



STRESS: CAN IT DRIVE IMMORALITY? ILLEGITIMATE TASKS AS AN ANTECEDENT OF EMPLOYEE EXPEDIENCY AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATION OBSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Expediency is covert unethical behavior that is subtle but detrimental for an organization. This study aims to investigate when and why employee exhibits expediency. Illegitimate tasks which fall in the category of occupational stressors are examined as a predictor of employee expediency. Moreover, the moderating role of perceived organization obstruction is explored. Data was collected from the private health sector with a sample of 591 supervisor-subordinate dyads and based on three time-lags. The conceptual framework is drawn on the transactional theory of stress and coping. The findings provide empirical support to hypotheses formulated in the present study. The results demonstrate a positive and significant effect of illegitimate tasks on employee expediency. In addition, statistical findings confirm the moderation effect of perceived organization obstruction. Implications and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Illegitimate tasks; Employee expediency; Perceived organization Obstruction

JEL Codes: M10

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent advancements in the subject of aberrant behavior in the workplace have begun to emphasize their negative impacts on individuals and companies, attracting research on a variety of problematic, immoral, and harmful actions like harassment, bullying, and interpersonal abuse (Decieri et al., 2019; Dhanani & Lapalme, 2019). However, this line of research adds to our understanding of the workplace's often overt, ethically charged actions, but it is mainly quiet on the more elusive but detrimental behaviors that breach accepted norms formally known as employee expediency (EE) in organizational behavior research (Eissa, 2020). EE refers to an employee's use of immoral techniques to hasten work to achieve self-serving goals, a behavioral issue that has recently piqued academia's interest (Greenbaum et al., 2018). EE research is still in its early stages (Ren et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2021). Scholars have an agreement that expediency is a common workplace phenomenon but remained overlooked (Eissa, 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018; Jonason & Connor, 2017; Parts et al., 2010). More specifically limited empirical investigation is available in the literature highlighting when and why employee exhibits expediency. Thus the present study intends to examine what prompts expediency at the workplace. Based on the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) also known as the cognitive theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) it is argued that workplace stress can be a significant and positive predictor of employee expediency. Recently, illegitimate tasks emerged as an occupational stressor and a task is defined as legitimate if it adheres to rules regarding what can be fairly expected of a specific person, and it is illegitimate if it deviates from those norms (Semmer et al., 2010). According to TTSC when an individual faces a stressful event it is appraised as a challenge or hindrance stressor and accordingly coping strategy is devised. Therefore, in this study, it is suggested that when an employee is assigned illegitimate tasks which are tasks related stressors they are appraised as hindrance stressors, and to cope with it employees indulge in expediency. Moreover, it is emphasized that employee perception can also play a significant role in strengthening the positive and significant relationship between illegitimate tasks and employee expediency. Literature underlines that employee negative perception can lead to negative behavior at the workplace for instance if the employee believes that the

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organization is a source of a hindrance towards the achievement of goals and detrimental to well-being, they may exhibit negative behavior (Gibney et al., 2009). Such perception is termed as perceived organization obstruction (POO) as the employee may interpret the actions of organization agents such as supervisors and leaders to be actions of the organization and blame accordingly.

This research makes fourfold contributions to the literature. First of all, it advances the research on employee expediency by identifying and examining what prompts it at the workplace. Secondly, it extends the research on illegitimate tasks (IT) which are considered as established stressors and constantly been associated with negative outcomes at the workplace (Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2019). Third, according to Mackey et al. (2018), it is significantly important to figure out how perceived organization obstruction explains the variation. Thus present research indicates that POO may be critical in explaining the relationship between IT and EE by acting as a moderator. Fourth, integration of transactional theory of stress in expediency research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.I. ILLEGITIMATE TASKS AND EMPLOYEE EXPEDIENCY

