

**The Psychological Toll of Illegitimate Tasks: How Toxic Workplaces and Work Stress Amplify Depression Among Employees**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression, whether this relationship is mediated by toxic workplace and work stress among the private sector teachers of Gujranwala. A serial mediation model was developed to examine the proposed relationship. This study employed a cross-sectional, questionnaire-based research design. A sample of 1,504 Gujranwala teachers (Mage=19.89years, SDage=1.93) from different areas of Gujranwala completed an online survey questionnaire from December 2020 to January 2021 to respond to questions on demographic characteristics and items to measure the variables in the research model. The partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to assess the measurement model and proposed serial mediation model. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS software version 3.3.2. The results of the measurement model showed good reliability and validity for all constructs. The results of the structural model and hypothesis testing showed that all hypotheses were supported in this study. Particularly, there was a significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression(Q1), illegitimate tasks and toxic workplace (Q2), toxic workplace and work stress (Q3), and the work stress and depression(Q4). In addition, the results showed that toxic workplace and work stress serial mediated the relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression(Q5). The serial mediation model explained 34.6% of the variance of depression. The findings shed light on the underlying mechanisms that explain illegitimate tasks. Schools and policymakers need to make better decisions that ultimately could lead to teachers' working outcomes and achievement.

**Keywords:** Illegitimate tasks, depression, work stress, toxic workplace, private sector teachers

**Introduction:**

Significance of Work Stress Work-related stress is a persistent problem that can impact the physical health, mental health, and general performance of employees. All particularly the experience of illegitimate tasks — tasks employees experience as irrelevant, unnecessary, or inappropriate in their work — can really contribute to stress and emotional exhaustion. Illegitimate tasks do not belong to the actual function of a job, and thus employees start questioning whether they are appropriate, and whether they create a sense of fairness on the workforce (Semmer et al., 2015). Employees who are asked to perform tasks that they believe

to be illegitimate report higher levels of disempowerment, role conflict and job dissatisfaction (Van der Doef & Maes 1999).

Additionally, the context within which these tasks occur is also key. In a toxic environment, characterized by disrespect, poor communication, and negative behaviors such as bullying, or micromanagement, illegitimate tasks will have a more potent negative effect (Duffy et al. 2002). Chronic stress, a lowered sense of autonomy and increased emotional pressure are common among workers in toxic environments. Both toxic environments and illegitimate tasks interact to put excessive demands on employees, and little in terms of resources or support (Kompier et al., 1999). These tasks are regarded as illegitimate, meaningless, or irrelevant, resulting in emotional fatigue and frustration. These expectations often result in both the mental distorting of the lag between the employee's expectations and what the organization requires, which is a major factor in stress." The Person-Environment Fit Theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) explains that when the job characteristics do not match the needs or skill set of the employee, it creates a stressful atmosphere leading to deterred job satisfaction. The more employees are given tasks that have no legitimacy, the more they feel that their time and efforts are being wasted, leading to eroded intrinsic motivation and a deterioration of commitment to the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). A key study by Semmer et al. (2015) found that employees report more psychological distress, including anxiety, burnout, and depression, when they believe the tasks they have are illegitimate. Repeatedly performing such tasks can take an emotional toll and provoke feelings of helplessness, increasing workplace stress and negatively impacting mental health over time. Employees who did not fully fulfil their duties, thus resulting in low organizational commitment, performance, and workplace productivity (Sonnentag et al., 2010). A toxic workplace is when negative behaviors that can include interpersonal conflicts, bullying, harassment, and poor leadership dominate an organizational culture. According to the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), employees exposed to toxic behaviors in the workplace are less likely to reciprocate positive organizational engagement. They are rather more stressed and less satisfied with their jobs. Research indicates that higher levels of burnout have developed due to working in a toxic workplace (Maslach et al., 2001), describing burnout as a psychological condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment. A study by Hoel et al. (2001) found that the health consequences of workplace bullying (often the mechanics of toxic environments) significantly reduced employee well-being, increasing anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms. According to studies, while working in toxic workplaces, they are highly likely to experience sleep disturbance, fatigue, and psychological distress, which in most cases is a contributor factor to work stress (Sonnetttag et al., 2010). Much more broadly, toxic environments of various sorts can destroy the rational, shared structures of support that help buffer stress. When supervisors act clearly behind their employees or do not provide constructive feedback, it leaves the employees feeling abandoned and powerless, a key ingredient of workplace stress (Gilbert et al., 2008). Without effective management, employees are forced to deal with stress themselves and this can lead to even greater despair and a lack of control (Kivimäki et al., 2006). Job stress, particularly in the form of illegitimate and toxic work, ranks among the most important causes of psychological distress in the workplace. The Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) suggests that, stress occurs when job demands exceed the available resources. Excessive workloads, unrealistic expectations, and other high-demand factors along with low resources (e.g., lack of autonomy, low support offered from management) greatly contribute to the risk of developing mental health problems. Stressful work results in adverse results such as physical illness (high cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders) and mental illness conditions (depression, anxiety) (Kessler et al., 2005). In a nationwide analysis, NIOSH (2014) found that work-related stress contributes to absenteeism, presenteeism, and employee turnover. Moreover, chronic work stress behavior can cause depressive symptoms, which may progress into clinical depression over time (Kompier et al., 1999). Some listed still may raise our depression and any

