: Workplace gaslighting is positively related to psychological withdrawal behavior.

Hypothesis 1b: Workplace gaslighting is positively related to time theft.

Gaslighting at work causes the employees to compare themselves with others around them due to doubts of competence, credibility, and social standing, i.e., "Maybe I'm not competent," "My account is not trusted," "Others are believed over me ([Darke et al., 2025](#); [Popat & Pandey, 2026](#)). Organizational conceptualizations focus on the idea that gaslighting is based on ideas of discrediting and perpetuated through power, hierarchy,

and narrative control ([Ivanitskaya et al., 2025](#)). Due to the power hierarchy, the negative events lead to envy because an employee cannot be aggressive and upfront with their emotions. The past research also supports that envy develops when the self is appraised in a negative evaluation compared to others who seem to have some kind of advantage relative to the self in terms of recognition, credibility, or resources ([Neerdaels et al., 2026](#)). When supervisors engage in gaslighting, the targets notice that some are treated as more believable, competent, or worthy of opportunities that are upward comparison salient ([Jabin, 2026](#)). Due to this environmental trigger, it results in state envy episodes even for those employees who are not generally prone to envy ([Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007](#)). Thus, we hypothesized that,

Hypothesis 1c: *Workplace gaslighting is positively related to episodic envy.*

2.2 | Episodic Envy

Workplace envy is defined as a negative emotion built over time due to the perception that a person has unfair treatment at the workplace ([van Zoonen, 2026](#)). Past research differentiates between envy at the episodic (state) and dispositional (trait) level. Meta-analytic work separates the episodic envy construct from the dispositional envy and more general constructs of envy, suggesting that these have different antecedents and consequences ([Lange et al., 2018](#)). Appraisals of clear injustice, external blame, and controllability are typically the antecedents of envy ([Kaur et al., 2026](#); [Lange et al., 2018](#)). Past Research supports that when an employee is not psychologically comfortable with the environment and is constantly exposed to unwanted negativity, he indulges into the behavior of spending time on non-productive and non- assigned tasks at work due to revenge motives ([Wang et al., 2025](#); [Yang et al., 2025](#)).

Affective Events Theory states that work behavioral patterns are determined by a chain of events whereby the discrete events cause emotional responses, which in turn affect cognition, attitude, and behavior ([Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996](#)). In this model, episodic envy occurs due to gaslighting, and the employee is exposed to a certain social comparison, like a colleague being given recognition, rewards, or promotion. This event creates a negative emotional response of inferiority, resentment, and frustration. Under such a situation, employees view the situation as unfair or threatening to their self-assessment, which leads to the development of distributive or procedural unfairness and feelings of relative deprivation ([Harold et al., 2022](#); [Yang et al., 2025](#)). Consequently, employees indulge in more withdrawal-oriented behaviors as the control mechanism of their negative emotional condition and the re-establishment of the perception of fairness. Time theft is an active manifestation of withdrawal where employees deliberately redirect working hours to other non-work activities as a coping mechanism to perceived injustice ([Harold et al., 2022](#); [Zhao et al., 2025](#)). Psychological withdrawal, conversely, is a more passive coping strategy, in which employees psychologically disengage with their work and avoid situations that cause them to compare themselves to others ([Jo & Lee, 2022](#); [Yasami et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, according to the Affective Events Theory, episodic envy is an affective stimulus, which, through cognitive appraisal and attitudinal deterioration, results in time theft and psychological withdrawal behaviors at work.

Hypothesis 2a: *Episodic envy is positively related to psychological withdrawal behavior.*

Hypothesis 2b: *Episodic envy is positively related to time theft.*

2.3 | Episodic Envy as a Mediator between Gaslighting and Outcomes

Integrating the above arguments, AET suggests that gaslighting episodes (events) at work trigger self-evaluation/credibility threat (appraisal), which triggers episodic envy (emotion), which then increases withdrawal/ time theft (behavior). This offers a cohesive "event -> appraisal -> emotion -> behavior" explanation of gaslighting to disengagement-based outcomes. However, episodic envy is expected to explain parts of the gaslighting. Workplace gaslighting has been associated with anxiety, depression, outcomes related to burnout, reduced engagement, and "quiet quitting", so it is clear that its impact is not only envy-based ([Moisoglou et al., 2025](#)). Likewise, empirical evidence in the health care context indicates that gaslighting is associated with burnout and intention to leave work ([Moisoglou et al., 2025](#)). These patterns suggest the presence of more than one affective pathway (e.g., fear/anxiety, sadness, exhaustion) apart from envy ([Darke et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, envy is an important proximal emotional mechanism, but not the only one. Hence, partial mediation is proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: *Episodic envy partially mediates the positive relationship between workplace gaslighting and psychological withdrawal behavior.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Episodic envy partially mediates the positive relationship between workplace gaslighting and time theft.*