Several studies have looked into the detrimental psychological, behavioral, and health effects of illegitimate tasks (Apostel et al., 2018; Eatough et al., 2016; Kottwitz et al., 2013; Muntz et al., 2019). According to Bjork et al. (2013), IT instills in you the feeling that "I shouldn't have to do this" (p. 262). Due to its negative connotation, illegitimate duties require particular consideration in occupational stress research (Fila & Eatough, 2020). IT is a source of workplace stress, although it is unknown why employees react differently to IT and how they manage with them (Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019). Researchers such as Rossi et al. (2020) discussed the features of illegitimate tasks, which include (i) they are given rather than chosen by the employee; and (ii) that they are based on the context. IT also influences an employee's mentality and causes undesirable emotional reactions (Pindek et al., 2019). According to experts, IT is a distinct form of workplace stress as it jeopardizes an employee's identity (Ma & Peng, 2019). IT is stressful because they send a message of disrespect that is perceived as a danger to one's self. Furthermore, a task that does not conform to what is appropriate in terms of an employee's function is considered illegitimate (Semmer et al., 2007). Later, Semmer et al. (2015) highlighted that IT is linked to burnout and irritation, which are two distinct strains. Workplace pressures cause strain, and experts believe that IT is linked to strain (Semmer et al., 2015, 2019). IT is viewed as unjust and conceptually linked to injustice, according to these researchers. As a result, illegal duties, like other workplace pressures, have an impact on behavioral patterns. Because unfair, unjust, disrespectful, or stressful occurrences generate bad feelings and conduct at work, research findings have revealed that IT leads to counterproductive work behavior (Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019; Semmer et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018). Similarly, it is argued in this study that employees use expediency to cope with the stress produced by IT. Relying on the transaction theory of stress it is emphasized that when an employee is confronted with illegitimate tasks that he or she perceives as threatening, expediency is used as a coping strategy. Thus,

H₁ Illegitimate tasks have a positive and significant effect on employee expediency

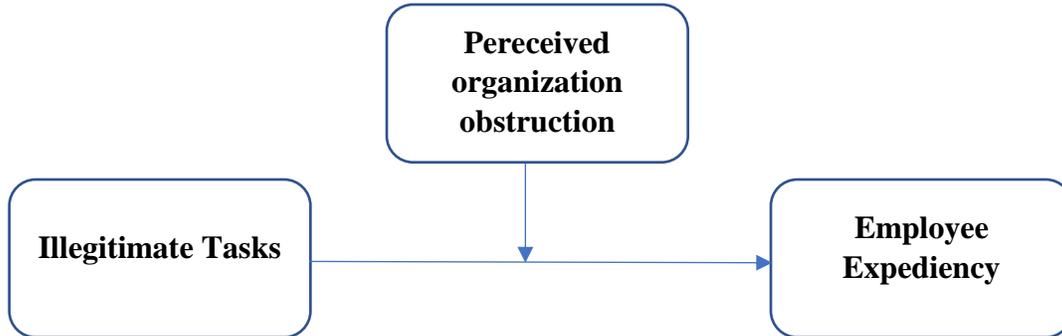
II.II. POO AS A MODERATOR

The concept of POO is founded on the social exchange theory, which also predicts the argument that employees perceive their employer as a source of impediment and respond in such (Gibney et al., 2009). They defined POO as an employee's perception that an organization is obstructing, hindering, or interfering with the attainment of his or her goals and poses a threat to his or her well-being. If an employee believes that the organization is the source of this mistreatment, they will retaliate by acting in a way that is detrimental to the company. Employee misbehavior would be attributed to the organization in this case (Skarlicki, 2004). According to Tripp et al. (2002), it is human nature to seek vengeance against those who have caused harm. Akhtar et al. (2020) argued that the hostile reaction is triggered by a conviction that the organization is a source of delay and failure to attain desired goals. Furthermore, POO is a representation of an employee's impression of the organization's treatment of them. The belief of negative treatment in the workplace can be retaliated against by displaying negative behavior. According to Mackey et al. (2018), abusive supervision is positively associated with POO because subordinates develop a negative perception of their organization when they have a negative exchange relationship with their supervisor and, as a result, respond negatively to the organization, which can be manifested in the form of a negative association between POO and organization-directed citizenship behavior. The entire approach is founded on the supervisor-subordinate and organization connection therefore it is argued that the assignment of tasks that are perceived to be illegitimate can contribute to the perception of obstruction. This is because the employee may interpret supervisor tasks assignment to be the action prescribed by the organization. Thus the combination of illegitimate tasks and POO can be stressful and trigger employee expediency. Relying on the transactional theory that posits when a stressful event is faced by an individual

it activates the coping mechanism. Accordingly when an employee faces stress in form of illegitimate tasks and believes that the organization is obstructing goal attainment and harmful to the well-being the coping mechanism can be expedient behavior. Thus it is hypothesized

