Impact of Perceived Generational Conflict on Workplace Stress with Moderating Role of Social Support in Educational Institutions: A Case of Twin Cities

Sadia Bukhari
COMSATS University, Islamabad
sadiabukhari@hotmail.com
&
Dr. Muhammadi Sabra Nadeem
COMSATS University, Islamabad
sabra.nadeem@comsats.edu.pk

Abstract

In today's diverse workplace, multiple generations often work side by side that can sometimes lead to perceived conflicts between younger employees particularly Generation Z and their older colleagues. This study explores how these generational conflicts are perceived by Generation Z employees by focusing on their impact on stress levels in the workplace. Additionally, it examines whether social support from peers and supervisors can help to reduce this stress. To analyze these relationships, data was gathered from Generation Z employees working under older generations at various universities in the Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions. The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using the SMART PLS software to test the proposed hypotheses. The results revealed a significant but moderate positive link between perceived generational conflict and increased workplace stress among Generation Z employees. However, the presence of social support was found to play a crucial role in moderating this effect. This research contributes to existing literature by emphasizing the value of social support in easing workplace stress caused by intergenerational conflicts. These findings suggest that fostering a supportive work environment can help organizations to mitigate stress and enhance overall performance for their younger workforce.

***Keywords**:* Perceived generational conflict, Workplace stress, Social support, Generation Z

Introduction

The modern workplace has become a vibrant mix of multiple generations where each bringing their unique values, work ethics, and communication styles to the table. This intergenerational diversity can foster innovation and creativity, but it also presents challenges, particularly when it comes to aligning expectations and work approaches (Abbasi et al., 2024). Generation Z, the youngest cohort to enter the workforce, often finds itself working under the guidance of older generations. This generational gap can create misunderstandings and friction particularly in areas like communication preferences, work styles, feedback mechanisms, and expectations for work-life balance (Agustin et al., 2023). In past, various studies have been conducted to understand the generational conflicts among various generations (Silent Generation, Generation X and Generation Y) (Appelbaum et al., 2022), however, this study is particularly about Generation Z who have distinct characteristics and working values (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) and are working under the older generations. This generation may have perception of generational conflict that may affect their productivity at workplace. These perceived generational conflicts are not merely about differences in age rather they reflect deeper disparities in outlook shaped by the societal contexts in which each generation was raised (Rafiki & Hartijasti, 2022). For Generation Z employees in Pakistan, who are still in the early stages of their professional journey, these conflicts can be a significant source of workplace stress (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). The stress stems from the pressure to adapt the established norms and practices that may not align with their own values or preferred ways of working (Ahmad et al., 2022). As a result, Generation Z employees may experience feelings of frustration, reduced job satisfaction, and even burnout if these conflicts are not effectively managed.

Despite the growing focus on workplace diversity, there is a noticeable gap in research when it comes to understanding the specific generational tensions experienced by Generation Z particularly in the context of developing countries like Pakistan. The existing literature on generational conflict has been conducted in Western settings (Guo et al., 2022), leaving a gap in our understanding of how these dynamics play out in Pakistani organizations especially for Generation Z who are entering to the workplace as entry level manager with distinct characteristics and values. These days, workplace stress is a significant issue for entry-level managers in educational institutions. These managers face various challenges that contribute to heightened stress levels. Stress

can stem from workload, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflicts, and performance pressures. These factors are especially prominent in educational settings, where managing both administrative tasks and interpersonal dynamics is crucial (Abdullah et al., 2023). To get benefit from this generation at workplace, it is important to understand how they perceive the generational conflict and how it can be mitigated to keep them motivated and productive. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how perceived generational conflicts contribute to workplace stress among Generation Z employees and exploring the moderating role of social support. Hence, this research has two distinct objectives: (a). To examine the impact of perceived generational conflict on workplace stress among Generation Z employees in educational institutions in twin cities (Islamabad & Rawalpindi). (b). To investigate the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between generational conflict and workplace stress.

Literature Review

Perceived Generational Conflict

Perceived generational conflict is a concept that captures the tensions, misunderstandings, and friction arising from differences in attitudes, behaviors, and work preferences among employees belonging to different age cohorts (Özan et al., 2024). This conflict often emerges in workplaces where multiple generations interact, influenced by distinct socio-economic contexts, technological advancements, and cultural shifts (Guo et al., 2022). These generational disparities can create challenges in fostering a cohesive and collaborative work environment, particularly in organizations that rely heavily on teamwork and cross-functional collaboration (Sattar et al., 2023). One of the most evident areas of generational conflict is communication style (Grieve, 2020). Generation Z, often described as digital natives, is highly comfortable with instant messaging, social media, and other quick, technology-driven communication methods (Agustin et al., 2023). They tend to favor open, informal, and immediate communication channels, expecting rapid responses and feedback (Bashir et al., 2021). In contrast, older generations such as Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation X are more accustomed to structured and formal communication methods, such as emails or scheduled meetings, which younger employees may perceive as slower and less efficient (Sattar et al., 2023).

These differences in preferred communication styles can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and strained relationships among employees. Generational differences also manifest in decision-making approaches. Generation Z employees generally value inclusivity, transparency, and a participative approach to decision-making (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). They expect their opinions to be heard and thrive in flat organizational structures that promote open dialogue (Bogueva & Marinova, 2022). On the other hand, older generations may prefer a more hierarchical approach, where decision-making authority is concentrated among senior leaders (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). This divergence in decision-making preferences often leads to feelings of exclusion or undervaluation among younger employees, further contributing to perceived generational conflict.

Perceived generational conflict is increasingly prevalent in educational institutions, where multiple generations of employees (including faculty, administrative staff, and managers) must work together in dynamic, team-oriented environments. Educational settings are unique as these settings are often hierarchical but require collaborative decision-making and communication, making generational differences more pronounced (Silva & Carvalho, 2021). Generational conflict can arise from differences in communication styles, and work preferences, all of which can impact institutional culture, teamwork, and overall performance (Gopinath, 2020). The implications of generational conflict are significant for organizational outcomes. Conflict can negatively impact employee engagement, reduce productivity, and increase turnover intentions (Rudolph et al., 2021). Addressing perceived generational conflict through effective communication strategies and fostering an inclusive work environment is critical for improving collaboration and reducing workplace tensions across age cohorts.