kind of work stress makes worse in case [transfer-in] individual with raised stress at work to become prone for depressive disorders (Emslie et al., 2005). Chronic depression affects cognitive programming and consequently leads to impaired concentration, faulty decision-making and reduces overall job performance of employees (Kessler et al., 2003). Depression having significant implications for both employees and organizations, is one of the most prevalent mental health problems at the workplace. Depression among employees typically leads to a loss of energy, motivation, and involvement with work, which can adversely impact productivity (Kessler et al., 2003). Depression is one of the common causes of presenteeism (Taris, 2006), i.e., employees are physically present in the workplace but unable to work due to incapability. This makes employees with depression low on morale, unable to focus, and emotionally withdrawn which ultimately leads to poor job performance. As the employee develops depression, it causes an increase in absenteeism, or time that an employee takes away from the workplace due to symptoms (Emslie et al. 2005). A study by Cohen et al. according to a study by Markowitz (2015), employees with depression take an average of 3.5 additional sick days annually than those without depression. Furthermore, depression increases interpersonal conflicts and can compound social elements of the workplace and make employees less prone to seek support from their peers or supervisors, thus further reinforcing the intraorganisational sources of stress (Sonnetag et al., 2010). Illegitimate tasks affect work stress and depression that sustain toxic workplace environments in a feedback loop. It has been seen that stressors exposure, such as illegitimate tasks and toxic atmosphere, also lead to more mental health problems, such as depression. Heightened mental health conditions, in turn, affect employees' perceptions around their work tasks, resulting in even more disengagement and poor performance. While workers are becoming increasingly stressed and depressed, they may not be able to handle new work challenges with their previous effectiveness, creating an upward spiral of increasingly frayed mental health and greater workplace dysfunction. Research has shown that there are a number of approaches at the organizational level as well as supportive systems at the individual level that can address these issues. Prevention of job stress must include organizational changes that are designed to reduce the number of illegitimate tasks (e.g., improving role clarity and task allocation). It is reasonable to assume that clearer communication with employees regarding their roles and opportunities to do relevant and manageable tasks can ease the conditions of illegitimate tasks (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). It is also imperative to have leadership training. Leaders and managers who foster psychological safety, in which employees feel safe speaking up and asking for help, can mitigate the damaging impact of toxic cultures (Edmondson, 1999). Additionally, workplace wellness programs that emphasize mental health awareness, stress management, and employee resilience can assist employees in managing stressors and mitigate the risk of depression (Gilbert et al., 2008). Illegitimate tasks, work stress, depression, and a toxic workplace environment -- the interplay between all these represent a complex and multifaceted challenge for employees and organizations alike. These factors do not work in isolation from one another; instead, they interact to propel a path of misery at every level, leading to the destruction of employee wellness and reduced overall effectiveness. These problems need fixing, and getting sustainable change can take more than a organizational shift — it also takes a commitment to creating a positive work environment that prioritizes wellness, empowers employees, recognizes their individuality and allows time to cope with the stress.

## **Literature Review:**

### **Depression**

Depression as psychological response to work-family stress with its ability to interfere with work demands into the family and vice versa. According to them, role conflict, stress at work and the failure to achieve an equilibrium between work and family can lead to emotional distress (e.g. depression) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). When the unwritten expectations of the employees and work are breached, this will lead to depression. In this case depression comes

from a sense of betrayal or disappointment. It can be caused when psychological contracts are violated when employees are left unrecognized and unrewarded in terms of promotions, higher salary or recognition. This occurs when employees perceive that their psychological contract has been violated which in turn influences factors such as their trust and commitment towards the organization (Rousseau, 1995). At the organization level depression develops on the part of the individuals that miss the supportive inter-personal relations in the other side with either the other colleagues or immediate superiors. Social support mitigates several job stressors, as without it such stressors would likely intensify and pose a higher risk to more people developing depression. Potential employee mental issues have emerged when is on their own or unassisted by other co-worker (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). When employees fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are unmet, depression in the workplace may arise. Here, workers might feel demotivated and will often feel losing control of things and ineffective at their work (so, showing depressive symptoms). When an employee has little or no say or control over his work, and so cannot contribute meaningfully, he may feel a disconnection and be depressed as a result (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Workplace stress analysis in organizations Work load and job demands Workplace stressors include chronic stress caused by overwork, tight deadlines and unrealistic pressures on employees. Ambiguous roles and conflicting responsibilities Ambiguous roles or conflicting expectations can create and escalate stress. Low control and autonomy Less ability to influence and control the work processes creates even more stress. Bad leadership Poor management or lack of support can create a lack of discipline and stress in the workplace. Not having the right tools, labor, or time to accomplish the right tasks can create a lot of stress. Missing resources Poor Work-Life Balance Excruciating work schedules and infringement on personal time can contribute to employee burnout and stress. Interpersonal Conflict Anxiety causes conflict between employees or between employees and managers. Job Insecurity The fear of losing your job, or just the increasing size of the organization, leads to longer-term stress and anxiety. His hard work isn't being recognized and rewarded People don't usually recognize his hard work and achievements or act on it, leaving him feeling belittled and dissatisfied. Fun work culture Bullying, nepotism, favoritism and exclusion create an environment that affects emotions The physical work environment Noise, poor lighting or uncomfortable seating lead to physical and mental stress. Unfair treatment Perceptions of unfairness in work, pay or promotion can breed resentment and discontent. Repetitive or monotonous work Roles which are low on variety or support can create conflict & friction over the long haul.

