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Effect of Sustainable HRM Practices on Job Performance: Mediating Role of Employee Retention

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the mediating role of employee retention in the relationship between employee empowerment, high-performance work systems, and job performance in the health sector. A cross-sectional study design was used, and data was collected from the health sector operating in South Punjab, Pakistan. Statistical random sampling method was employed, to a sample of 550 employees the questionnaires was randomly distributed for data collection through a self-administered plan. SPSS software was used and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was employed for testing of research hypotheses. Current study based its investigation into theory of performance. The findings showed that the relationship between employee empowerment and job performance was insignificant, but the relationship between high-performance work systems and job performance was significant. Additionally, employee retention has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between High Performance Work System, and job performance. The results provide insight for the government, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand the impact of various sustainable human resource management practices on job performance.

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Introduction

The concept of sustainability has been a key focus in management for many years. The relationship between sustainability and human resource management has been receiving attention and sustainable HRM has developed strategies to identify the benefits of adopting sustainable practices compared to traditional HRM. Sustainable HRM aims to align human resources practices with the company's economic, human, and environmental goals, with a long-term perspective, while taking into account unintended consequences and potential criticisms. "Sustainability" means lasting and extensive, and "sustainable development" is development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ehnert, 2006; The World Environment and Development Board, 1987).

The impact of human resource activities on employee job performance in an organization is a complex issue with multiple factors to consider. The sustainable management of human capital is a modern and advanced concept that seeks to link sustainability and HRM. (Faiza Manzoor, 2019). In any organization, employees are a crucial asset as they can either enhance or harm the reputation of the organization and have a direct impact on the organization's profitability (Imran, 2013). Employee performance is determined by several factors such as abilities, job-related knowledge, skills, job experience, and temperament (Vroom, 1964). Organizations must pay attention to factors that can improve employee performance, as it is a crucial element for success (Abbas, 2009).

Employee empowerment and High-Performance Work System (HPWS) have been linked to improved employee satisfaction and performance, leading to increased employee retention. According to Awamleh (2013), empowerment leads to job performance, and HPWS inspires employees to contribute to organizational goals. The social exchange perspective of HPWS highlights its role in forming long-term employee-employer relationships, including the sharing of resources and mutual respect. Empowerment is a technique for retaining employees in the organization. Studies have shown that HPWS has a significant impact on employee retention (Qureshi, 2019).

When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to remain with the organization for a longer period. Sustainable Human Resource Management (HRM) is an innovative concept that has been studied by experts and researchers. Although some research has been done in emerging economies including Pakistan, a lack of studies examining the impact of sustainable HRM practices on employee performance in the healthcare sector. High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have been widely researched in relation to their impact on firm performance, but the extent to which hospitals implement HPWS remains unexplored, particularly in developing nations like Pakistan (Rasool & Nouman, 2013). This research aims to increase understanding of sustainable HRM practices such as Employee Empowerment and HPWS, and to investigate the effect of these practices on employee job performance in organizations.

The current research paper aims to examine the relationship between sustainable HRM practices (such as employee empowerment and High-performance work system) and job performance, with employee retention serving as a mediating factor in the health sector of Pakistan. The focus on employee empowerment and High-performance work system is motivated by the link between sustainability and HRM. The lack of studies on this topic in the health sector of Pakistan, combined with the limited focus on sustainable HRM practices in previous literature, creates a need for

further research in this area (Sherine, 2017). The independent variables are sustainable HRM practices (employee empowerment and High-performance work system), the dependent variable is job performance, and the mediating variable is employee retention.

Literature Review

Job Performance

Employee performance in an organization is crucial for its success and productivity. It refers to the way an employee carries out their assigned tasks and duties, which contributes to the organization's survival and competitiveness in the market. According to Dr. Khalid Khan (2015), job performance is a measure of an employee's success in fulfilling their duties as assigned by upper management. A study by Jerome (2013) states that employee performance involves attitudes and actions that demonstrate how a job is being carried out and the desired outcomes for successful work. Improving individual performance is crucial to boosting organizational performance as employees form the foundation of a successful organization (Sultana, 2012).