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress refers to the mental, emotional, and physical strain caused by job-related demands that exceed an individual's capacity to cope. It is a widespread phenomenon across various sectors, driven by factors such as excessive workloads, unclear job expectations, lack of control over work tasks, and interpersonal conflicts (Ahmad et al., 2022). Stress in the workplace can lead to significant negative outcomes, including burnout, decreased job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and mental health challenges (Abdullah et al., 2023). Organizations that fail to address workplace stress often experience high employee turnover and decreased overall organizational performance (Arora & Mahapatra, 2022). One of the primary causes of workplace stress is role

ambiguity, which occurs when employees are uncertain about their responsibilities or expected performance standards. Employees placed in ambiguous roles often experience anxiety and frustration, which can negatively impact their decision-making abilities and overall job performance (Arnetz et al., 2020). Additionally, workplace stress can be exacerbated by limited resources and organizational changes, especially when employees feel unsupported in adapting to new work demands (Cao et al., 2021). Interpersonal relationships at work also contribute to workplace stress. Conflict with supervisors, colleagues, or subordinates can lead to feelings of exclusion or disrespect, further increasing stress levels. High levels of interpersonal tension in the workplace often result in job dissatisfaction, disengagement, and lower team cohesion (Byun et al., 2022; Estes, Awais, & Sher, 017; Nawaz & Awais, 2018). Similarly, workplace stress can be intensified by inadequate feedback or a lack of recognition for an employee's efforts, leading to feelings of undervaluation and demotivation (Sharma & Tripathi, 2023).

In educational institutions, workplace stress is particularly prevalent due to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the environment. Entry-level managers and educators are often subject to heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and frequent disruptions. They may experience stress due to unclear job expectations, administrative challenges, and the need to manage relationships with faculty, students, and senior management simultaneously (Abdullah et al., 2023). Additionally, rapid policy changes and limited resources can create a stressful work environment for educational employees, leading to burnout and reduced job satisfaction (Chen et al., 2021). High-pressure performance evaluations and administrative demands further compound workplace stress in educational institutions. Workplace stress is a complex issue that affects employee well-being and organizational outcomes across industries (Tan et al., 2020). Organizations that implement stress-reduction strategies are more likely to improve employee engagement and overall performance (Wright et al., 2023).

Social Support

Social support plays a crucial role in the well-being of individuals, particularly in the workplace (Cao et al., 2021). It is broadly defined as the perception or experience of being cared for, valued, and having assistance available from others (Santiago et al., 2023). This support can come from various sources, including colleagues, supervisors, family members, and friends (Xiao et al., 2020). Social support encompasses emotional, informational, and instrumental dimensions, each contributing to reducing stress, improving mental health, and enhancing overall performance (Dhakate et al., 2022).

Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy, care, concern, and encouragement from others (Santiago et al., 2023). It can involve listening to someone's problems, providing reassurance, or simply being present during difficult times. In the workplace, emotional support from colleagues and supervisors fosters a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of isolation. Employees who feel valued are more likely to experience increased morale and motivation (Xiao et al., 2020).

Informational support involves providing advice, guidance, or useful information that helps individuals solve problems or make decisions (Santiago et al., 2023). This type of support is particularly valuable in work settings, where employees may face challenges related to job tasks, career development, and organizational changes (Foy et al., 2019). Access to reliable information from trusted sources alleviates stress by reducing uncertainty and enhancing one's ability to cope with job demands (Dhakate et al., 2022).

Instrumental support, also known as tangible support, involves offering practical help or resources to meet a person's immediate needs (Cao et al., 2021). In the workplace, this might include assistance with workload, providing necessary tools or resources, or offering flexibility in work schedules (Santiago et al., 2023).By reducing the immediate demands placed on an employee, instrumental support enables better management of responsibilities (Xiao et al., 2020).

In educational institutions, social support plays a critical role in mitigating workplace stress and promoting a positive work environment. Entry-level managers, teachers, and staff often benefit from emotional and informational support to navigate complex administrative tasks, classroom challenges, and shifting institutional priorities (Zambrana et al., 2021). Informational support is particularly valuable in addressing curriculum changes, student issues, and policy adjustments, while instrumental support, such as workload sharing and schedule flexibility, helps to reduce burnout. Institutions that foster a supportive culture can enhance employee well-being, increase job satisfaction, and ultimately improve overall educational outcomes (Killgore et al., 2020).

Theoretical Foundation

The Generational Cohort Theory was developed by sociologists Karl Mannheim (1952) serves as a foundation for understanding how different generations develop distinct attitudes, values, and behaviors (Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2016). According to this theory, individuals born during a specific time period are influenced by the major events, societal changes, and technological advancements of their formative years that leads them to form a "cohort identity" that differentiates them from other generations (Egerová et al., 2021). The Generation Z is born approximately between 1997 and 2012, has grown up in a digital age marked by the rise of social media, economic uncertainty, and a globally connected world (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). This digital-native cohort is characterized by their preference for instant communication, flexibility, diversity, and a strong inclination towards work-life balance (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). The Generational Cohort Theory thus provides a theoretical lens through which to examine how these generational differences can lead to perceived conflicts in the workplace.

Linking Theory with Research Model

The Generational Cohort Theory underpins the research model by explaining how the unique experiences and characteristics of Generation Z influence their expectations and behaviors in the workplace. According to the theory, the shared experiences of Generation Z such as growing up in a rapidly changing technological landscape, have shaped their preferences for a flexible, dynamic, and feedback-rich work environment. When these expectations clash with the work styles of older generations who may prioritize structure and hierarchy, it can lead to perceived generational conflict.