3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

3.1 | Participants and Procedure

By utilizing the personal and professional contacts, employees of different service sector organizations (including banks, telecom, consultancy agencies, financial institutes, and software houses) were accessed for data collection. Participation of the respondents was voluntary. A cover letter explicating the objective of the research and confidentiality of respondents was provided to the Human Resource Departments of different organizations by using convenience sampling. Self-reported questionnaires were used for data collection, where, at time 1, the questions regarding "Workplace gaslighting" were circulated along with demographic questions. "Episodic envy" items were circulated at time 2 through self-reports. Similarly, at time 3, we gathered data regarding the dependent variables: psychological withdrawal behavior and time theft. Almost 600 questionnaires were distributed among different organizations; after eliminating incomplete, illogical, and inconsistent data, a total of 480 complete data was received, yielding us the final response rate of 67%. This study targeted entry and middle-level employees in the service sector of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The reason for targeting junior to middle-level employees was that they are more likely to be victims of gaslighting by their supervisors.

3.2 | Common Method Variance

To mitigate the risk of common method variance, this study adopted several procedural remedies. Data were collected by using a time-lagged design, as suggested by [Podsakoff et al. \(2003\)](#), to provide a true

representation of responses in three time waves: independent variable measured at Time 1, the mediator at Time 2, and the dependent variable at Time 3, separated by intervals of 2-3 weeks. This temporal separation creates psychological separation and minimizes respondent recall bias ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#); [Podsakoff et al., 2012](#)). All the constructs were measured using established multi-item scales from prior studies. Although self-reported measures were necessary given the perceptual nature of the core constructs, these design features provide reasonable confidence that common method bias is unlikely to affect the results.

To examine common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was performed. Sampling adequacy was acceptable ($KMO = .95$). The first factor explained 28.38% of the variance (eigenvalue = 12.49), which is well below the 50% criterion, indicating that common method variance is unlikely to substantially bias the results. Table 1 shows the results of Harman's single-factor test:

Table 1

Harman's Single-Factor Test (Unrotated Principal Component Analysis)

| Component | Eigenvalue | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
|-----------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1 | 12.49 | 28.38 | 28.38 |

N=480. 44-items

3.3 | Measures

Data were collected from individual employees across multiple organizations and analyzed at the individual level. Questionnaires were distributed among the respondents to collect primary data from employees. The time lag of 2-3 weeks was selected to allow the mediator (episodic envy) to plausibly develop after gaslighting experiences and subsequently influence behavioral outcomes, supporting temporal precedence in the hypothesized mediation. All the scales used in the current study are already validated and tested in previous studies, and the measures used in the current study are well aligned with the operationalization of the study constructs. Scholars contend that using standardized measures helps in reducing the problems associated with the instrumentation (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). For independent and dependent variables, the scale was set as 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree", except for episodic envy, were ranging from 1 = "never" to 7 = "frequently". The higher anchors of all the Likert-type scales represented higher values for the variables tapped. Moreover, all the measures were self-reported.

3.3.1 | Workplace Gaslighting

Workplace Gaslighting is measured by a 12-item scale developed by ([Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#)) and tapped at time 1. The sample items are "Your supervisor diverted the topic to project the fault onto you, 'Your supervisor passed degrading comments followed by rewards. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale is found to be 0.89 for the overall scale

3.3.2 | Episodic Envy

We tapped episodic envy on time 3, and it is measured by 9-item scales ([Cohen-Charash, 2009](#)). The sample items are ‘I feel some hatred toward my coworker’, ‘I have a grudge and feel resentment or bitterness toward my coworker’. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale is found to be 0.85.

3.3.3 | Psychological Withdrawal Behavior

At time 3, psychological withdrawal behavior is measured by using [Lehman and Simpson \(1992\)](#) 8 items scale. The sample items are ‘Thoughts of being absent’, ‘Chat with co-workers about non-work topics. The value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.88.