In organizational and industrial psychology, the theory of employee performance as a dependent variable is widely used (Kahya, 2009). Thus, employee performance is a critical aspect of an organization and must be analyzed carefully as it affects the goals and reputation of the organization. This research study aims to examine the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and employee job performance, with the mediating effect of employee retention in the health sector of Pakistan. The views of several researchers on the relationship between sustainable HRM practices and job performance will be discussed in the following sections.

Employee Empowerment and Job performance

Employee empowerment enables employees to feel secure and confident in sharing their ideas and opinions in decision-making processes. Research has shown that employee empowerment can improve an organization's competitiveness and increase employee performance by involving all employees, from top to bottom, in policy and strategy making, which motivates them to perform at their best. A study on the impact of employee empowerment on employee performance by Gaudreau Meyerson (2012) revealed that empowerment and its implementation in a company have a significant influence on employee performance.

They found that the most important factors affecting employee performance are authority delegation, performance-based compensation, and recommendation programs. Empowerment is a widely debated topic and remains a firmly established concept today. In general, it can be defined as a set of practices that involve knowledge sharing, authority delegation, and increased autonomy for employees (Randolph, 2000). Based on these findings, it is clear that employee empowerment plays a crucial role in job performance. Numerous studies (Christopher Robert, 2000; Terziovski, 2003; Celik, 2014; Richa Aryan, 2016; Pilar de-Luis, 2005; Ipsita Mohapatra, 2018; Bakari, 2008; JAY A. CONGER, RABINDRA N. KANUNGO, 1988; Bakari, 2008) have confirmed the positive and significant relationship between employee empowerment and job performance. Several studies have investigated the impact of employee empowerment on job performance. For example, Conger and Kanungo (1988) found that empowering leadership styles were positively associated with employee job satisfaction and performance.

Terziovski (2003) found that empowering work practices were positively related to employee attitudes and job performance. In addition, Pilar de-Luis (2005) found that empowering management practices were positively related to employee job satisfaction and performance in the retail industry. Ipsita Mohapatra (2018) found that empowerment practices in the banking industry were positively related to job performance and job satisfaction.

However, some studies have also highlighted the importance of considering contextual factors when examining the relationship between employee empowerment and job performance. For example, Bakari (2008) found that the impact of employee empowerment on job performance was moderated by the level of organizational support and the quality of the work environment. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Employee empowerment is significantly related to Job performance.

High-performance work system and job performance

The Total Strategic Resource Approach (TSRA), developed by B. Nicole Rasool in 2013, is a framework for assessing the effectiveness of high-performance work systems. It combines universal theory, contingency theory, and resource-based viewpoint to test HR activities. Universal theory suggests that a set of core HR practices can benefit all organizations in building a high-performance work system (HPWS), as described by Huselid in 2017.. Many Human Resource (HR) activities are considered standard and universal, and must be adopted by each organization for success.

The theory most frequently referred to in HPWS (Human Resource Practices and Firm Performance Studies) and firm performance studies is that HR activities should align with the organization's business strategy, as per the principle of contingency (John E. Delery and D. Harold Doty, 1996). The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) states that businesses should strive to create unique, valuable, and inimitable HR activities to establish a competitive advantage. According to Shih Yung Chou (2013), the theory of social exchange is strongly linked to employee job performance. The employees' reaction to their behavior, the organization's perception of the employees, and the employees' sense of equity towards the organization's strategies, as well as the organization's focus on career development, significantly impact employee job performance.

A study of doctors and nurses across seven Greek regional hospitals found that a high-performance work system (HPWS) had an impact on employee job performance, and this effect could be influenced by the employees' perception of the exchange relationship with their employer (Mihail & Kloutsiniotis, 2016). Only a few studies have used an individual-level approach to examine the relationship between high-performance work systems (HPWS) and employee performance. Previous studies conducted in various sectors (Li-Yun Sun, 2007; Veiga, 1999; Cai Li, 2019; Kaifeng Jiang et al., 2011; Longzeng Wu, 2011; Wernan, 2016; Tanya Gibbs, 2013; Po-Chien Chang, 2011; Shirzad Mohammed Mahdi, 2014; Noor Hassanah Husin, 2017) and (Ayesha Zafar, 2019; Moosa Moazzezi, 2014; Vathsala Wickramasinghe, 2013) have consistently found a strong relationship between HPWS and job performance.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: High-performance work system is significantly related to job performance.