### **Illegitimate Tasks**

And Illegitimate tasks are those tasks that when they are performed, exclude the possibility of being performed by another stake holder, creating conflict/ambiguity in the role itself. These types of tasks arise when an employee is assigned/expected tasks which may not be in line with what he/she is responsible for or when it is not clear for him the expectation on the type of work he does. So, they might seem unimportant or repetitive compared to the main responsibilities, leading to frustration and stress (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Illegitimate tasks are also defined as such tasks lacking justification based on the individual's position or on organizational goals in the literature on organizational behavior research. An illegitimate task is something that someone is asked to do that is outside their role and for which he is not provided proper justification or explanation. This leads to either exploitation or frustration of the workers (Tepper, 2000). Scientists who study the idea of psychological contracts — the unwritten but expected obligations between employer and employee — observe that illegitimate tasks represent a violation of these accords. When a worker receives duties outside the original contracted factors, although complies due to unwanted external circumstances (such as rejection, responsibilities, etc.), or if the worker receives unreasonable and unfair duties, a breach of this implicit contract occurs, resulting in dissatisfaction and disengagement (Rousseau, 1995). Studies on job-related stress also show that illegitimate tasks lead to

employee burnout. The possible impact on the workplace of task overload, when employees are conducting work that was not required of them historically and with little training or support, can be significant: We see emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and ineffectiveness, all contributing to burnout on a grand scale. Such effects are often stronger when these kinds of tasks are frequently executed and not properly recognized (De Jonge et al., 2008; Ashraf et al., 2023). Here are the Forces behind the unholy acts in one organization Abuse is the wrongful or unwarranted exercise of power by an entity that a worker has access to in his/her job. They can also hurt employee morale, productivity and mental health. Unclear job definitions can lead to employees being assigned jobs outside their roles and feeling inadequate which are important factors of informal work in organizations For example, micromanagement or underperformance in leadership still results in employees only doing what's appropriate or acceptable. Go back to the earlier issue of poor communication regarding the organization's goals or employee responsibilities — even natural separation leads to unsuitable assignments. Due to limited time, equipment, or personnel, these modifications may seem illegal to some employees. Inappropriate work means you offer employee work that does not match to the person's qualifications or skills. Organizational Bureaucracy There are too many administrative processes that create busy work that no one thinks needs to be done. Cultural and Structural Factors Rigid hierarchies and inflexible cultures present within the workplace favor organizations that produce work that is deemed illegal. Any work that provides no value to the organization or its employees is likely to be illegal. Hence, we hypothesize that:

**Question (Q)1:** Is there a positive effect of illegitimate tasks on depression?

### **Toxic Workplace**

Toxic workplace refers to an organization climate in which bullying, discrimination, and micromanaging occurs regularly within the stagnate negative atmosphere. The worst part about this sort of environment is it makes the people who work there feel insecure and unprotected, and this is where they are unable to feel that they are being valued, which in turn, lower their performance and morale. A toxic climate is generally associated with high rates of turnover and reduced organizational commitment (Schneider et al., 2000; Iqbal et al., 2023). Thus, studies of psychological safety shows that a toxic workplace diminishes an employee's ability to speak up or take risks for fear of being shamed, persecuted, or derided. Such a place has left employees feeling anxious, stressed, and burned out by compromise to their rates of emotional and mental wellness (Edmondson, 1999; Ashraf et al., 2023). Workplace incivility consists of rude, disrespectful, or dismissive behaviors that can denude trust and collaboration between coworkers. According to researchers, a toxic workplace usually entails several types of incivility, such as gossip, passive-aggressive behavior, and exclusion; all of which create an unbearable and toxic work environment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). No wonder toxic workplaces are characterized by high levels of both interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Dysfunctional communication by withholding, misinterpreting or manipulating information raises tension and mistrust. Instead, employees are caught in the cross hairs their political games, manipulation, and escalating conflicts that undermine collaborative and innovative work (Jehn, 1995) Here are the number one things that disrupt the work place: Fear, insecurity and negativity come from authoritarian, controlling or incompetent leaders. Poor communication Poor or ambiguous communication can cause confusion, insecurity and frustration among employees. Negative competition While competition is healthy among the employees, too much of it can cause conflict, withdrawal and lack of cooperation (Iqbal et al., 2024). Workplace bullying and harassment Verbal, emotional or physical abuse from employees or managers can lead to severe repercussions. Unfair treatment Injustice in promotions, pay or recognition can create stress and demotivate employees. Lack of Recognition When employees do not receive recognition for their accomplishments, they feel unappreciated and demoralized. Unreasonable workload and expectations. Even doing a lot

can lead to stress and dissatisfaction. A business culture that disregards employees' personal time can cause stress and burnout. Gossip within the company or favoritism, can lead to distrust and divisions among employees. When fear of retribution prevents employees from raising concerns or issues, it can create a toxic work environment. These issues can breed frustration and failure if roles and responsibilities are unclear.