Perceived Generational Conflict Leading to Workplace Stress

Perceived generational conflict arises when employees from different generational cohorts experience difficulties in communication, work expectations, and leadership styles (Grieve, 2020). According to Generational Cohort Theory, individuals develop shared values, attitudes, and work preferences based on the socio-economic and cultural events they experience during their formative years. When these generational values clash in the workplace, it can lead to intergenerational tensions, affecting employee well-being and performance (Bashir et al., 2021). Workplace mismatches in leadership, feedback mechanisms, and communication styles have been found to be major contributors to workplace stress (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). Previous Studies suggested that Generation Z employees, who are digital natives and accustomed to instant feedback, open communication, and flexibility, may struggle under the hierarchical, formal, and structured work approaches of older generations (Agustin et al., 2023). These misalignments can create stressors such as role ambiguity, lack of autonomy, and feelings of exclusion (Cao et al., 2021). A study by Byun et al. (2022) found that younger employees experiencing intergenerational conflict reported higher stress levels and lower performance, primarily due to misaligned expectations and a lack of effective communication.

One critical area of conflict between Generation Z employees and older supervisors is the feedback mechanism (Bratu et al., 2023). Generation Z employees prefer frequent, constructive, and digital-based feedback, whereas older generations may adhere to formal, periodic performance reviews (Bogueva & Marinova, 2022). A mismatch in feedback expectations has been linked to higher levels of workplace stress and reduced job engagement (Sharma & Tripathi, 2023). When younger employees perceive that their contributions are undervalued due to delayed or insufficient feedback, they may experience workplace stress, anxiety, and disengagement (Chen et al., 2021). Leadership style also plays a crucial role in generational conflict and workplace stress (Ali et al., 2020). Transactional and hierarchical leadership styles, which are more common among Generation X and Baby Boomer supervisors, may conflict with the participative and collaborative leadership expectations of Generation Z employees. This misalignment can lead to feelings of alienation, increased role conflict, and workplace stress (Guo et al., 2022). Workplace stress is the most relevant variable as it directly captures the strain caused by perceived generational conflict (Chen et al., 2021), unlike broader workplace stressors. Generational differences in work styles, communication, and decision-making create interpersonal tensions that contribute to stress through workload pressure, conflicts, and job insecurity (Dhakate et al., 2022). Focusing on workplace stress ensures a precise analysis of how generational conflict affects employees' well-being and productivity (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022).

Building on the Generational Cohort Theory, this study hypothesizes that perceived generational conflict is a significant predictor of workplace stress for Generation Z employees. The theory suggests that when Generation Z feels that their communication styles, work ethics, or feedback expectations are not aligned with those of their older supervisors, it creates a stressful work environment (Egerová et al., 2021). This conflict can be particularly

stressful for younger employees who are still adapting to the professional world that may lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and disengagement (Rafiki & Hartijasti, 2022). For example, if a Generation Z employee prefers instant feedback but receives infrequent, formal reviews from their older generation supervisor, they may feel undervalued and demotivated. Such mismatches can contribute to elevated levels of workplace stress, as they navigate the challenge of aligning their work styles with the expectations of their supervisors. Hence, the researcher proposed that:

H1*: Perceived generational conflict is positively related to workplace stress among Generation Z employees.*

The Moderating Role of Social Support

Social support plays a critical role in buffering workplace stress, particularly in environments where generational differences create interpersonal tensions (Cao et al., 2021). Santiago et al. (2023) suggested that social support can mitigate the adverse effects of workplace stressors by providing emotional, informational, and instrumental resources that help employees cope more effectively. Generation Cohort Theory also highlights the importance of social contexts in shaping workplace experiences, emphasizing that intergenerational support can facilitate adaptation and stress management. Studies have consistently found that employees with strong social support networks experience lower workplace stress (Chen et al., 2021) and higher performance (Abdullah et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant for Generation Z employees, who are still adapting to professional environments and may struggle with intergenerational communication barriers (Agustin et al., 2023).

Social support can help to mitigate the negative effects of generational conflicts and stress (Santiago et al., 2023). Research indicates that supervisors who acknowledge generational differences and adapt their leadership styles to foster a more inclusive environment, their younger employees feel less stress at workplace (Byun et al., 2022). A collaborative and team-oriented work culture allows employees to exchange experiences, seek advice, and gain reassurance, thereby alleviating workplace stress (Arora & Mahapatra, 2022). Frequent, constructive feedback from supportive mentors can reduce uncertainty, improve job performance, and lower stress levels among younger employees (Bogueva & Marinova, 2022). Xiao et al. (2020) suggested that informational and emotional support directly buffered the effects of workplace stressors, including generational differences in leadership styles.

The model further posits that social support can moderate the relationship between perceived generational conflict and workplace stress. Social support can mitigate the negative effects of stressors by providing employees with resources to cope more effectively (Abbasi et al., 2024). When Generation Z employees receive support from their peers or supervisors, it can help alleviate the stress caused by generational misunderstandings (Santiago et al., 2023). For instance, a supportive supervisor who acknowledges generational differences and provides tailored feedback can create a more inclusive and understanding work environment. Social support can also enhance resilience by making Generation Z employees feel valued and understood, reducing the perceived impact of generational conflicts (Cao et al., 2021). This aligns with the Generational Cohort Theory's emphasis on the influence of social contexts in shaping attitudes and behaviors. A supportive work culture can bridge generational gaps, enabling employees to focus on their strengths rather than the conflicts that arise from their differences. Therefore, the researcher posits that:

H2*: Social support moderates the relationship between perceived generational conflict and workplace stress of Generation Z in such that when social support is high, the workplace stress is low and when social support is low, the workplace stress is high*

Development of Conceptual Model

Perceived generational conflict, rooted in Generational Cohort Theory, arises from differences in attitudes, communication styles, and work preferences across generations (Guo et al., 2022). The Generation Z employees prefer the rapid feedback and open dialogue while older generations gave importance to more formal and hierarchical approaches (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). These differences can lead to misunderstandings, friction, and feelings of exclusion or undervaluation, contributing to heightened workplace stress (Arora & Mahapatra, 2022). This stress may lead to reduced collaboration and productivity (Byun et al., 2022). However, social support; comprising emotional (empathy and encouragement), informational (guidance and advice), and instrumental (practical assistance) dimensions can moderate this relationship (Santiago et al., 2023). Social Support buffer the stress by fostering empathy, clarifying expectations, and easing work demands (Cao et al., 2021). Social support helps mitigate the negative effects of generational conflict on workplace stress, promoting a more inclusive and

cohesive work environment (Xiao et al., 2020).