Employee Empowerment and Employee Retention

Empowering employees is a way to increase employee retention and promote loyalty to the organization, leading to better performance. According to Mendes and Stander (2011), empowering and retaining employees is crucial for financial stability. Managers should consider how empowerment motivates workers to stay with the organization. Previous studies (Gul, Akbar, & Jan, 2012; Hussain & Sana-ur-Rehman, 2013; Ongori, 2009; Nedd, 2006; Sergio & Rylova, 2018; Shetty & Shetty, 2015; Malik, Baig, & Manzoor, 2020; Berridge, Tyler, & Miller, 2016) have confirmed the relationship between employee empowerment and employee retention. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Employee Empowerment is significantly related to Employee Retention.

High-performance work system and Employee Retention

High-performance work system strategies that aim to increase employee involvement can enhance worker performance by increasing their commitment to the organization and their alignment with its goals. Such strategies include incentive programs (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and socialization processes that boost employee dedication. These activities enhance employee human capital, reduce turnover and absenteeism, and foster a positive organizational culture, motivating employees to view their relationship with their employer as more than just an exchange. The result is improved employee retention. Numerous studies (Arthur, 2017; Daniel Pittino, Visintin, Lenger & Sterna, 2016; Combs, Liu, Hall & Ketchan, 2006; Karatepe, 2013; Sarikwal & Gupta, 2013; Tahir Masood Qureshi, 2019; Patel & Conklin, 2012) have concluded that high-performance work systems have a significant impact on employee retention, so it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis: High-performance work system is significantly related to Employee Retention.

Employee Retention and Job Performance

Retention of employees is crucial in achieving high job performance as employees who are committed to the organization are also dedicated to their work, leading to increased job performance. Employee retention is a significant challenge in today's competitive market, with employees being the most important assets of an organization. It is in the best interest of organizations to retain talented employees rather than constantly recruiting new ones (Branham, 2005). The organizations should strive to make their employees feel a part of the job, reducing the likelihood of turnover and increasing employee retention, which in turn will lead to improved job performance.

Long-term employee retention results in increased employee loyalty and commitment, leading to increased productivity for the organization. Previous studies (Ahmed Imran Hunjra, Raza, & Munir, 2014; Ivana Tomic, Tesic, Kuzmanovic, & Tomic, 2018; Daniel Esem Gberevbie, 2010; Kundu & Vora, 2004; Rawat, 2013; Jonathan P. Doh, Smith, Stumpf, & Walter, 2011; Salim & N, 2013; Sultana A. S., 2012; OSIBANJO, ADENIJI, FALOLA, & HEIR, 2014; Jerome, 2013) have confirmed that employee retention has a significant impact on employee job performance. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: Employee Retention is significantly related to Job Performance.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between sustainable Human Resource Management practices, such as Employee Empowerment and High-Performance Work System, and job performance in government hospitals in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, with employee retention serving as a mediating factor. The independent variable of this research is Sustainable HRM practices, while job performance is the dependent variable, and employee retention is the mediating variable that helps to explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The study's theoretical model, as illustrated in Figure 2, has been developed based on the findings from a comprehensive review of the relevant literature.