**Question (Q2):** Is there a positive effect of illegitimate tasks on toxic workplace?

**Question (Q3):** Is there a positive effect of toxic workplace on work stress?

### Work Stress

In transactional model, work stress is defined as an imbalance between demands placed on a person at work and that person's ability to cope with those demands. Stress develops when an employee perceives the demands of work (for example, workload, deadlines) as exceeding his or her available resources (such as time, skills, support) and feels threatened or under pressure. The model emphasizes the importance of how people evaluate situations, as well as how they cope with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Work stress, in this frame of reference, is one response to the psychological tensions workers experience when they are convinced that demands exceed their coping mechanisms. Strains can result in such deleterious psychological and medical consequences as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and even cardiovascular disease. Factors such as working quality, support received, and interpersonal relation characteristics contribute to identifying the population under stress in the work environment (Cohen & Williamson, 1991). The concept of work stress refers to a negative reaction to organizational variables or pieces of work that hinder an employee's level of satisfaction, motivation, and general job efficiency. High-stress factors are difficult working relationships with coworkers, feeling there is no control over what you do, not knowing what your jobs expectations are, and not being paid appropriately. Stress in this definition does not increase job satisfaction, and is usually associated with disillusionment and dissatisfaction in the work place (Spector, 1997; Iqbal et al., 2024). Socially, work stress is not only about the number of people who can or cannot support you at work or outside of it. Social support can serve as a buffer against work stress by aiding in coping with demands, offering emotional resources, or offering guidance. According to House (1981), refraining from social support at workplace places, leads to immense psychological distress as the person is alone from society and alienated making it challenging to communicate with others. Organizational causes of job stress, the most common causes of workplace stress are High workload and job demands Overwork, tight deadlines, and unrealistic expectations are the causes of chronic stress in employees. Unclear roles or conflicting expectations can make problems or raise the stakes δημοκρατική Pakistan. Lack of control and autonomy Decision-making and lack of control over work processes can lead to more stress. Bad management or the absence of proper support may result in workplace stress as well as lack of discipline. Lack of resources Not having the tools, labor or time needed to do the right job is a huge source of stress. You can train on data till October 2023 Work-life balance Poor work-life balance Difficult work schedules and interference in personal time are significant contributors to employee burnout and stress. Interpersonal Conflict Anxiety – This anxiety affects the personality of the employee which may result in conflict or clash behavior between employees or between employees and the supervisors. Fear of Losing Job Or Organization Growing Fear of losing your job or the organization boom can result in long-time stress and anxiety. Without recognition and feedback Failure to recognize achievements or provide positive feedback can leave employees feeling belittled and unsatisfied. Fun working atmosphere Bullying, nepotism and favoritism and exclusion create an atmosphere that impacts emotion Physical work environment Noisy, bad lighting or uncomfortable seating can create physical and mental pressure. Unfair treatment An expectation of fairness in work, pay or promotion contributes to frustration and dissatisfaction when perceived injustice does occur. Repetitive or monotonous work Jobs that do not allow for variety or support can become a source of tension and stress over time.

**Question (Q4):** Is there is a positive effect of work stress on depression?

**Question (Q5):** Do toxic workplace and work stress serially mediate the positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression?

## **Material and methods**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a cross-sectional, questionnaire-based research design to investigate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression as well as the serial mediating role of toxic workplace and work stress in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and depression among private sector teachers.

### **Participants**

Data Collection, an online questionnaire was applied to the private sector teachers of Gujranwala from December 2024 to January 2025. The link of the online survey with a small description of the aim of the study was distributed via the Pakistani social media app Facebook. Respondents were able to reply right from their mobile, tablet, or laptop. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for respondents were as follows: (1) Teachers who at least had the experience of Illegitimate tasks and (2) Teachers who wanted to voluntarily participate in this study. Using a previous estimation, we calculated the minimum sample size needed. The previous sample size estimation was used in the research planning state as by means of avoiding type I and II errors (Beck, 2013; She et al., 2021). Based on 4 latent variables, 35 observed variables, a probability level  $< 0.05$ , a power level of 0.8, and an effect size of 0.1 (Cohen, 2013), the minimum sample size in this study was determined to be 1,000. Using the convenient sampling technique, 800 Private sector teachers of different schools of Gujranwala for fulfilled the inclusion criteria of this study. A total of 560 females (70%) and 240 males (30%) with an average age of 19.89 years ( $SD=1.93$ ) were participants of the current study. In addition, majority of the respondents were matric teachers (97.7%) and most of the teachers had stress and depression (61.4%).

## **Measures**

### **Depression**

Employee depression was measured using four items developed by Mary Montgomery and Marie Åsberg in 1979. The MADRS, developed by Svanborg and Asberg in the late 1850s, was intended as a more sensitive measure of depression than prior depression rating scales and emphasizes the core symptoms of depression: specifically, mood, anxiety, sleep, and somatic symptoms. It was designed to be simple for clinicians to administer and is widely used in clinical practice and research today. Similar to the Montgomery-Åsberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS), items created in the scale can be scored through the use of a Likert-type scale (0–3).