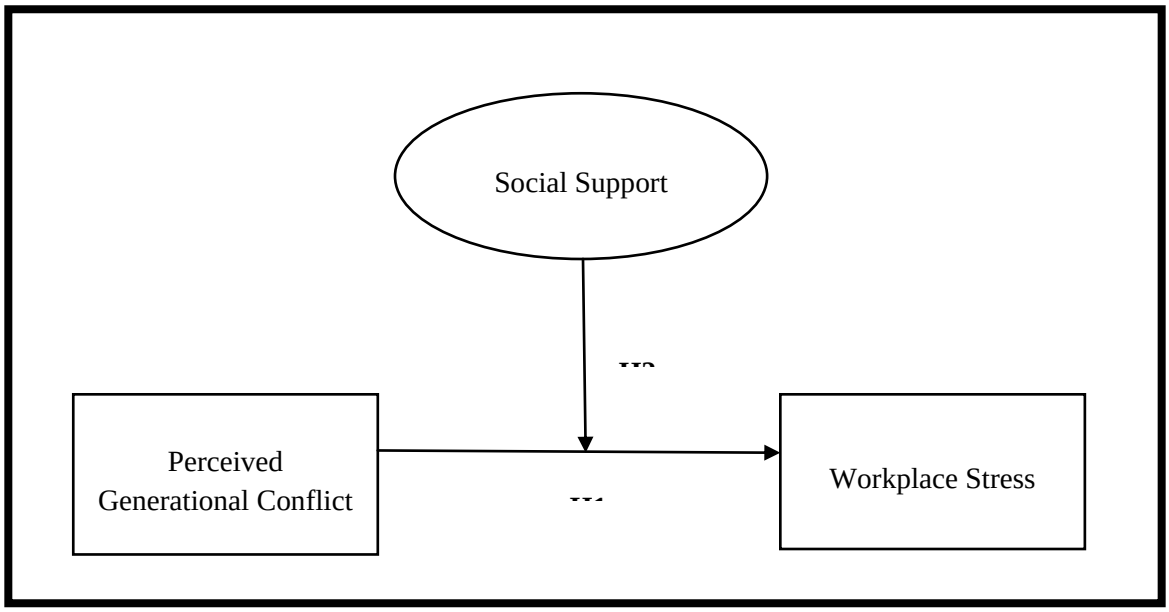

Figure 1: Research Model of the Study

Research Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative approach to examine the perceived generational conflict, workplace stress, and the moderating role of social support among Generation Z employees working in higher education Institutions. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023) reported that according to 7th Population and Housing Census – First Digital Census of Pakistan, Generation Z makes up 52% of the total population of the country. However, for the purpose of this study, the focus was narrowed down to individuals of Generation Z who are employed in universities as entry level manager because these institutions have a clearly defined hierarchical structure. The rationale for choosing this age range is to target those who have recently transitioned into full-time professional roles and are likely to encounter generational dynamics in the workplace. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with the aim of gathering data from universities located in the Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions. To ensure the data was both valid and reliable, the researcher approached the registrar offices of various universities to identify departments with a significant presence of Generation Z employees. This strategic engagement with university administration helped in pinpointing departments and offices where younger employees were more prevalent, thereby increasing the relevance and authenticity of the responses.

According to sample-to-item ratio (Memon et al., 2020), 20:1 ratio was applied to the current study and 340 sample size was selected from universities located in Islamabad and Rawalpindi region. A total of 33 universities, both public and private, were identified as potential data sources for the study. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed to Generation Z employees working as entry-level managers in these institutions. However, only 24 universities provided responses to the survey. Out of the 230 questionnaires distributed, 200 responses were found to be complete and accurate, making them suitable for analysis. The reduced response rate can be attributed to several factors. First, only 24 universities had Generation Z employees working as entry-level managers which limited the eligible participant pool. Additionally, many public sector universities were unable to participate in the research because they had not yet recruited Generation Z employees. These limitations significantly influenced the final sample size and response rate for the study. The overall response rate was approximately 87%, which is considered quite satisfactory for survey-based research. To develop a comprehensive and reliable questionnaire, the researcher adapted several well-established measurement instruments. To confirm the validity of the adapted questionnaire, a model fit analysis was conducted using SMARTPLS. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.06, while the Normal Fit Index (NFI) was 0.107. Both values fell within the acceptable range, indicating the overall validity of the adapted questionnaire. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which assesses convergent validity, the Composite Reliability (CR), which measures the internal consistency of the items, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), which evaluates discriminant validity, were all within the acceptable thresholds. These findings further confirmed the validity of the adapted questionnaire. The scale for measuring perceived generational

conflict was a 5-item scale adapted from the work of Hochwarter and colleagues (Hochwarter et al., 2009). For assessing workplace stress, an 8-item scale was used, originally developed by The Marlin Company in collaboration with the American Institute of Stress (Sharma & Tripathi, 2023). Social support was measured using a 4-item scale adapted from the work of Peeters and his colleagues, which captures the extent of emotional, informational, and practical support employees perceive from their supervisors and colleagues (Santiago et al., 2023). The structured questionnaire included a combination of Likert scale items, where participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This approach was used to quantitatively capture the subjective perceptions of generational conflict, workplace stress, and social support, thus providing a robust framework for subsequent statistical analysis.

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months, allowing sufficient time for follow-ups and reminders to increase response rates. The collected data was then cleaned and checked for any inconsistencies or missing values, ensuring that only complete responses were included in the final dataset. The sample size of 200 was deemed adequate for conducting Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which was the chosen method for analyzing the hypothesized relationships between the variables.