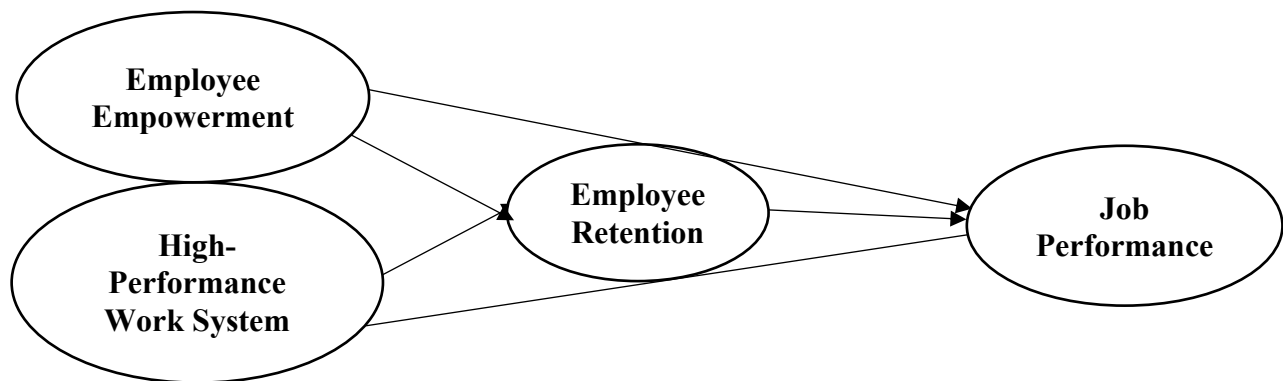


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Underpinning Theory

The Theory of Performance (ToP) developed by Elger (2007) consists of six fundamental principles that describe and improve performance. These principles are context, level of knowledge, ability levels, identity level, personal factors, and fixed factors. This theory supports the current research study's model by emphasizing the impact of HPWS and employee empowerment on employee performance.

HPWS is a set of HRM practices that contributes to enhanced performance and goal attainment in organizations, and when present, employees feel secure in their jobs and duties, positively impacting their performance in line with the context component of the theory.

Empowerment is a personal factor that boosts employee performance. Furthermore, employee retention, as a behavior, has a positive impact on job performance as employees who remain with the organization for longer periods have greater job knowledge and are more committed to the organization.

Data, Variables and Methodology

This research used simple random sampling as a type of probability sampling technique. The study population consisted of employees in the health sector of Bahawalpur, specifically doctors and nurses working in government hospitals. This choice was made because government institutes have more formal rules and regulations compared to private institutes. The study was conducted in Bahawalpur Victoria Hospital and Civil Hospital. In total, 550 questionnaires were distributed in both hospitals, and the response rate was 73%. However, due to the ongoing pandemic situation, the response rate was poor. Out of the 402 returned questionnaires, 330 were valid, while the remaining 72 were incomplete or wrongly filled and were not usable. Doctors and nurses were considered as study unit of analysis in filling gap of research field of HRM.

The data collection for this research was done using a self-administered questionnaire which was distributed to the doctors and nurses in both Bahawalpur Victoria Hospital and Civil Hospital. To increase the response rate, the questionnaires were disbursed to sample.

The questionnaire consisted of two pages, with the first page including instructions on how to complete the questionnaire and a section for the respondent's demographic information. This research utilized a questionnaire adapted from previous studies to ensure accurate information was obtained without asking sensitive questions.

Table 1. Items Summary

Constructs	Source	Items used	Cronbach's
Job Performance	(Faiza Manzoor, 2019)	5	0.60
Employee Empowerment	(Faiza Manzoor, 2019)	12	0.76
High-performance work system	(Morris & Llewelyn, 2013)	18	0.828
Employee Retention	(Eva Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsen, & Moeyaert, 2009)	11	0.91

Analysis and Results

Statistical techniques and methods from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20 were used to analyze the data and test hypotheses. A macro in SPSS was also utilized, as established by HAYES (2004), to test the mediating effect of employee retention on the relationship between sustainable HRM practices (employee empowerment and high-performance work system) and job performance.

This was due to Smart PLS's ability to evaluate latent variables and their relationship with items (outer model), as well as test the relationship between latent variables (inner model) as highlighted by Joseph F. Hair M.S. (2012) and Werner Reinartz (2009).

Demographic Analysis

The respondents in this study were asked to provide information about various demographic aspects of their work including gender, marital status, age, occupation, level of education and experience in years. These were measured using nominal and ordinal scales.

The results of the descriptive analysis showed that 65.7% of the 330 respondents were doctors, while 34.3% were nurses. 40.7% of the respondents were male, while 59.3% were female. 28.7% of the respondents were in the age group of 20-25, 45.3% in the age group of 25-35, 23.9% in the age group of 35-45, and 2.1% above 45. 56.3% had a graduate degree, 25.7% held a master's degree, 8.6% had completed intermediate, 2.1% held a Ph.D., and 7.3% had other qualifications. 58.4% of the respondents had 1-5 years of service, 31.8% had 5-15 years of service, 8.6% had 15-25 years of service, and 1.2% had more than 25 years of service.