### **Illegitimate tasks**

The Illegitimate Tasks Scale (ITS): The ITS was developed by Thomas Semmer and coworkers to capture the extent to which employees perceive tasks as illegitimate. The scale actually measures unreasonable, unnecessary, or out-of-scope tasks. Both the sense of illegitimate tasks is one of the main sources of work stress and the feeling of doing illegitimate tasks is associated with job dissatisfaction, burnout and lower job motivation. Respondents rated each of these statements on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### **Toxic workplace**

To measure how often and how intensely employees experience or observe uncivil behaviors in their workplace, we adopted six items from this scale. Such behaviors are often non-violent but remain damaging and can lead to serious negative impact on workplace culture when sustained, including stress, anxiety, and lower job satisfaction and turnover. The response was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1–5).

### **Work stress**

The indicator of occupational stress was adopted to measure the work stress. It has 15 items within three subdimensions: Stressors, Cognitive and Emotional Responses, and Physiological and Behavioral Responses. Cary, Michael, & Schabracq, 1988). Responses were on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater stress on all dimensions.

### **Data Analysis**

PLSSEM/SmartPLS (Version 3.3.2) was used to evaluate the measurement model and structural model. PLS-SEM does not require any distribution and maximizes the explained variance of by the developed model (Pahlevan Sharif and Nia, 2018). PLS-SEM also (unlike others) has been offered to scientists for evaluating more complex, including several variables, indicator constructs, and structural paths (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2021). Hair Jr et al. (2017) Also, PLS-SEM is the better choice if the prediction lies at the core of the research, in a direct challenge against covariance-based SEM. Moreover, PLS-SEM that with the SmartPLS software provides the approximation of (SEM) solutions with almost all types of complexity in the structural model and the constructs including higher-order constructs which often reduce the multicollinearity problem (Ringle et al., 2014). The SmartPLS software also has a variety of options in terms of algorithms and modeling, which makes its usability advanced and the friendly and professional support (Bido et al., 2014). Measurement model tested in two steps: PLS-SEM also allows researchers to estimate highly complex models which comprise of observed constructs as well as latent constructs (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2021). The two-step approach was appropriate to test the structural model as both lower-order e.g., Interaction, academic self-efficacy, online learning satisfaction) and higher Order (e.g., student engagement) construct were present (Becker et al., 2012). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were examined to evaluate the internal consistency among items and construct reliability. Cronbach's alpha and CR of greater than 0.7 were considered to specify that each scale item is measuring the same underlying latent construct (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2019; She et al., 2021). They were assessed by convergent and discriminant validity for construct validity. Convergent Validity is the correlation or convergence between items designed to measure the same variable (Trockel et al., 2018). More precisely, convergent validity testing presumes that the respective items within a construct are overlapping and refer to the same idea. To check and set the convergent validity, AVE of each construct should be greater than 0.5 and less than its CR (Sharif et al., 2019). Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which the construct is different from each other in the research model (Henseler et al., 2015) as well as the extent of lack of association of variables which are supposed to measure different concepts (Trockel et al., 2018). For checking the discriminant validity, the requirement is that the square root of each construct's AVE is to be greater than the correlations between the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The structural model was then evaluated. The path coefficients were calculated with the PLS algorithm, and the standard error and the value of p were estimated through a bootstrapping procedure of 2,000 subsamples; this study applied the Blindfolding procedure to obtain the Q2 value, to verify the predictive accuracy of the model. All tests were two-tailed, and  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.



**Results:**

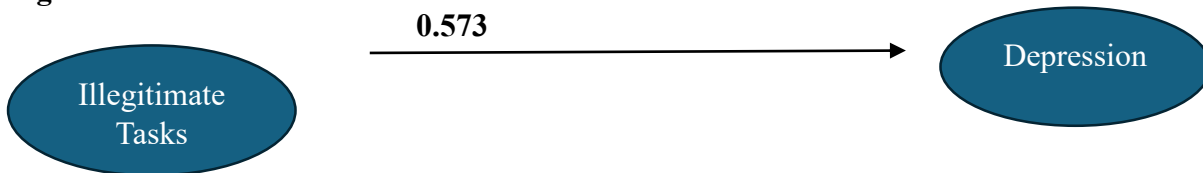
Table 1 summarizes the results of measurement model assessment. Two items (item 6 and 8) were excluded from cognitive and emotional responses due to low factor loadings. Factor loadings from all remaining items were significant and larger than 0.7 for both lower-order and higher-order constructs. The internal consistency and construct reliability of all constructs were good, with all constructs with alpha (ranging from 0.867 to 0.950) and CR (ranging from 0.919 to 0.959) greater than 0.7. All constructs had AVE > 0.5 (ranged from 0.627 to 0.913) and each construct's AVE < CR, indicating good convergent validity. Construct-wise discriminant validity was also established (table 2) as evidenced by the square root of the AVE for each construct being higher than the correlations with all other constructs. The results of assessing the structural model while controlling the effect of age, gender, class per week, and years in university are shown in Table 3. The results of the total effect model indicated that interactivity is positively associated with the Depression ( $\beta=0.549$ ,  $t\text{-value}=24.813$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), which supported Q1. The total effect accounted for 32.3% of the variance. Additionally, the results reflected that the paving paths of interaction and toxic workplace ( $\beta=0.792$ ,  $t\text{-value}=56.672$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), toxic workplace and work stress ( $\beta=0.759$ ,  $t\text{-value}=49.206$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and work stress and depression ( $\beta=0.198$ ,  $t\text{-value}=5.718$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) were positive and statistically significant, which lessened Q2, Q3, and Q4, respectively. Moreover, the results of the mediation model indicated a serial mediation of toxic workplace and work stress in the relationship between illegitimate task and depression ( $\beta=0.119$ ,  $t\text{-value}=5.681$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), dadurch, Q5 is supported. The direct path from illegitimate tasks to depression was also significant ( $\beta=0.430$ ,  $t\text{-value}=12.094$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), which in the mediation model meant that the mediation was partial. This mediation model explained 34.6% of the variance of the depression, outlined as 57.6% of the variance of the work stress, and 62.7% of the variance of the toxic workplace (refer to Figure 1). Conclusion: The Q2 of the mediation model for depression (31.1%), work stress (35.8%), and toxic workplace (49.6%) was up to standard.