The study involved 200 participants from Pakistani universities, which operate within a hierarchical organizational structure. All participants were members of Generation Z, aged between 23 and 28 years, and included 135 males (67.5%) and 65 females (32.5%), ensuring gender representation. The participants were early-career professionals, with work experience ranging from 1 to 2.5 years. Specifically, 76 participants (38%) had 1 year of experience, 34 (17.5%) had 1.5 years, 85 (42.5%) had 2 years, and 4 (2%) had 2.5 years. This distribution reflects the participants' early stage of professional development, offering valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of Generation Z in the workplace. The information about the type of universities from which data has been collected is given in Table 1:

Table 1: University Type to Collect the Responses

Sr. #	University Type	Number of Universities
1.	Public Sector Universities	14
2.	Private Sector Universities	10
	Total	**24**

In this study, the administrative staff from both public and private universities was surveyed to assess the perceived generational conflict and workplace stress. Despite institutional differences, the nature of administrative work remains fundamentally similar across both sectors which justifies the treatment of their responses as a single group. Administrative staff in both types of universities perform comparable functions, including academic administration, human resource management, finance, budgeting, and facility operations. Further, combining responses leads to an adequate sample size that improves the reliability and generalizability of findings. Since administrative work in public and private universities shares core functions, therefore, researcher treated their responses as a single type.

Results and Analysis

The data were analyzed using SmartPLS, a software widely employed for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This method was chosen for its ability to handle complex models as well as it accommodates small to medium sample sizes and work efficiently with non-normal data distributions. The analysis was conducted in two main stages: the evaluation of the measurement model and the assessment of the structural model. Although SmartPLS is a non-parametric tool that does not require strict assumptions like normality, ensuring data quality is still essential for accurate and reliable results. To achieve this, the researcher carefully checked for missing values and addressed them by excluding incomplete responses. Additionally, potential outliers were identified and evaluated. These steps ensured that the dataset was complete, consistent, and suitable for structural equation modeling, enhancing the robustness and validity of the findings of the study.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

The **measurement model** evaluation focuses on testing the reliability and validity of the constructs. Reliability is assessed through composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency, with acceptable thresholds set at 0.7 or higher. Validity is evaluated in three parts: the loadings of all indicators should exceed the value 0.65 then convergent validity by using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5, and

discriminant validity is assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT (Hetrotrait-Monotrait Ratio) which ensured that constructs were distinct from each other.

The analysis of results demonstrates the reliability and validity of the constructs used in the study. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. Specifically, Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC) has a CR of 0.766. Similarly, Cronbach's alpha values for PGC, WS, and SS further confirm the reliability of the constructs, as they are above the minimum recommended value of 0.7. Convergent validity is assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs exhibit AVE values above the standard threshold of 0.5. This indicates that a substantial portion of the variance in each construct is explained by its indicators.

Table 2: Evaluation of Measurement Model

Constructs	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Perceived Generational Conflict	0.766	0.788	0.546
Workplace Stress	0.744	0.737	0.596
Social Support	0.852	0.761	0.742

Outer loadings are performed in **structural equation modeling (SEM)** to evaluate the relationship between observed indicators (items) and their associated latent constructs (factors). They are part of the **measurement model assessment** and help determine the reliability and validity of the constructs being measured. The results of outer loadings are reported in Table 3 below:

Table 2: Outer Loadings

Constructs	Indicator	Outer Loadings	Remarks
Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC)	PGC_1	0.50	Removed (low loading)
	PGC_2	0.88	Retained (excellent)
	PGC_3	0.65	Retained (as value was >.47)
	PGC_4	0.78	Retained (acceptable)
	PGC_5	0.72	Retained (acceptable)
Workplace Stress (WS)	WS_1	0.60	Retained (as value was >.47) with acceptable AVE)
	WS_2	0.74	Retained (acceptable)
	WS_3	0.86	Retained (excellent)
	WS_4	0.72	Retained (acceptable)
	WS_5	0.77	Retained (acceptable)
	WS_6	0.59	Retained (as value is >.47 with acceptable AVE)
	WS_7	0.81	Retained (acceptable)
	WS_8	0.85	Retained (excellent)
Social Support (SS)	SS_1	0.90	Retained (excellent)
	SS_2	0.81	Retained (acceptable)
	SS_3	0.72	Retained (acceptable)
	SS_4	0.85	Retained (excellent)

The diagonal values in Table 4 below, represent the square root of the AVE, which are higher than the inter-construct correlations, supporting discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. These findings suggest that while generational conflict moderately influences workplace stress, it inversely relates to social support. Additionally, workplace stress and social support appear largely independent in this context.

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

Constructs	PGC	WS	SS
Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC)	0.739	-	-
Workplace Stress (WS)	0.172	0.772	-
Social Support (SS)	-0.127	-0.046	0.862

HTMT is considered a more robust and reliable method for assessing discriminant validity in PLS-SEM compared

to the Fornell-Larcker method. HTMT calculates the ratio of correlations between items across constructs (heterotrait correlations) to correlations between items within the same construct (monotrait correlations). Its acceptable threshold is <0.85. The results of HTMT Ratio indicates that discriminant validity is established among the constructs and same is represented in Table 5:

Table 5: HTMT Ratio

Constructs	PGC	WS	SS
Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC)	-	0.62	0.31
Workplace Stress (WS)	0.62	-	0.15
Social Support (SS)	0.31	0.15	-

Assessment of Structural Model

The **structural model** evaluation involved examining path coefficients to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs. The assessment of structural model is represented in Table 6:

Table 6: Assessment of Structural Model

Predictor	R	R^2	P	B	T
PCG:WS (Dependent Variable)	0.03	0.025	0.011	0.068	2.549
Interaction Effect (PCG*SS)	-	-	0.852	0.081	0.187

N= 200; PGC= Perceived Generational Conflict; WS= Workplace Stress; SS= Social Support

The structural model results provide insights into the impact of **Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC)** on **Workplace Stress (WS)** and the moderating role of **Social Support (SS).** The analysis revealed that PGC has a **small but statistically significant effect** on WS, with an R^2 value of 0.025 that indicates that PGC accounts for only 2.5% of the variance in WS. These findings suggested that PGC contributes to workplace stress, the effect is relatively weak compared to other potential factors influencing stress levels. The path coefficient (B = 0.068) further confirms that as perceived generational conflict increases, workplace stress also rises but slightly. This relationship is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.011 and a T-value of 2.549, exceeding the critical threshold for significance.