Assessing Path Model

Before conducting analysis, it was necessary to fit the model for the purpose of clarity. The analysis included four latent variables with two independent variables (Employee Empowerment, High-Performance Work System), one mediating variable (Employee Retention), and one dependent variable (Job Performance), taking into account the sequence and relationship between the constructs.

Reliability

The current investigation explored the reliability of items of the study, and provided reliability of all indicators (Hair; Black; Babin; & Anderson, 2014). Hair (2013) emphasized that items with outer loadings greater than a value of 0.40 but lesser than a value of 0.70 should be carefully examined and deleted if otherwise. It left 34 items in current model of the study, as shown in Figure below.

Convergent Validity

The convergent validity assesses the similarity between theoretically related measures of the same construct. To establish convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value should be equal to or greater than 0.50 (Joseph F. Hair, 2012; Jörg Henseler, 2009). In this research, the AVE values were calculated and tested to establish convergent validity. The results of study show that all constructs have an AVE value higher than 0.50, ranging 0.502 to 0.580, establishing convergent validity.

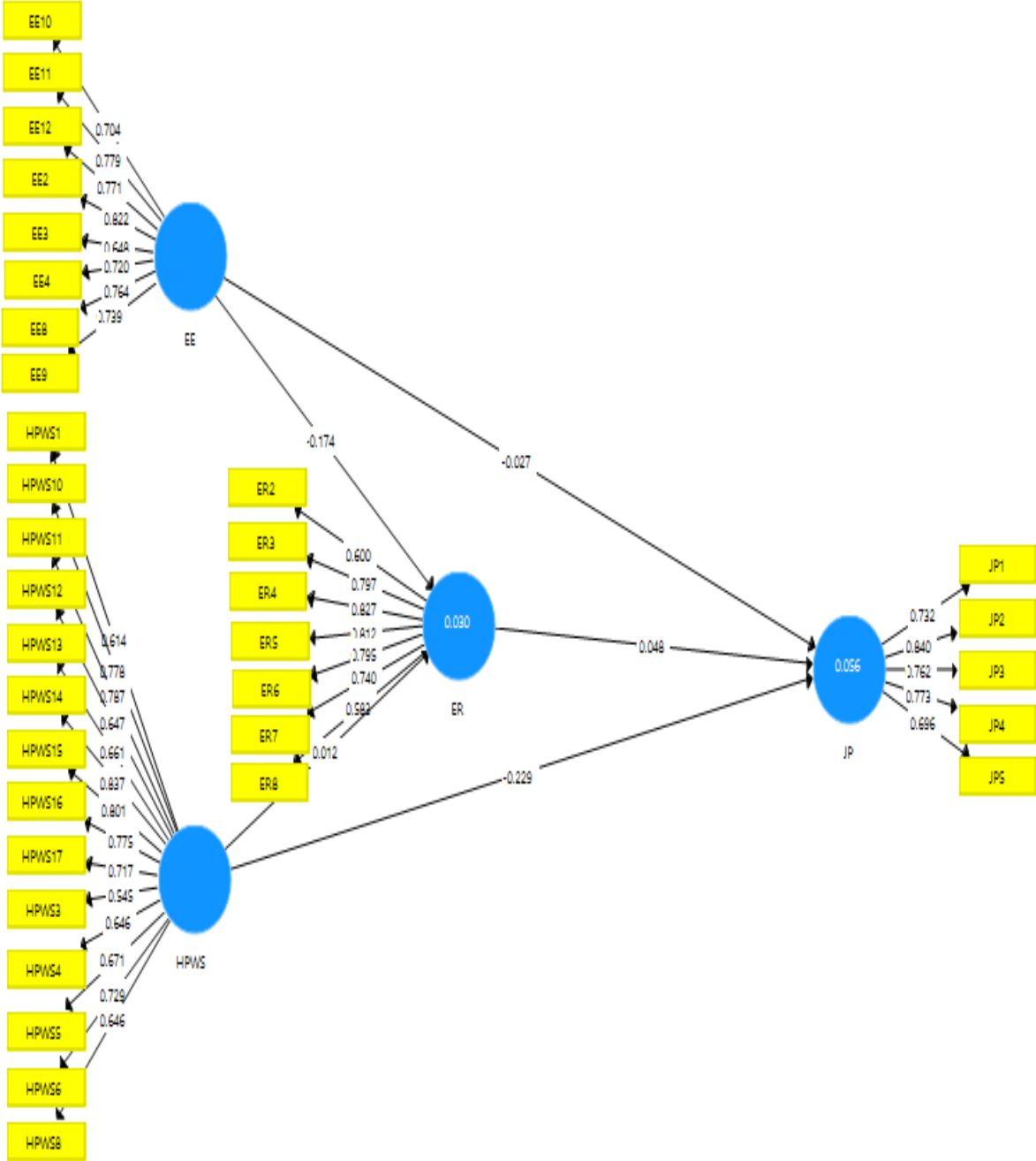


Figure 2.

Table 2. Loadings

Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's	CR	AVE	Discriminant Validity?
	EE2	0.822				
	EE3	0.648				
	EE4	0.720				
	EE8	0.764				
	EE9	0.739	0.890	0.908	0.555	YES
	EE10	0.704				
	EE11	0.779				
	EE12	0.771				
	HPWS1	0.614				
	HPWS3	0.545				
	HPWS4	0.646				
	HPWS5	0.671				
	HPWS6	0.729				
	HPWS8	0.646				
HPWS	HPWS10	0.778	0.923	0.933	0.502	YES
	HPWS11	0.787				
	HPWS12	0.647				
	HPWS13	0.661				
	HPWS14	0.837				
	HPWS15	0.801				
	HPWS16	0.775				
	HPWS17	0.717				
	ER2	0.600				
	ER3	.797				
ER	ER4	.827				
	ER5	.812	0.865	0.894	0.551	YES
	ER6	.795				
	ER7	.740				
	ER8	.583				
	JP1	0.732				
	JP2	0.840				
JP	JP3	0.762	0.820	0.873	0.580	YES
	JP4	0.773				
	JP5	0.696				