H₂ POO moderates the positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and employee expediency such that the relationship is stronger when POO is high.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



III. METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a time-lag and two-source data collection method that includes three-time lags and two sources supervisor and subordinates. In T1 data were collected on illegitimate tasks and employees rated them. In T2 employees filled the survey on perceived organization obstruction and in T3 individuals working on supervisory positions rated employee expediency of employees who filled the survey in T1 and T2. The data was collected from private hospitals located in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore, and Peshawar. In the pre-data collection phase permissions were taken from the respective departments of hospitals. After the permission was granted, the employees were contacted for data collection. The survey was self-administrated and each hospital was personally visited by researchers in three-time lags. For the sake of traceability across three lags surveys were coded with 4-digits. After three lags a usable data of 591 matched responses (supervisor-subordinates) was available for data analysis. Employees were 49% male and 51%, females, with age 33% (20-30), 53% (31-40), 14% (above 40), education 63% graduates, 32% masters, 60% earning salary between 31000-40000 and 60% have experience less than 5 years. Supervisors were 60% males and 40% females, with age 45% (above 50), 42% (40-49), 13% (30-39), 51% have qualification above masters, 79% earning a salary above 50,000 monthly and 31% have experience more than 20 years.

III.I. MEASURES

III.I.I. ILLEGITIMATE TASKS

Bern illegitimate task scale (BITS) adapted from Semmer et al. (2010). The illegitimate task scale measures two dimensions i.e., unnecessary and unreasonable. The scale includes eight items, each dimension is measured by four items. The sample item includes “Do you have work tasks to take care of which you kept wondering if they have to be done at all” and “Did you have work tasks to take care of which kept you wondering if they should be done by someone else?” Employees evaluated these items on a Likert scale of five points (1 = never to 5 = frequently). Following the footsteps of Semmer et al. (2015), this study considered IT as one construct and dimensions as indicators.

III.I.II. EMPLOYEE EXPEDIENCY

Employee expediency was assessed on four items scale by Greenbaum et al. (2018) supervisor rated their employees “To what extent your employee engages in following behaviors?” “alters performance numbers to appear more successful” (1 = never to 7 = all the time).

III.I.III. PERCEIVED ORGANIZATION OBSTRUCTION

Perceived organization obstruction was gauged on the five items by Gibney et al. (2009). Sample item included “My organization obstructs the realization of my professional goals”. Employees filled these items on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

IV. RESULTS

The data analysis in this study was done with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS software (Ringle et al., 2015). Partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) has received a lot of use in recent years, compared to covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). The results were analyzed in two steps, following the criteria from the PLS-SEM literature (Hair et al., 2021). The first step was evaluating the measurement model of the PLS-SEM technique to assess inter-item reliability, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability. The structural model was analyzed in the second step to test hypotheses.

IV.I. EVALUATION OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

First, inter-item dependability was determined by evaluating factor loadings while keeping a 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2016). Second, analysis of average variance extracted (AVE) was used to determine convergent validity, with a needed threshold of 0.50 maintained (Chin, 1998). Third, the internal consistency reliability was determined by assessing the composite reliability (CR) scores, which were found to be over the 0.70 level (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Referring to Table 1 all the values are in accordance with the threshold values recommended by scholars.