However, the results do not support the hypothesized moderating role of social support in this relationship. The interaction effect (PGC × SS) yields a high p-value (0.852), indicating no statistical significance. Although the path coefficient for the interaction term is 0.081, it is not meaningful in this context due to the lack of significance. This indicates that while social support is often considered a buffer against workplace stress, it does not appear to influence how perceived generational conflict impacts workplace stress in this sample.

Overall, the findings suggested that while generational conflict slightly contributes to stress at work, social support does not play a moderating role in mitigating this relationship. This highlights the need for further exploration of other factors that might buffer or intensify the effects of generational conflict on workplace stress.

Discussion

The findings of this study offered important implications, both theoretical and practical, for understanding the dynamics of Perceived Generational Conflict (PGC) of Generation Z about older generations and its relationship with Workplace Stress (WS), as well as the moderating role of Social Support (SS). By integrating these constructs into a structural model, the study provided novel insights into generational dynamics in workplace settings.

The findings of the study advance the understanding of the role of Perceived Generational Conflict as a stressor in organizational settings. Although PGC was found to have a statistically significant impact on WS, the relatively small effect size (R^2 = 0.025) highlights the nuanced nature of this relationship and suggested that PGC alone is not a dominant predictor of stress among the employees of Generation Z. This finding extends existing theories on workplace stress by emphasizing generational conflict as a contributing factor. Second, the study adds to the literature on social support by revealing its limited moderating role in mitigating workplace stress caused by generational conflict among the employees of Generation Z. While prior research often highlighted the buffering effects of social support in stressful contexts. This study showed that its effectiveness may depend on the type or source of the stressor. The buffering role of social support was not proven in the current study, which may be

attributed to several factors. Social support typically consists of three types: instrumental, emotional, and informational support (Cao et al., 2021). However, in the case of Generation Z employees, these support mechanisms may not have effectively mitigated the stress caused by generational conflict. Firstly, instrumental support, which includes assistance with tasks and resources, may not have addressed the emotional strain experienced by Generation Z employees due to generational differences. While task-related help can improve efficiency, it does not necessarily alleviate workplace tensions stemming from communication gaps, differing work ethics, or leadership styles (Santiago et al., 2023). Secondly, emotional support, such as encouragement from peers, may have provided temporary relief but failed to resolve the fundamental workplace challenges that contribute to stress. While reassurance and empathy are valuable, they do not change the structural and cultural barriers that cause generational conflict (Grieve, 2020). Thirdly, informational support, which includes feedback and guidance, may not have been effective for Generation Z employees. This generation thrives in participatory and collaborative environments, yet traditional hierarchical structures may have limited the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms (Bashir et al., 2021). If feedback was infrequent, formal, or top-down, it likely did not meet the expectations of Generation Z employees, who prefer instant and constructive engagement.

Additionally, social support in the workplace is a two-way process (Xiao et al., 2020), where Generation Z both receives and provides support to older generations. However, if this intergenerational exchange is weak particularly in hierarchical organizations (Guo et al., 2022), then the buffering role of social support is compromised. In the current study, data was collected from organizations with rigid hierarchical structures, where Generation Z employees may not have received the level of support they expected. The lack of open communication, participatory decision-making, and mutual exchange may have further diminished the moderating effect of social support on workplace stress. This theoretical nuance calls for further research to explore the contextual and situational factors influencing the role of social support in intergenerational workplace settings.

The findings emphasized the importance of addressing generational conflict in the workplace to minimize stress and improve well-being of Generation Z employees to tackle the increased turnover rate in the organizations. While the direct impact of PGC on WS was relatively small, the statistical significance of this relationship suggested that organizations cannot ignore the friction arising from intergenerational differences among the employees of Generation Z and older generations. To address this, organizations can implement targeted conflict resolution strategies, such as generational awareness training, cross-generational mentoring programs, and open communication channels that foster understanding and reduce misunderstandings among different age groups (Zhang & Wiebe, 2022). Moreover, the study highlighted that Social Support alone may not be sufficient to alleviate stress of Generation Z employees stemming from generational conflict (Cao et al., 2021). This suggested that organizations need to tailor support mechanisms to the specific challenges employees face by ensuring that the quality and relevance of support should be aligned with their stressors. Practical interventions could include customized wellness programs, team-building activities, and the promotion of a culture of mutual respect and collaboration (Liu et al., 2021).

The findings highlight critical implications for policymakers and organizational leaders in managing workplace stress stemming from perceived generational conflict among Generation Z employees. Policies fostering inclusive leadership and adaptive management styles are essential to reduce workplace stress by addressing generational differences effectively (Rudolph et al., 2021). Leaders should prioritize creating supportive work environments that value diverse perspectives, implement flexible work arrangements, and develop tailored feedback mechanisms to meet the specific needs of Generation Z. These strategies can help alleviate stress, improve performance, and enhance overall workplace harmony (Ali et al., 2020).

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of workplace dynamics by exploring the relationship between generational conflict and workplace stress, with social support examined as a potential moderator. Theoretically, the study extends the application of Generational Cohort Theory by highlighting how generational differences in communication styles, work expectations, and decision-making can contribute to workplace stress. While the results confirm a moderate relationship between perceived generational conflict and workplace stress that also indicate that social support does not significantly moderate this relationship. These finding challenges existing assumptions about the buffering role of social support in mitigating stress, suggesting that its effectiveness may vary depending on the nature or intensity of workplace conflicts. Secondly, the Generation Z is quite different from older generations. The social support, they are receiving at their workplace is not directly matching to their characteristics. These findings highlight the gaps in existing body of knowledge that