NOTE: EE=Employee Empowerment, HPWS=High Performance Work System, ER=Employee Retention, JP=Job performance, CR=Composite Reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which two or more measures of constructs are unrelated (Joseph F. Hair., 2013; Jörg Henseler, 2009). In other words, it tests the distinctiveness of the constructs from each other. In this study, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with the highest correlation of the construct with any other construct (Joseph F. Hair., 2013). The Fornell-Larcker criteria was used to evaluate the discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the AVE values in bold with the correlations provided in the correlation matrix. The results of the analysis, as shown in

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

<i>Variables</i>	<i>EE</i>	<i>HPWS</i>	<i>ER</i>	<i>JP</i>
<i>EE</i>	0.745			
<i>HPWS</i>	-0.174	0.742		
<i>ER</i>	0.016	0.009	0.708	
<i>JP</i>	-0.039	0.051	-0.229	0.762

Note: Bold values show square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), EE=Employee Empowerment, HPWS=High Performance Work System, ER=Employee Retention, JP=Job performance.

This method involves repeating random sampling with replacement from the original sample to create a bootstrap sample and calculate standard errors for hypothesis testing. In this study, 5000 sample sizes were used for bootstrapping, following the guidelines of previous researchers. The results, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$, showed that five out of seven hypotheses supported the formulated hypothesis.

Table 4. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relation	Std.D	t-val	p-val	Decision
H1	EE →JP	0.107	0.511	0.610	NOT Supported
H2	HPWS →JP	0.044	5.172	0.000	Supported
H3	ER →JP	0.116	0.602	0.547	NOT Supported
H4	EE →ER	0.066	2.642	0.008	Supported
H5	HPWS →ER	0.069	3.175	0.005	Supported

However, Hypothesis 2, which stated that there was a significant positive relationship between HPWS (High Performance Work System) and job performance ($t = 5.172$, $p < 0.05$), was supported by the findings shown in Table 4. The results indicated that Hypothesis 3, which stated a relationship between employee retention and job performance, was not accepted based on the findings. The results also showed that the relationship between HPWS and employee retention, stated in Hypothesis 5, was supported ($t = -0.069$; $p < 0.05$).