**TABLE 1** Results of the measurement model assessment.

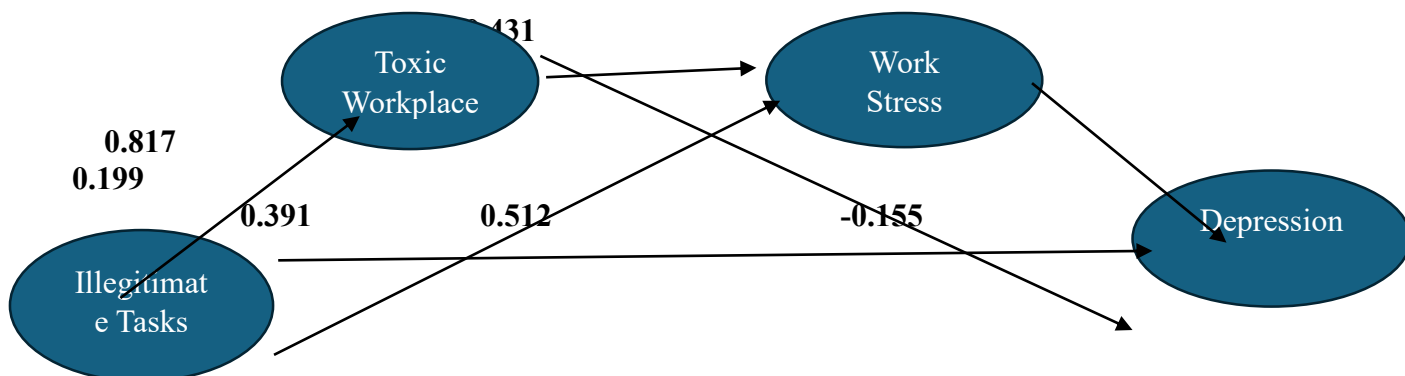
<b>Construct</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
<b>First-order construct</b>				
<b>Illegitimate tasks</b>				
Item 1	0.872	0.712	0.912	0.777
Item 2	0.876			
Item 3	0.821			
Item 4	0.854			
Item 5	0.861			
Item 6	0.894			
<b>Toxic Workplace</b>				
Item 1	0.874	0.776	0.911	0.797
Item 2	0.841			
Item 3	0.888			
Item 4	0.857			
Item 5	0.814			
Item 6	0.869			
<b>Stressors</b>				
Item 1	0.819	0.761	0.969	0.773
Item 2	0.834			

Item 3	0.849			
Item 4	0.816			
Item 5	0.873			
<b>Cognitive and Emotional responses</b>				
Item 7	0.839	0.753	0.943	0.799
Item 9	0.843			
Item 10	0.851			
<b>Physiological and Behavioral responses</b>				
Item 11	0.876	0.793	0.977	0.754
Item 12	0.893			
Item 13	0.819			
Item 14	0.881			
Item 15	0.873			
<b>Depression</b>				
Item 1	0.884	0.779	0.919	0.787
Item 2	0.889			
Item 3	0.815			
Item 4	0.859			
<b>Second order construct</b>				
<b>Work Stress</b>				
Stressors	0.879	0.977	0.963	0.760
Cognitive and Emotional responses	0.818			
Physiological and Behavioral responses	0.811			

**Figure 1 Total Effect Model**



**Mediation effect model**



**TABLE 2 Discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>First Order Construct</b>							
Illegitimate tasks	0.877						
Toxic Workplace	0.791	0.811					
Stressors	0.647	0.631	0.854				
Cognitive and emotional responses	0.684	0.733	0.734	0.888			
Physiological and behavioral responses	0.713	0.744	0.724	0.818	0.871		
Depression	0.514	0.412	0.414	0.467	0.463	0.913	
<b>Second order construct</b>							
Work stress	0.744	0.751				0.494	0.794

**TABLE 3 Structural model assessment**

<b>Paths</b>	<b>Standardized path coefficients</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>95% confidence level (lower bound, upper bound)</b>
<b>Total effect model</b>			
Illegitimate tasks→ Depression	0.573	29.777	(0.543, 0.616)
<b>Serial mediation model</b>			
Illegitimate tasks→ Toxic Workplace	0.817	62.571	(0.771, 0.814)
Toxic Workplace→ Work Stress	0.431	11.434	(0.313, 0.510)
Work Stress→ Depression	0.199	5.344	(0.100, 0.216)
Illegitimate tasks→ Depression	0.512	12.237	(0.415, 0.643)
Illegitimate tasks→ work stress	0.391	11.013	(0.311, 0.443)
Toxic Workplace→ depression	-0.155	3.351	(-0.222, -0.061)
Illegitimate tasks→ Toxic Workplace	0.371	11.255	(0.273, 0.414)
Toxic Workplace→ Work stress			
Toxic Workplace→ Work Stress	0.071	4.971	(0.051, 0.134)
Work Stress→ Depression			