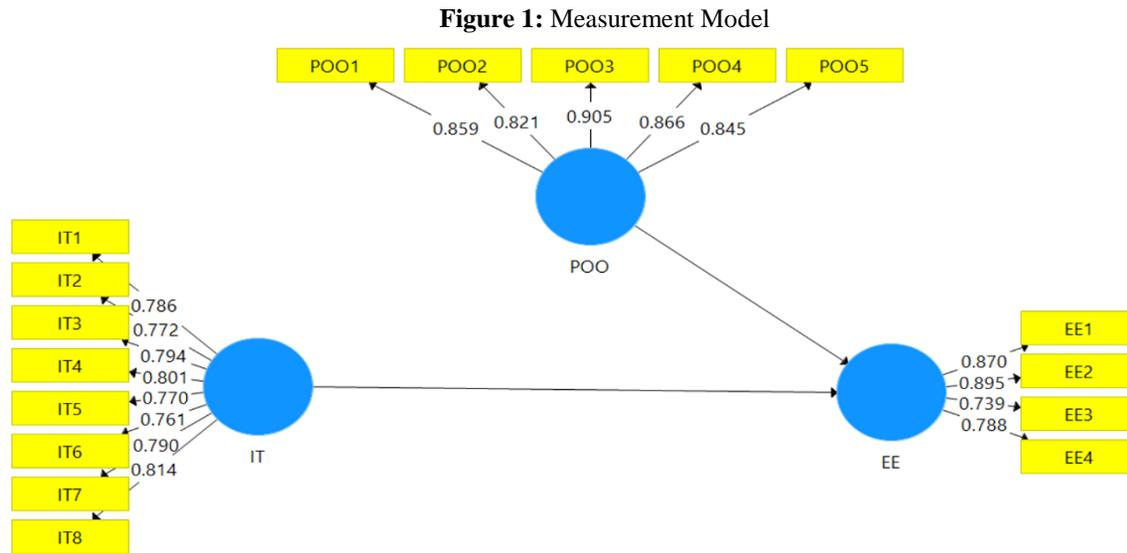


Table 1: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Composite Reliability
IT	IT1	0.786	0.912	0.618	0.928
	IT2	0.772			
	IT3	0.794			
	IT4	0.801			
	IT5	0.770			
	IT6	0.761			
	IT7	0.790			
	IT8	0.814			
EE	EE1	0.870	0.847	0.681	0.895
	EE2	0.895			
	EE3	0.739			
	EE4	0.788			
POO	POO1	0.859	0.912	0.739	0.934
	POO2	0.821			
	POO3	0.905			
	POO4	0.866			
	POO5	0.845			

AVE=Average Variance Extracted AVE>0.50 CR= Composite Reliability CR>0.70 Factor Loading>0.70

IV.II. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

To determine the discriminant validity, two tests employed are Fornell-Larcker (1981) and Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Henseler, 2015). For the Fornell and Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE must be greater than the correlation among variables on the other hand for the HTMT ratio the values must be below 0.90. Referring to Table 2 the square root of AVE is greater than the correlation among variables and HTMT ratios are below 0.90 thus confirming discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
Constructs	1	2	3
EE	0.826		
IT	0.294	0.786	
POO	0.344	0.259	0.859
<i>Note: Bold values represent the square root of AVE.</i>			
HTMT Criterion			
EE			
IT	0.315		
POO	0.367	0.281	

HTMT=Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio n=591

IV.III. EVALUATION OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

The second stage was testing hypotheses and assessing the significance of path coefficients using the guidelines recommended in the PLS-SEM literature. Smart PLS 3 was used to perform a bootstrapping approach on 5000 subsamples (Hair et al., 2011). The H1 posits that IT positively and significantly affect EE. With reference to Table 3 the statistical results supported H1 ($\beta = 0.227$ $t=5.669$ $p=0.000$). The H2 speculates moderating effect of POO between IT and EE such that the relationship is stronger when POO is high. Referring Table 3 the results proved H2 ($\beta = 0.159$ $t=2.437$ $p=0.015$).

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationships	B	Std Error (SE)	t- value	P Value
H1	IT -> EE	0.227	0.040	5.669	0.000
H2	IT X POO -> EE	0.159	0.065	2.437	0.015

IT=Illegitimate Tasks EE=Employee Expediency POO=Perceived Organization Obstruction $p>0.05$ $t>1.96$ n=591