3.3.4 | Time Theft

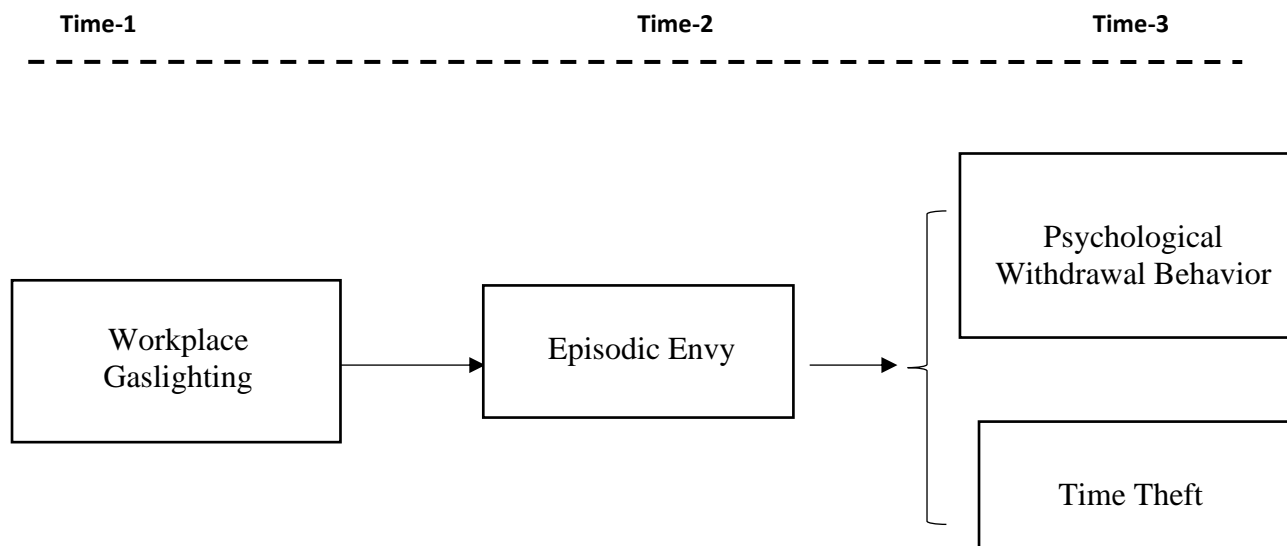
Time theft is tapped at time 3 by the 15-item scale developed by [Harold et al. \(2022\)](#). The sample items are ‘I took more breaks during the day than I am supposed to take’, ‘I took longer breaks than my boss/company allows me to take’. The value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.90.

3.4 | Control Variables

Data regarding the demographic factors were collected through self-reported questions at time 1. To explore their influence on dependent variables, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The test results showed that gender and education had significant variance with our dependent variables, thus they were controlled. These controls were added as covariates while performing correlation and regression analysis.

Figure 1

Proposed Theoretical Framework



4 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 | Participant details

The sample of the current study possesses diverse characteristics. The final sample consisted of 51% males and 49% females, most of whom were working in government sector organizations, having a bachelor's

level of education, mostly. Moreover, the mean age of respondents was 29 years, ranging between 22 and 36. Their mean present and total work experience were 3.87 and 6.12 years, respectively.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics

| Characteristics | Demographic Statistics | |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 245 | 51 |
| Female | 235 | 49 |
| Age | Ranged from 22 – 36 years (average age is 28.52 years) | |
| Type of Organization | | |
| Government | 251 | 52.3 |
| Semi-Government | 50 | 10.4 |
| Private | 179 | 37.3 |
| Designation | | |
| Top Management | 3 | .6 |
| Middle Management | 126 | 26.3 |
| Lower Management | 181 | 37.7 |
| Entry-level | 170 | 35.4 |
| Education Level | | |
| Bachelor's and Below | 290 | 60.4 |
| Master's & above | 190 | 39.6 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 259 | 54.0 |
| Unmarried | 221 | 46.0 |
| Experience | | |
| Current Experience | Ranged from 01 – 11 years (average current experience is 3.87 years) | |
| Total Experience | Ranged from 03 – 14 years (average total experience is 6.12 years) | |