Generation Z employees' expectations at workplace are different from its older generations. Practically, the results underscore the need for organizations to proactively address generational differences through training, open dialogue, and tailored conflict-resolution strategies, rather than relying solely on social support systems. These insights can help educational institutions and other organizations design more targeted interventions to promote employee well-being and collaboration across generational divides.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it also has some limitations. First, the sample size of study was 200 respondents of Generation Z. Although this sample size is sufficient for basic structural equation modeling but limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. A larger sample size across diverse organizational contexts and industries could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how perceived generational conflict of Generation Z employees about older generations affects workplace stress. Additionally, the data was collected from a single geographical region, which may not fully capture the organizational, or industry-specific variations that influence the studied relationships. Future research could address this limitation by including a more diverse and representative sample to enhance the external validity of the findings. Second, the study was cross-sectional in design that restricted the evaluation of long-term effectiveness of social support as a moderating factor. Generational conflict and its effects on stress may evolve over time due to changes in organizational dynamics, leadership styles, or employee experiences. A longitudinal research design would enable a deeper exploration of the temporal aspects of these relationships that may offer a more dynamic perspective on how social support mechanisms and generational conflict interact over time.

Conclusion

In summary, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on workplace stress by integrating the unique construct of perceived generational conflict of Generation Z. The study helps to understand the impact of perceived generational conflict on workplace stress and also determines the role of social support in moderating the relationship between perceived generational conflict and workplace stress. To conduct this study, the data was collected from higher educational institutions located in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The participants were the entry level manager from Generation Z. The data was collected through questionnaire and the quantitative analysis of data was performed by using the SmartPLS tool. The results indicate that although generational conflict is a small but significant contributor to workplace stress among Generation Z employees. The findings challenge the assumption that social support universally buffers its impact. Practically, these insights call for a proactive and context-specific approach to managing generational differences in organizations. Future research should explore alternative moderators such as emotional intelligence and organizational culture. Moreover, expanding the research to include different industries and generational cohorts could offer deeper insights into variations in stress management across diverse workplace settings.

References

Abbasi, M. A., Amran, A., Khan, R., & Sahar, N. E. (2024). Linking corporate social irresponsibility to workplace deviant behavior: A comparative analysis of generation Z and Generation Y. *Current Psychology*, *43*(2), 1118–1135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04372-z

Abdullah, A. M., Neamah, N. R., Kadhim, A. J., Hasan, A. A., Hassan, A. Y., Sabit, S. H., & Hrejha, N. I. (2023). *The effect of teacher self-efficacy, workplace stress, workplace environment, and teacher engagement to improve the teacher's job satisfaction: A study on public and private sector universities of Iraq*.

Agustin, N., Garcia, R. C., Espino, B. C. R., & Rayos, R. A. U. (2023). Generational Diversity at Government Workforce: An Assessment towards Job Involvement and Organizational Commitment. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases*, *33*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.33.1.10

Ahmad, I., Gul, R., & Kashif, M. (2022). A Qualitative Study of Workplace Factors Causing Stress Among University Teachers and Coping Strategies: A Qualitative Study of Workplace Factors. *Human Arenas*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-022-00302-w

Ali, M., Usman, M., Pham, N. T., Agyemang-Mintah, P., & Akhtar, N. (2020). Being ignored at work: Understanding how and when spiritual leadership curbs workplace ostracism in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *91*, 102696. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102696

Appelbaum, S. H., Bhardwaj, A., Goodyear, M., Gong, T., Sudha, A. B., & Wei, P. (2022). A Study of Generational Conflicts in the Workplace. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, *7*(2),

7–15. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2022.7.2.1311

Arnetz, J. E., Goetz, C. M., Arnetz, B. B., & Arble, E. (2020). Nurse Reports of Stressful Situations during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Qualitative Analysis of Survey Responses. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(21), 8126. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218126

Arora, S., & Mahapatra, D. M. (2022). *Virtual Reality as a Solution for Workplace Stress*.

Barhate, B., & Dirani, K. M. (2022). Career aspirations of generation Z: A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Training and Development*, *46*(1/2), 139–157. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-07-2020-0124

Bashir, F., Rehman, H.-, Ashraf, M., & Naveed, T. (2021). Determinants of Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty in Pakistan: A Case Study. *Review of Economics and Development Studies*, *7*(1), 91–99. https://doi.org/10.47067/reads.v7i1.324

Bogueva, D., & Marinova, D. (2022). Australian Generation Z and the Nexus between Climate Change and Alternative Proteins. *Animals*, *12*(19), 2512. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12192512

Bratu, M. L., Cioca, L.-I., Nerisanu, R. A., Rotaru, M., & Plesa, R. (2023). The expectations of generation Z regarding the university educational act in Romania: Optimizing the didactic process by providing feedback. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1160046. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1160046

Buskirk-Cohen, A. A., Duncan, T. A., & Levicoff, M. (2016). Using generational theory to rethink teaching in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(1), 25–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1110787

Byun, K., Aristizabal, S., Wu, Y., Mullan, A. F., Carlin, J. D., West, C. P., & Mazurek, K. A. (2022). Investigating How Auditory and Visual Stimuli Promote Recovery After Stress with Potential Applications for Workplace Stress and Burnout: Protocol for a Randomized Trial. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 897241. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.897241

Cao, C., Zhu, C., & Meng, Q. (2021). Chinese International Students' Coping Strategies, Social Support Resources in Response to Academic Stressors: Does Heritage Culture or Host Context Matter? *Current Psychology*, *40*(1), 242–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9929-0

Chen, H.-M., Liu, C.-C., Yang, S.-Y., Wang, Y.-R., & Hsieh, P.-L. (2021). Factors Related to Care Competence, Workplace Stress, and Intention to Stay among Novice Nurses during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(4), 2122. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042122

Dhakate, M. A., Domple, V. K., Joge, U. S., Khakse, G. M., & Hiwarkar, P. A. (2022). Assessment of job stress among non-teaching staff: A cross-sectional study at teaching hospital, Central India. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Health*, *12*(1), 29–34. https://doi.org/10.3126/ijosh.v12i1.41036

Egerová, D., Komárková, L., & Kutlák, J. (2021). Generation Y and Generation Z Employment Expectations: A Generational Cohort Comparative Study from Two Countries. *E+M Ekonomie a Management*, *24*(3), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.15240/tul/001/2021-03-006

Estes, J., Awais, M., & Sher, A. (2017). Prevalence And Dimensions of Sexual Harassment of The Female Workforce in the Public Sector Organizations of Pakistan. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics*, *11*(2).

