Money talks in working behavior: impact of unethical leadership on psychological empowerment, attitude towards doing well, and deviant work behavior

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Abstract

This empirical investigation examines the mediating mechanisms through which unethical leadership influences employee work deviant behavior in the healthcare sector, specifically focusing on psychological empowerment and performance attitudes as potential mediating variables. Furthermore, the research explores the moderating role of financial job dependency in the relationship between unethical leadership and employee work deviant behavior. Utilizing a systematic stratified sampling methodology, data were collected from 384 manager-employee dyads within healthcare organizations in developing countries. The results demonstrate that both psychological empowerment and performance attitudes serve as significant mediating mechanisms in the relationship between unethical leadership and work deviant behavior. Additionally, the findings reveal that financial job dependency moderates the relationship between unethical leadership and psychological empowerment, although no significant moderating effect was observed in the relationship between unethical leadership and employee workplace behaviors. These findings contribute to the existing literature on organizational behavior and healthcare management while offering practical implications for healthcare administrators seeking to mitigate workplace deviance. The results provide empirically-grounded insights that can inform the development of targeted interventions and management strategies within healthcare organizations.

Keywords Unethical leadership, Psychological empowerment, Attitude towards doing well, Financial job dependency, Work deviant behavior, Social exchange theory

Introduction

Workplace deviance is a set of adverse behaviors that transgress organizational standards, distort work settings, and undermine institutional objectives. In high-risk industries such as healthcare, these behaviors can be lethal, exerting influence not just on employees' well-being but also on patient safety and general service quality. Workplace deviant behaviors, such as absenteeism, insubordination, and unethical behavior, usually originate from dysfunctional organizational environments where corrupt leadership is the norm. Leaders who practice dishonesty, manipulation, or unfairness establish a

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culture of distrust and discontent, which breeds resentment among employees and reduces their commitment to ethical behavior. Unethical leadership not only erodes workplace morale but also activates retaliatory actions, as employees feel helpless, demotivated, or forced to practice deviant behavior as a means of resistance or coping. This erosion of workplace integrity results in reduced performance at work, increased stress, and turnover rates, further destabilizing healthcare facilities already plagued with workforce shortages and operational issues. Unethical leadership also normalizes unethical behavior with a cascading effect where the employees justify dishonesty as survival. An understanding of these dynamics is important for those organizations seeking to develop ethical leadership, strong mechanisms of governance, and an ethos of accountability that will prevent deviance in the workplace.

Unethical leadership entails behavior that disobeys moral standards, threatens the well-being of subordinates, and undermines organizational integrity [40]. It is characterized by morally objectionable conduct exhibited by organizational leaders [31, 36]. In organizational hierarchies, such leadership constitutes a breach of official authority [28, 32]. The negative impact of unethical leadership on various employee outcomes, including performance measures [8, 30], job satisfaction [53], and workplace behavior [10, 53] has been empirically proven. A comprehensive investigation is required due to the complex interplay between unethical leadership and employee behaviors, driven by various internal and external factors.

There is significant knowledge gaps persist despite plenty of research on the impact of unethical leadership on the perceptions and attitudes of employees [10, 54]. Specifically, less attention has been directed toward understanding the moderating role of financial job dependency and the mediating effect of attitudes toward doing well, particularly within the healthcare industries of developing countries. There has not been sufficient research conducted on the buffering effects of financial job dependency, which can restrict workers' ability to exit poor working environments. A more detailed analysis of the processes involved is needed, although the literature that is published at present indicates that unethical leadership has a negative effect on employees' behaviors, which is seen as an expansion of work deviance [34]. The theoretical basis of this research is social exchange theory [9], which highlights the mutually rewarding interaction between supervisors and subordinates. In accordance with this theoretical framework, four fundamental elements are the basis of organizational relationships: mutual dependency, exchange interactions, relationship outcomes, and established norms.