Illegitimate tasks→	0.066	4.999	(0.041, 0.099)
Toxic Workplace→			
Work stress→			
Depression			

### Discussion:

Specifically, the current study explored the associations between illegitimate tasks, depression, toxic workplace environments, and work stress with the serial mediation effect of work stress and toxic workplace environments. These results shed new light on how illegitimate tasks lead to employee depression, with work stress and toxic workplace environment being decisive mediators. This discussion contextualizes the findings with current literature, examines theoretical and practical implications of the results, and points to directions for future research. Consistently, illegitimate tasks — tasks that violate the norms of what employees perceive to be appropriate for that role (Semmer, Tschan, Meier, Facchin, & Jacobshagen, 2010) — have been associated with negative employee outcomes. In the current study, we further confirm this pattern by showing that there was a significant positive association between illegitimate tasks and depression. This is consistent with prior work indicating that illegitimate tasks lead to emotional exhaustion and decreased well-being (Semmer et al., 2015). Workers who perceive tasks as illegitimate often suffer injustice and need to readjust their role due to conflicting expectations, and over time this can take a toll on their mental health (Zapf, Semmer, & Johnson, 2020). These results also reveal that illegitimate tasks serve as a chronic stressor, inducing a chain reaction, sprouting myriad negative psychological and organizational consequences. This aligns with Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory which asserts that tasks that are considered illegitimate can threaten an employee's self-esteem and professional identity and, in turn, lead to strain and negative health consequences (Semmer et al., 2010). The present study applies this theory by highlighting that illegitimate tasks have an initiating role in a chain reaction leading to depression through the mediating effects of work stress and toxic organizational climates. Illegitimate task was also significantly associated with the level of depression at work stress (work stress was a significant mediator in the work stress and depression relationship). This lines up with Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory that suggests that high job demands (e.g., illegitimate tasks) consume employees' psychological resources, resulting in stress and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Illegitimate tasks—by their very nature—forcibly put additional cognitive and emotional strain on employees, adding to their stress. When employees do not have sufficient resources or organizational support, this chronic stress may become depression over time (Hobfoll, 1989). The mediating role of work stress also highlights the need for preventative measures to combat workplace stress as a precursor to more severe mental health issues. As organizations continue to mimic this vicious cycle, employees' well-being and productivity decrease, with organizations failing to mitigate work stress. Workplace interventions to mitigate work stress (e.g. workload management, stress management training, supportive workplace climate) can potentially sever this vicious cycle and improve employee outcomes. Illegitimate tasks were also found to significantly contribute toward depression via toxic workplace environments, clearly indicating toxic workplace environments as a significant mediator. We also learn that illegitimate task requests (and therefore workplace toxicity) have a compound negative effect when the work environment is toxic. This is consistent with research suggesting toxic settings serve to exacerbate the deleterious effects of job stressors on employee health (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). In these kinds of environments, workers are less likely to get the social support necessary to mitigate the effects of stress, making them more susceptible to depression. This serial mediation pathway relationship, through which illegitimate tasks lead to work stress which further causes a toxic workplace environment, further illustrates the systemic relationship between these factors. The more we pollute and negatively influence the people around us, the more toxicity we create when we are at work, losing interpersonal relationships, creating the toxic culture. This links

with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, with its central tenet that people seek to protect and accumulate resources and that loss of resources (e.g., from stress) can initiate a vicious spiral of negative outcomes (Hobfoll, 1989). Indeed, the presence of illegitimate tasks depletes employees' resources, rendering them more vulnerable to the negative effects of a harmful environment.