Foy, T., Dwyer, R. J., Nafarrete, R., Hammoud, M. S. S., & Rockett, P. (2019). Managing job performance, social support and work-life conflict to reduce workplace stress. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *68*(6), 1018–1041. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-03-2017-0061

Gopinath, D. R. (2020). Influence of Job Satisfaction and Job Involvement of Academicians with special reference to Tamil Nadu Universities. *International Journal of Research*, *24*(03).

Grieve, A. (2020). Actual Versus Perceived Generational Differences within the Contemporary Workforce. *A Dissertation Submitted to the National College of Ireland*

Guo, M., Lemke, A., & Dong, X. (2022). Sources of Intergenerational Conflict in Chinese Immigrant Families in the United States. *Journal of Family Issues*, *43*(9), 2275–2294. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211030724

Hochwarter, W. A., Rogers, L. M., Summers, J. K., Meurs, J. A., Perrewé, P. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2009). Personal control antidotes to the strain consequences of generational conflict as a stressor: A two-study constructive replication and extension. *Career Development International*, *14*(5), 465–486. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430910989852

Killgore, W. D. S., Taylor, E. C., Cloonan, S. A., & Dailey, N. S. (2020). Psychological resilience during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Psychiatry Research*, *291*, 113216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113216

Liu, Y., Bellibaş, M. Ş., & Gümüş, S. (2021). The Effect of Instructional Leadership and Distributed Leadership

on Teacher Self-efficacy and Job Satisfaction: Mediating Roles of Supportive School Culture and Teacher Collaboration. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *49*(3), 430–453. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220910438

Memon, M. A., Ting, H., & Cheah, J. H. (2020). Sample size for Survey Research*: Review and Recommendations*. *4*(2), i–xx.

Nawaz, K., & Awais, M. (2018). Family Work Conflict and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Banking Sector in Pakistan. *Foundation University Journal of Business & Economics*, *3*(1), 29-41.

Özan, M., Gayretli, Ş., Arpınar, M. S., & Ali, I. N. M. (2024). A Scale Development Study on the Perceived Level of Workplace Generational Conflict. *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental*, *18*(4), e07695. https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n4-180

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Pakistan insight*. Government of Pakistan. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/material/pakistan_insight.pdf

Rafiki, M., & Hartijasti, Y. (2022). *Generational Differences in Dimensions of Work Values of Indonesian Permanent Employees:* 7th Sriwijaya Economics, Accounting, and Business Conference (SEABC 2021), Palembang, Indonesia. https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.220304.039

Rudolph, C. W., Rauvola, R. S., Costanza, D. P., & Zacher, H. (2021). Generations and Generational Differences: Debunking Myths in Organizational Science and Practice and Paving New Paths Forward. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *36*(6), 945–967. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09715-2

Santiago, P. H. R., Smithers, L. G., Roberts, R., & Jamieson, L. (2023). Psychometric properties of the Social Support Scale (SSS) in two Aboriginal samples. *PLOS ONE*, *18*(1), e0279954. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279954

Sattar, T., Imdadullah, M., Bashir, F., & Arshad, F. (2023). Underlying Causes of Intergenerational Conflict between Parent-Child Age Bands in Multan City, Pakistan: A Comparative Study. *Review of Applied Management and Social Sciences*, *6*(1), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.47067/ramss.v6i1.303

Sharma, A., & Tripathi, D. K. M. (2023). *Job Satisfaction and Workplace Stress among Employees working in Organisations*.

Silva, J., & Carvalho, A. (2021). The Work Values of Portuguese Generation Z in the Higher Education-to-Work Transition Phase. *Soc. Sci.*

Tan, W., Hao, F., McIntyre, R. S., Jiang, L., Jiang, X., Zhang, L., Zhao, X., Zou, Y., Hu, Y., Luo, X., Zhang, Z., Lai, A., Ho, R., Tran, B., Ho, C., & Tam, W. (2020). Is returning to work during the COVID-19 pandemic stressful? A study on immediate mental health status and psychoneuroimmunity prevention measures of Chinese workforce. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, *87*, 84–92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.055

Wright, S. A., Walker, L. F., & Hall, E. E. (2023). Effects of workplace stress, perceived stress, and burnout on collegiate coach mental health outcomes. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, *5*, 974267. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2023.974267

Xiao, H., Zhang, Y., Kong, D., Li, S., & Yang, N. (2020). The Effects of Social Support on Sleep Quality of Medical Staff Treating Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in January and February 2020 in China. *Medical Science Monitor*, *26*. https://doi.org/10.12659/MSM.923549

Zambrana, R. E., Valdez, R. B., Pittman, C. T., Bartko, T., Weber, L., & Parra-Medina, D. (2021). Workplace stress and discrimination effects on the physical and depressive symptoms of underrepresented minority faculty. *Stress and Health*, *37*(1), 175–185. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2983

Zhang, Y. B., & Wiebe, W. T. (2022). Intergenerational Conflict-Initiating Factors and Management Styles: U.S. Older Adults' Report. *Societies*, *12*(6), 160. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12060160

Appendix

List of Universities (for Data Collection)	
Public Sector	**Private Sector**
Air University, Islamabad	Abasyn University, Islamabad
Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad	CUST, Islamabad
Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi	CASE, Islamabad
Bahria University, Islamabad	Foundation University, Islamabad
HAS, Islamabad	Ibadat University, Islamabad

International Islamic University, Islamabad	Iqra University, Islamabad
National Skills University, Islamabad	MY University, Islamabad
NDU, Islamabad	Preston University, Islamabad
NUML, Islamabad	Riphah International University, Islamabad
NUMS, Rawalpindi	Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, Islamabad
NUTECH, Islamabad	
NUST, Islamabad	
Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi	
Rawalpindi Medical University, Rawalpindi	