Mediation Analysis

The mediation test was conducted in this study to examine the mediating effect of the mediating variable between the independent and dependent variables (T. Ramayah, 2011). The PLS-SEM method was used for the mediation test, which is widely used for mediation and moderation tests in PLS research (Nick Bontis, 2007; Chin, 2010; Joseph F. Hair., 2013; Hayes, 2017). The PLS approach is becoming increasingly popular in social sciences, especially in marketing-related studies (Jorg Henseler, 2009) due to its ability to handle it (Joe Hair, 2016). The mediation test in this study was conducted to determine if Employee Retention mediates the two exogenous (EE also HPWS) and the endogenous variable (JP).

Table 5. Results of Mediation Tests

	Hypotheses/ Path	St. Dev	t-stat	P-value	Decision
H6	EE→ER→JP	0.0140	0.567	0.570	Not Supported
H7	HPWS→ER→JP	0.0449	4.096	0.005	Supported

Table 5 shows the results of the mediating impact of employee retention on the relationship between employee empowerment and high-performance work system on job performance. Hypothesis H6, which predicted the mediating role of employee retention in the relationship between employee empowerment and job performance, is not supported according to the results in Table 5 (S.D = 0.014, t = 0.567, p = 0.570). On the other hand, hypothesis H7, which was based on the mediation role of employee retention in the relationship between high-performance work system and job performance, is supported (S.D = 0.0449, t = 4.096, p = 0.005).

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this research paper is to investigate the mediating role of employee retention in the relationship between employee empowerment (EE), high-performance work system (HPWS), and job performance in the health sector of Bahawalpur. The research findings indicate

- 1) An insignificant positive relationship between EE and job performance.
- 2) A significant relationship between HPWS and job performance.
- 3) A significant relationship between EE and employee retention.
- 4) A significant relationship between HPWS and employee retention.
- 5) An insignificant relationship between employee retention and job performance.
- 6) A Significant mediating role of employee retention in the relationship between HPWS, and job performance.
- 7) A significant mediating role of Employee retention the relationship between EP, and job performance.

Out of the 7 hypotheses tested, 4 were accepted and 3 were not accepted.

Theoretical Contribution

Mediating role of employee retention in the relationship between employee empowerment (EE), high-performance work system (HPWS), and job performance (JP) in the hospitals of Bahawalpur. Out of 7 hypotheses in the study, 4 are accepted and 3 are not accepted. This research contributes to the field by examining the relationship between EE, HPWS, JP, and employee retention (ER) in the health sector of Bahawalpur, and focusing on both direct and indirect (EE, HPWS) and dependent variable (JP) with the mediating effect of ER.

The results have enriched the existing literature on employee empowerment, high-performance work system, employee retention, and job performance in the health sector. This research contributes to the existing theory and provides empirical support for the proposed relationship based on the theory of job performance (Elger, 2007). It also enhances the existing literature on sustainable human resource management (HRM) and job performance in the health sector by incorporating the current research model.

Most previous studies on sustainable HRM practices and job performance have focused on the manufacturing sector (SHERINE, CHERIAN, 2017) and the educational sector (Faiza Manzoor, 2019). This study targets the health sector and includes both doctors and nurses, filling a gap in the research by including doctors, who have not been examined in previous studies.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current research provides a comprehensive roadmap for improving job performance in the health sector of Pakistan, with a focus on four variables including one mediator. The study focuses specifically on government hospitals in the southern Punjab region of Bahawalpur and does not extend to other areas of the Pakistani health sector. The results of this study may differ in other regions and should therefore be cautiously generalized to other health sectors in the world. The current study may also provide direction for further research in competitive sectors. The study's limitations include a constraint of time, small population and sample size, and limited examination of independent variables solely aimed at achieving job performance in the health sector. To overcome these limitations, future research can consider both public and private hospitals in Pakistan.

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