To address the knowledge gap of existing studies on unethical leadership, this study aims to investigate the impact of unethical leadership on employee attitudes toward doing well and further on employee deviant work behavior. This study also aims to investigate the mediation effect of employee attitude towards doing well in the relationship between unethical leadership and employee deviant work behavior. The mediation of employee attitude towards doing well has been investigated in the leadership member exchange relationship in past studies. For instance ' Bergkvist et al. [7] argued that the relationship between brand attitude and perceived celebrity drive, celebrity expertise, and celebrity–brand fit is mediated by attitude toward the endorsement. In addition, this study also aims to determine the buffering effect of unethical leadership and employee work deviant behavior. Several buffering factors that can reduce the negative effects of unethical leadership have been identified by previous research. For instance, Goldberg & Grandey [22] point out that the main breadwinners will suppress responses to abusive leadership behaviors in a bid to maintain job security, whereas [3] highlight how economic dependence can compel workers to remain in abusive working conditions.

The present study is expected to contribute theoretical knowledge in multiple aspects. First, this study discusses whether psychological empowerment and performance attitudes could mediate the relationship between workplace deviant behavior and unethical workplace leadership. Second, this study also discusses whether financial job dependency can be a moderator or not in this relationship. Third, it advances the social psychology knowledge base by illuminating the relationship between unethical leadership and the psychological empowerment of workers. This study's contribution lies in its exploration of how financial job dependency shifts the dynamics of the relationships between unethical leadership and psychological empowerment and attitudes toward doing well, especially in environments where workers may be forced to tolerate unethical leadership actions due to financial pressures.

Theory and hypothesis
Theoretical framework: a social exchange theory perspective

Social Exchange Theory (SET), applied to define the mutual exchange processes between individuals or social groups in organizational contexts, forms the theoretical underpinning of this study [41]. SET has been widely utilized in organizational literature for analyzing leader-employee relationships and accounting for workplace behavior. The theory offers a rich paradigm for conceptualizing many different forms of exchange relations in

the workplace [14], including complex relations between leader-member exchange, psychological empowerment, employee turnover, and perceived organizational support [33]. The intricate exchange relationships between employees and managers in organizational contexts are accounted for by SET's general framework. Consistent with research, workers who feel less supported by their managers are more likely to become disengaged in the organization [2]. Furthermore, leadership mindsets have been proven to exert important roles in organizational decision-making and problem-solving processes [1]. The workforce usually becomes psychologically less empowered with unethical leaders because this is associated with lower competence and significance in their work perception. In circumstances of unethical management, a reduced sense of liberty may lead to poor performance or misbehavior on the job. SET principles consider that leadership actions have a dramatic impact on performance attitudes and workers' psychological empowerment, which has the potential of being positive as well as negative [23].

The theoretical framework of the current study maintains that unethical leadership creates a poor work environment that promotes deviant behavior among employees. Financial job dependency, though, can mitigate this relationship. SET's central principles regarding reciprocal exchange relationships are in line with the moderating effect of financial job dependency. Workers highly reliant on their jobs for financial support might be more likely to tolerate unethical leadership practices to maintain financial security. Through the SET framework, in this model of study, the study examines the extent to which the leader-follower dynamics are influenced by financial need. More specifically, economic job dependence can make employees tolerate unethical leadership behaviors despite the existence of negative leadership behaviors so that they can have job security and organizational relationships.

The application of SET in this context is particularly relevant as it brings out how beneficial organizational relationships are to each other. Employees trade their skills, commitment, and effort for a range of organizational rewards, such as economic stability, based on SET norms [13, 16]. Financial job dependency is an important dimension that shapes workers' tolerance for unethical practices if there is unethical leadership. It affects the connection between leadership practices and employee behavioral outcomes.

Hypothesis development

Many other studies have looked at the causal relationships between the variables that our research suggests. As an example [49], showed that immoral leadership

had a detrimental effect on employee attitudes at work. [54] found a favorable correlation between psychological empowerment among employees and unethical leadership. In addition, scholars have looked at how psychological empowerment affects deviant work behavior and how employee attitudes affect deviant work behavior in a variety of fields and study environments [51]. Thus, this study emphasizes the identification of underlying and boundary conditions to develop hypotheses for the research model. Specifically, this study introduces attitudes toward doing well and psychological empowerment as key underlying mechanisms to investigate the impact of unethical leadership on employee deviant work behavior.