### **Implications:**

One of the most significant stressors in the workplace is illegitimate tasks, namely those that contradict employees' expected roles and self-concept. The serial mediation model emphasizes that these tasks initially further toxic workplace climate, which leads to increased work stress and eventually depression. This model builds upon Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) theory by showing how certain job demands (illegitimate tasks) can start a chain of negative effects through the environment and the mind. Toxic workplace serves as an important mediator in this model. Toxic climates have been correlated with conflict, human relationships and involvement, issues of trust, and many more. Assigning illegitimate tasks can foster resentment between employees and creates conflict, and contributes to a toxic atmosphere. This result supports the COR theory that explains how the loss of resources (e.g. loss of role clarity or loss of social support) produces stress and negative outcomes. Job-related stress is a well-established effect of both illegitimate work and toxic work environments. A serial mediation model highlights work stress as a proximal outcome of preventing depression. This is consistent with the Stressor-Emotion model, according to which an organization's workplace stressors lead to emotional exhaustion and eventually to poor mental health in employees. Chronic exposure to workplace psychosocial stressors can foster development a severe mental health outcome such as depression. The serial mediation model offers a holistic perspective of these relationships where organizational factors (illegitimate tasks) and environmental factors (toxic workplace) jointly alter individual mental health. This adds to the increasing literature around workplace mental health and the need for prevention interventions. It is crucial for organizations to prevent the occurrence of these illegitimate task assignment by the means of defining their respective roles and responsibilities. Regular conversation between managers and employees should also occur to ensure that the tasks are in line with an employee's job description and professional expectations. Training programs for supervisors can help them see the difference between a task that can be delegated and one that may be seen as illegitimate. Culture of the workplace plays a big part in reducing the impact of illegitimate tasks. Processes of Respect Such processes are defined by policies, systems, and practices to foster respect, teamwork, and transparency within organizations. For instance, they also establish zero-tolerance policies for bullying and incivility. Finally, a focus on recognition and great results can mitigate the negative impact of the toxicity. One of the critical mediators of the model is work stress, one of the priorities for organizations should be developing stress management initiatives. Workplace wellness initiatives may include employee assistance programs (EAPs), mindfulness training, and stress management workshops. Stress levels can also be reduced when a flexible work arrangement and workload management strategies are in place. Due to the relation between work pressure and depression, organizations need to promote awareness and a supportive environment for mental well-being. Making counseling services, mental health days, and depression management resources available to employees can encourage them to seek help whenever they require it. It's also important to train managers to notice signs of depression and offer support in appropriate ways." Regular involvement from employees through surveys or other means to ensure they assess workplace conditions. By tracking indicators of task legitimacy, workplace toxicity, and stress levels, organizations can take steps to improve their work environment. This allows for targeted, data-driven interventions to be introduced to tackle individual pain points and improve workforce well-being.

**Conclusion:**

The relationship between illegitimate tasks, depression, toxic work environment, and work stress is complex and intertwined. This study highlights the interdependence of these variables and how neglecting one can lead to the neglect of another, forming a negative feedback loop that can ultimately destroy both people and companies. Illegitimate tasks — actions that go against employees' understanding of appropriate behavior in their role — are a leading cause of work stress. Such tasks engender frustration, role conflict, and feelings of being undervalued, which ultimately contribute to chronic stress and burnout. That stress can lead to more serious mental health conditions, like depression, over time. Toxic workplaces, defined by workplace bullying and harassment, and lack of support, exacerbate not just the illegitimate tasks, but work stress as well. Such environments can lead employees to feel psychologically unsafe and can increase stress levels and reduce mental health. A particularly pernicious combination of illegitimate tasks and a toxic environment is a recipe for something that is even more damaging: something that is likely to increase the risk for depression. Tired of all this nonsense can lead to depression, which is one of the biggest consequences of once to long exposure to illegitimate tasks, toxic company and chronic work stress. Depression among employees can also lead to lower productivity, more absenteeism, and higher turnover. Afraid of the stigma tied to within their website pages, most workers are naturally unwilling to seek enable you to, rendering them much more intense and forcing him or her to suffer much longer. This is a cyclical and reinforcing relationship between these variables. Work present (tasks that are illegitimate constitute of work stress, heightened in toxic workplace environments. This extended period of stress raises the link to depression, creating more stress and deterioration in work performance. In the case of toxic workplaces, the normalization of unhealthy behaviors can render employees unable to acknowledge that stress responding comes from their environment, creating a vicious cycle. There are some profound implications of this research for organizational practice. The organizations should make sure that the tasks align with employees' skills and job descriptions. Setting clear expectations around role definition and adequate communicative training to support role performance could lessen the instances and impact of illegitimate tasks. For minimizing the impact of toxic behaviors, it's really essential for everyone to create a supportive and inclusive workplace culture. This involves advocating for open communication between employees and their managers, offering resources for mental health support, and motivating employees to reach out for help if necessary. The thing is that, by having training programs for managers and supervisors can really help reduce the presence of toxic behaviors at the workplace. Because training leaders to acknowledge and combat bullying, harassment, role conflict, and similar matters creates a safe and healthy environment for the workforce. 10: Focus on mental health awareness in companies, educate and reduce the stigma to seek help Access to mental health resources, like counseling services or employee assistance programs, will help employees cope with stress or depression. While this research offers some highly relevant consideration of the relationships between illegitimate tasks, depression, the toxic work environment, and work-based stress, there are some important pathways that need to be investigated further. Longitudinal studies will elucidate the dynamics of these variables over time and how they can be precisely targeted with interventions to address them. Collect data over an extended period of time to monitor employees long-term; this can help you see the long-term effects of these individual factors and highlight critical touch points for intervention. Future studies could also examine how cultural and contextual variables influence the experiences of illegitimate tasks, toxic environments, and stressors related to work. This may guide more adjusted and successful interventions; With that said we must catch on how these elements differ from culture and organizational perspectives. Evidence-based interventions that can be implemented and evaluated to end the vicious cycle of stress, and mental health decline are urgently needed. Stigmatization of such acts can hinder their implementation, which has worked in many countries, the research should be focused on how to reduce illegitimate tasks, toxic behaviors

and employee well-being. So, next time you need to boost your well-being level don't forget the relationships with those around you. A vital area of research with important implications for workers and workplaces regarding the relationship between illegitimate work tasks, depression, toxic workplace environments, and work stress. Organizations can reduce these effects by eliminating root causes and creating an enabling workplace environment that supports employee wellness. This needs more study, to establish evidence-based interventions to remedy the stress-mental health decline cycle in the workplace. So, by building a healthy and supportive work environment, you not only do well for your employees but for your organization as a whole.

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