4.2 | Validity

Both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) were used to evaluate the discriminant validity. In the case of Fornell-Larcker test, square root of AVE of workplace gaslighting ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = .63$), episodic envy ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = .61$), psychological withdrawal behaviour ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = .69$), and time theft ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = .59$) were higher than the inter-construct correlations (.35 to .54). This pattern shows that all the constructs had a greater variance with their indicators than with other constructs which supports discriminant validity. Consistent results were received using HTMT; all HTMT scores were between 0.41 and 0.61, which is less than the cutoff point .85. The combination of the Fornell-Larcker and HTMT results is great evidence of the discriminant validity among the study constructs. Table 3 indicates the discriminant validity of all the constructs with both techniques:

Table 3*Discriminant Validity*

| | | HTMT | | | | Fornell-Larker Criteria | | | |
|-----------|-----|------|------|------|---|-------------------------|------|------|------|
| Construct | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | WG | - | | | | 0.63 | | | |
| 2 | EE | 0.41 | - | | | | 0.61 | | |
| 3 | PWD | 0.54 | 0.48 | - | | | | 0.69 | |
| 4 | TH | 0.61 | 0.54 | 0.53 | - | | | | 0.59 |

Factor loadings were also checked to confirm the validity. Factor loadings basically interpret the role each item plays in defining the variable (Hair et al., 2012). The factor loadings of 0.5 and above depict the appropriateness of the factor model (Kumar & Dash, 2013). This also shows that there is no problem of common method bias in the data. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE values lower than .50 are acceptable if composite reliability (CR) exceeds .70, indicating that the construct explains sufficient variance in its indicators despite the lower AVE.

Table 4 signifies the detailed factor loadings for each item, AVE, and composite reliabilities of the study constructs.

Table 4*Factor Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliabilities (CR) of the main study.*

| Item No. | WG | EE | PWD | TH |
|------------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 0.60 | 0.58 | 0.73 | 0.58 |
| 2 | 0.65 | 0.64 | 0.68 | 0.58 |
| 3 | 0.63 | 0.65 | 0.67 | 0.56 |
| 4 | 0.66 | 0.58 | 0.71 | 0.65 |
| 5 | 0.61 | 0.63 | 0.69 | 0.60 |
| 6 | 0.66 | 0.64 | 0.69 | 0.59 |
| 7 | 0.66 | 0.57 | 0.67 | 0.64 |
| 8 | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.74 | 0.59 |
| 9 | 0.62 | 0.57 | - | 0.58 |
| 10 | 0.62 | - | - | 0.53 |
| 11 | 0.62 | - | - | 0.59 |
| 12 | 0.64 | - | - | 0.61 |
| 13 | - | - | - | 0.57 |
| 14 | - | - | - | 0.60 |
| 15 | - | - | - | 0.63 |
| AVE | 0.40 | 0.37 | 0.48 | 0.35 |
| MSV | 0.30 | 0.22 | 0.23 | 0.30 |
| CR | 0.89 | 0.85 | 0.88 | 0.90 |

4.3 | Confirmatory Factor Analysis

As per [Anderson and Gerbing \(1988\)](#) guidelines, a one-factor model was compared with a full measurement model to further validate the discriminant validity. The full factor model showed better model fit as compared to the single-factor model, thereby establishing the discriminant validity of the variables (see Table 5).

Table 5

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

| Measurement Models | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>NFI</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>GFI</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Hypothesized model (WG, EE, PWD, TH) | 1179.2 | 898 | .86 | .96 | .90 | .02 |
| Hypothesized model (1-factor) | 3368.4 | 902 | .60 | .67 | .62 | .07 |

N=480

Note: Better fit indices are presented in bold; WG = Workplace Gaslighting, EE = Episodic Envy, PWD= Psychological Withdrawal Behaviour, TH= Time Theft

4.4 | Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), reliability statistics (alpha), and correlation values. The Cronbach alpha and the composite reliability of all measures were greater than the cut-off value of .70, which indicates internal consistency reliability ([Hair Jr et al., 2020](#)). Further, the correlation values among the study variables show that all variables are positively and significantly correlated ($p < .01^{**}$ and $p < .05^*$).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlation

| | Mean | SD | α | CR | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------|------|-----|----------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1 Gender | 1.48 | .50 | - | - | | | | | | |
| 2 Edu | 1.39 | .48 | - | - | .08 | | | | | |
| 3 WG | 3.92 | .71 | 0.89 | 0.89 | .08 | .03 | | | | |
| 4 EE | 3.86 | .69 | 0.85 | 0.85 | .04 | .12** | .35** | | | |
| 5 PWD | 4.04 | .79 | 0.88 | 0.88 | .031 | .09* | .48** | .41** | | |
| 6 TH | 4.01 | .67 | 0.90 | 0.90 | .09* | .14** | .54** | .47** | .47** | - |

Note: WG = Workplace Gaslighting, EE = Episodic Envy, PWD= Psychological Withdrawal Behaviour, TH= Time Theft, Edu = Education Qualification, SD= standard deviation α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; N = 480, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

4.5 | Model Testing

First, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to identify the control variables, among all the demographic variables (see table 2), gender and education were found to be significantly affecting the study variables, and they were added as study control variables.