Figure 2: Structural Model

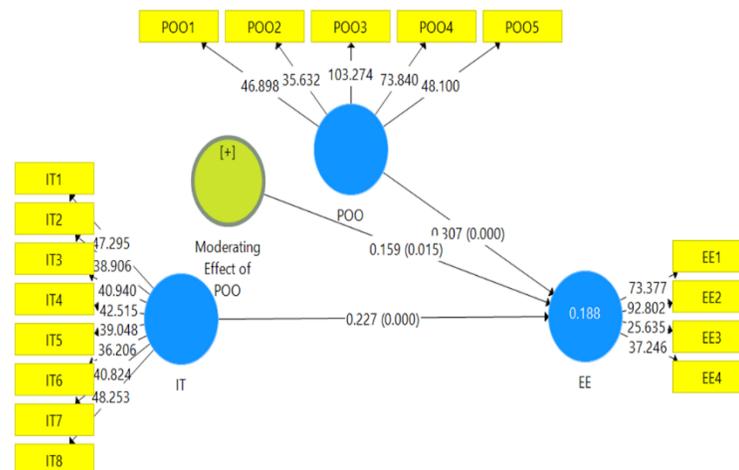
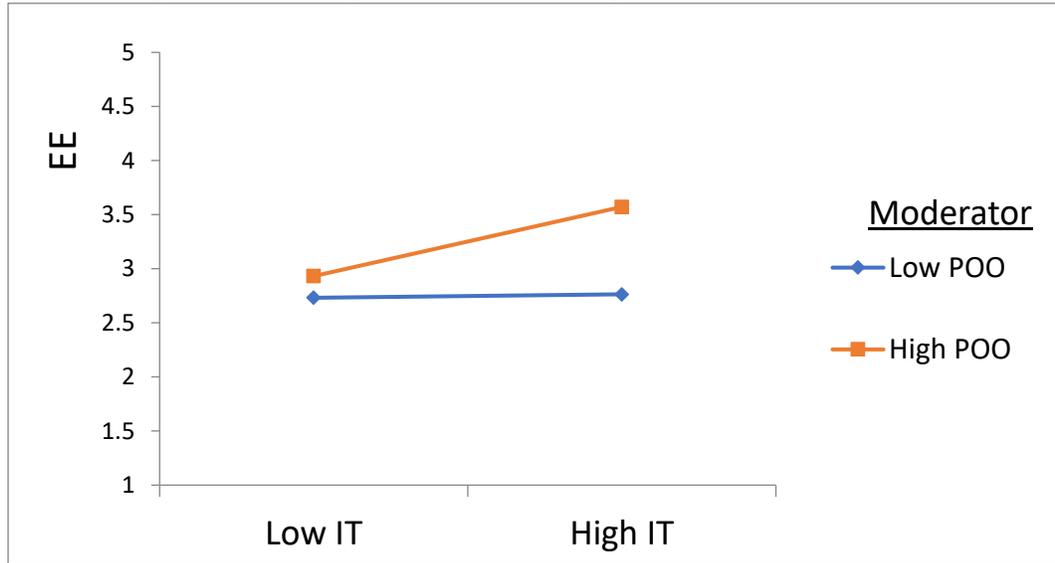


Figure 3: Moderating Effect of Perceived Organization Obstruction



The graph demonstrates that high- POO makes the positive relationship of IT and EE stronger. The coefficient of determination, or R^2 , was used to assess the model's explanatory ability. R^2 was calculated in Smart PLS software using the PLS algorithm, and the result was greater than the recommended threshold of 0.10 (Falk & Miller 1992) refer Table 4. Cohen (1988) devised an effect size (f^2) scale, with 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 denoting small, medium, and large impact sizes, respectively. In addition, a score of less than 0.02 implies that no impact size exists. As demonstrated in Table 4 the f^2 value is 0.059 which implies a small effect size. According to Shmueli et al. (2019), if the latent variable Q^2 is bigger than 0, the route model's predictive relevance for a certain dependent construct is confirmed. With reference to Table 4, Q^2 is 0.117.

Table 4: Goodness of fit

Constructs	R^2	Q^2	Relationship	f^2
IT			IT-> EE	0.059
EE	0.188	0.117		
Moderating effect of POO				0.030

IT=Illegitimate Tasks EE=Employee Expediency

V. DISCUSSION

This study intended to investigate when and why employee exhibits expediency. It is argued in the present study based on the transactional theory of stress that occupational stressors can be a probable cause of EE. For that very reason, IT is examined as a predictor of EE. IT is underlined as a workplace stressor and associated with negative consequences (Omansky et al., 2016; Thun et al., 2018). As hypothesis one it was predicted that IT has a positive and significant effect on EE. The statistical results confirm hypothesis one. Consistent with previous empirical findings IT has consistently been found to be linked with counterproductive work behavior (Semmer et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2018, 2015). EE is a specific form of unethical behavior that is directed towards the organization. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that IT which is a task and role-related stressor tends to trigger EE which is covert unethical behavior. The theoretical assertion and statistical findings support the notion. In addition, the moderating effect of POO is also examined in this study. Hypothesis two posits that POO moderates the relationship between IT and EE such that the positive relationship is stronger when POO is high. The statistical results approve the moderating effect of POO. In line with the recent study where POO was found to be a potential moderator between the supervisor ostracism and façade of conformity (Akhtar et al., 2020). It is theorized based on the TTSC, that it is antagonistic for employees and perceived as threatening when they feel task assignment is illegitimate (not part of their duty obligation) and the company is a source of obstruction. As a result, to deal with it, the employee acts expediently.

VI. CONTRIBUTIONS

To begin with, this research adds to the body of knowledge on hidden unethical behavior by empirically analyzing the origins and effects of expediency, a common workplace manifestation that has received little empirical scrutiny. The current study agrees with earlier studies that an organized and comprehensive inquiry of this phenomenon is required (Greenbaum et al., 2018; Parks et al., 2010). Despite several theoretical claims, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on employee expediency. Secondly, this research adds to the understanding of the potential depth of IT as an occupational stressor influence on employees, as the harm caused may extend beyond psychological effects and manifest in behavioral responses as well. This research was carried out in Pakistan's private health sector. This study will be useful to healthcare practitioners since it identifies the contextual drivers of employee expediency. As a result, it aids in the development of a strong ethical governance framework that prevents expediency from occurring. Because private hospitals are unregulated and unchecked by the government, severe ethical violations occur. This study will assist policymakers in the private healthcare sector in designing and developing ethical rules that will provide ethical standards to healthcare practitioners. To maintain ethical compliance in the private health industry, healthcare practitioners might benefit from awareness and training workshops on ethical behaviors. In addition to private healthcare, this research can assist other sectors organizations. Employees are increasingly expected to go over and above their obligations and duties for organizations to succeed, such as working extended hours or being available on behalf of their organizations, to ensure the well-organized and smooth operation of their businesses in today's cut-throat economy. Furthermore, these businesses demand their staff to put in long hours, respond swiftly, and deliver outcomes on time and within budget. This research gives managers insight into why employees may utilize evasive techniques and when they are most likely to do so. Organizations should also develop successful programs and efforts to help employees deal with challenging work situations. This work makes major methodological contributions in addition to theoretical and practical advances. According to Eissa (2020), expediency research can benefit by accounting for different sources of data collection and temporal separation during data collection. Furthermore, in her research on employee expediency, Eissa (2020) collected data from different sources (triads) and time-lagged it. In the current study, data is collected from two sources: supervisor-subordinates and employed time-lag, to follow in her footsteps and recommendations.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite its significant contributions, this research has some notable limitations. First, the data is gathered from Pakistan's private health industry. Regardless, this industry is one of the most important in any economy and a fantastic research field to look into. However, expediency can exist in any industry, and future research could look into whether it exists in industries such as manufacturing, hotels, telecommunications, information technology, education, or construction. Another weakness of this study was the inability to account for a range of other factors, such as organizational ethical culture, organizational climate, and ethical leadership. Individual differences are not taken into consideration in this study, Individual characteristics such as conscientiousness, locus of control, and the urge for autonomy could be investigated in future studies.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study advances empirical research on employee expediency which has so far been considered an understudied phenomenon. Illegitimate tasks have been identified and examined as a predictor of employee expediency. Moreover, the exacerbating effect of perceived organization obstruction has also been proved in this research. This research takes one step closer to understanding the hitherto unknown phenomena of employee expediency. It is hoped that this study encourages others to pursue this line of research.

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