This study follows a regression-based mediation framework, and direct and indirect effects are calculated through the PROCESS-macro using bootstrapping procedures ([Hayes, 2017](#)) using SPSS Statistics 20 for

statistical analyses. Although construct validity was established via CFA in AMOS, mediation was tested using PROCESS (Model 4) with bias-corrected bootstrapping because the study employed composite (mean) scores for each construct to reduce model complexity and ensure estimation stability given the large number of indicators (44 items). Regression-based mediation with bootstrapped confidence intervals provides a well-established and robust test of indirect effects in observed variable models.

Results about the direct and indirect effects are illustrated in Table 6, where WG is positively and significantly influenced by the PWD [$\beta = .43^{**}$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.34,.52], WG also positively and significantly influences the TH [$\beta = .40^{**}$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.33,.48] and EE [$\beta = .34^{**}$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.26,.42] and EE also positively affect PWD [$\beta = .30^{**}$, $p < .001$, CI [.21,.40] and TH [$\beta = .29^{**}$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.22,.36]. These results show positive and significant direct effects of WG and EE on dependent variables, thus supporting the first hypothesis of this study.

Regarding the results of the mediation analysis, which tested the indirect effects of workplace gaslighting on psychological withdrawal behavior and time theft via episodic envy. The results supported the acceptance of our mediation hypothesis ($\beta = .10^{**}$, CI [0.06, 0.15], showing partial mediation of EE between WG and PWD, as the bootstrap confidence interval included non-zero values between lower- and upper bounds. The results also got acceptance for the mediation between WG and TH via EE [$\beta = .10^{**}$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.07, .14], supporting the partial mediation.

Table 7

Hypothesis testing

| Direct effects | β | SE | t | p-value |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| WG → PWD | .43 | .04 | 9.33 | .000 |
| WG → TH | .40 | .03 | 11.39 | .000 |
| WG → EE | .34 | .04 | 8.21 | .000 |
| EE → PWD | .30 | .04 | 6.53 | .000 |
| EE → TH | .29 | .03 | 7.99 | .000 |
| Indirect effects | Effect | Boot SE | LL 95% CI | UL 95% CI |
| WG→EE→PWD | .10** | .02 | .06 | .15 |
| WG →EE→TH | .10** | .02 | .07 | .14 |

Direct and Indirect Effects

Note: $N = 480$, WG = Workplace Gaslighting, EE = Episodic Envy, PWD = Psychological Withdrawal Behaviour, TH = Time Theft Bootstrapping based on 5,000 samples, β = standardized coefficient, SE = Standard Error, LL = Lower limit, UL = Upper limit, CI = Confidence interval, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

5 | DISCUSSION

The results show that gaslighting at work is a significant predictor of both psychological withdrawal and time theft, with the mediation of episodic envy. These results add to this expanding literature on mistreatment in the workplace by identifying gaslighting as a distinct yet related form of interpersonal mistreatment that demonstrates patterns consistent with prior research on abusive supervision and workplace bullying, particularly in predicting withdrawal and counterproductive work behaviors. Unlike overt aggression,

gaslighting via epistemic manipulation, weakening the confidence of employees in their own perceptions and judgments, is capable of strengthening emotional stress and disengagement. Recent conceptual and empirical research has started to recognize the existence of workplace gaslighting as a quantifiable and theoretically significant concept ([Kukreja & Pandey, 2023](#)), and the current results contribute to this emerging field of research by linking it with counterproductive behaviors. Envy is a theoretically meaningful mediator in epistemic abuse situations because gaslighting is inherently stabilizing perceptions regarding status, credibility, and competence. When people are repeatedly invalidated or caused to question their own interpretations, they may engage in upward social comparison, feeling that others, especially perpetrators, possess more power, recognition, and/or legitimacy. This dynamic gives rise to episodic envy, which is a short-term emotional response to perceived disadvantage. The results of this study add to the meta-analytic evidence that workplace envy predicts withdrawal, undermining, and counterproductive behaviors at work ([Li et al., 2023](#)). By studying envy within the gaslighting process, the study explains why employees may not only react with distress but also withdrawal and compensation deviance, such as time theft. Importantly, these findings are consistent with prior literature on abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment, which shows that negative interpersonal treatment often leads to deviant and withdrawal behaviors through affective mechanisms such as anger, frustration, and emotional exhaustion. The present adds to the existing research by suggesting that envy may serve as an additional emotional pathway, particularly in contexts where employees' competence and credibility are undermined rather than directly attacked. Comparing these findings in relation to abusive supervision and bullying literature at work provides further clarity regarding the contribution of the study. Abusive supervision ([Tepper, 2000](#)) and bullying ([Einarsen et al., 2020](#)) consistently link abuse (mistreatment) with strain and deviant behaviors. However, gaslighting is conceptually different in that it applies epistemic agency, not just plain old hostility or intimidation. This distinction is responsible for the centrality of comparison-based emotions, such as envy. Thus, the research acknowledges gaslighting as part of the domain of mistreatment, but also identifies the unique psychological aspects and emotional processes. The mediation results show partial rather than full mediation, indicating that envy accounts for a meaningful but incomplete portion of the relationship between gaslighting and behavioral outcomes. Gaslighting likely operates through multiple processes simultaneously, including anxiety, mental exhaustion, moral disengagement, and reduced psychological safety. Accordingly, the findings identify episodic envy as one important pathway among several possible mechanisms, rather than a comprehensive explanation of the effects of gaslighting. Modeling partial mediation strengthens the theoretical model by acknowledging the complexity of emotional reactions to workplace mistreatment. The magnitude of the effects observed is also a reason to consider. Moderate effects in the organizational setting involve being 'practically meaningful' particularly if behaviors such as withdrawal and time theft accumulate over time and among teams. Large effects would constitute a high-risk situation in an organization, but even moderate relationships can cause considerable productivity loss and cultural erosion in an organization.

5.1 | Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, policies should openly define gaslighting behaviors such as persistent denials of prior statements, distortion of reality, and delegitimizing employee perceptions of reality so that

they can be formally recognized and addressed. Second, organizations should implement structural accountability systems that have documented decision processes and transparent performance criteria for reducing the opportunity for narrative manipulation.

Third, leaders should receive training that integrates emotional intelligence with practices of fair management to decrease dynamics of status-based comparison that increase envy. Finally, withdrawal and time theft should be considered by organizations as potential early warning signs of dysfunction in a relationship and not as isolated issues in performance.

5.2 | Limitations

Despite the contributions, there are limitations to this study. The use of self-reported information has raised concerns about the problem of common method bias, where you increase the associations among variables. Future examinations should include more multi-source designs and measure gaslighting behaviors or withdrawal as reported by peers, for example, or rated by supervisors. Endogeneity concerns that also remain as reverse causality or omitted variables, cannot be ruled out completely. Longitudinal cross-lagged models, experimental vignette studies, and quasi-experimental interventions would give stronger causal inferences. Additionally, there may be cultural and sector-specific boundary conditions that prevent the experience and expression of gaslighting. High power-distance cultures, for example, may normalize a reality distortion through the concept of authority, upsetting emotional responses. Similarly, competitive sectors might increase the dynamics of comparison, which increases envy.

5.3 | Future Research Directions

Future research must attempt to increase the scope of the emotional model from episodic envy to include anger, shame, fear, and moral disengagement as alternative mediators. Experimental research could manipulate the situations of gaslighting to test discrete emotional responses and behavioral intentions. Experience sampling methods would enable examination of within-person fluctuations in the exposure to gaslighting and same-day behavioral reactions. Multi-source and multi-level designs could also clarify the nature of team-level contagion effects; explorations could be taken on the effects of gaslighting climates producing collective withdrawal norms.

6 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study contributes to the knowledge of gaslighting at the workplace as a form of mistreatment that operates with emotional mechanisms in a way that can shape the behavior of employees. By generalizing Affective Events Theory and incorporating envy into models of epistemic abuse, the results lead to a theoretically grounded account of the reasons for subtle manipulation in psychological settings that result in high costs to an organization. Solutions to gaslighting demand structural safety measures, emotional consciousness, and accountability practices that uphold the epistemic agency of employees and cut down the instances of withdrawal and counterproductive acts.

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