Several scholars have acknowledged the importance of investigating underlying mechanisms within the leadership literature, specifically emphasizing employee attitude and psychological empowerment. For example, Suifan et al. [45] confirmed that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between ethical leadership, but does not explain the full relationship between unethical leadership and employee working behavior. There are other factors to be considered which may have significant influence. Avolio et al. [5], put forward the complete mediation effect between transformational leadership and job satisfaction and employee commitment. Similarly, psychological empowerment has partial mediation within participative leadership and deviant work behavior [27]. Additionally Seibert et al. [42], identified that psychological empowerment has mediation effect between empowering climate and job performance. Additionally psychological empowerment has been used as a potential mediator between ethical leadership and employee moral identity and employee success [55]. Based on the above-stated evidence we suppose:

> H1: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between unethical leadership and works deviant behavior.

Attitude is a mental state and an act to respond to a situation that how individual feels, it might be favorable or unfavorable, that particular feelings under a condition may be positive or negative [1]. However, the employee with a positive attitude leads to less absenteeism, taking high responsibility for his duty and task, obedience to superior authority and less turnover, all these factors may result in an employee's high performance. Similarly, the employee's negative attitude towards work will lead to deviant work behavior, lack of responsibilities, high absenteeism and more turnover intention, which will lead to poor performance [1]. Leadership and employees' attitude towards doing well has become more complex

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and challenging. These are the main elements that influence organizational performance and effectiveness [35].

Previous studies stated that benevolent leadership has a positive correlation with such attitudes of employees as organizational commitment toward an organization [19]. Sušanj & Jakopec [46], found that fair treatment by leaders improves employee's attitude towards performing well. Leaders who are concerned only directly with output and do not consider employee's emotions and thoughts, they were unable to achieve the highest output [15]. The literature supports the argument that effective supervision facilitates subordinates and enhance employees attitude towards doing well in the work setting [37]. Yeh & Hong [52], found a positive association between the project leader and the employees' attitude such as group cooperation, employees' commitment and motivation to utilize their full capacity to achieve their tasks. Employee attitude towards doing well plays a crucial role in employee work deviant behavior while facing the unethical leadership, so on the basis of study stated above we purposed the following hypothesis.

> H2: Attitude towards doing well mediates the relationship between unethical leadership and work deviant behavior

Job provides financial benefits to people as it brings income, which is necessary to maintain living standards and also helpful for dealing with difficult situations [21]. Financial resources provide how important social and cultural activities in life become possible. Money provides the feeling of self-control and self-authority,hence the financial crises possess a threatening and dangerous expression. According to the SET, an individual's salary plays an important role in maintaining the a social exchange relationship of employees with their organization [29]. Financial job dependency plays a crucial role for all the members who are dependent on the working person. The evaluation of financial job dependency may vary from person to person because there might be differences among their expenditure patterns, needs, choices and number of dependents in a family [43]. Tichenor, [48] stated that where an individual is the main breadwinner in a family, he or she will be more responsible to fulfill their needs and assumed to be more dependent on the job. Financial job dependency also raises the threat of job insecurity and over the last two decades, it has become the main threat in the working environment [17].

Household financial job dependency prevents the employee from leave the organization and staying in that particular abusive environment [3]. The feed winner doesn't think about their own comfort and doesn't pay attention to such negative behavior to keep his job [24].

According to [47] abusive supervision leads to negative emotions among employees, these emotions might be influenced by an employee's economic condition. Specifically, when an employee's family is fully dependent upon them, they don't internalize their emotions to maintain the required resources needed for their survival. If the financial job dependency is high then these emotions don't lead to job-related anger and frustration. So, we proposed the following hypothesis:

> H3:Financial Job Dependency moderates the relationship between unethical leadership and employee's psychological empowerment.
> H4: Financial Job Dependency moderates the relationship between unethical leadership and employee's attitude towards doing well.

Method

Data collection procedure

This study employed a time lag research design to examine the relationships between unethical leadership and employee outcomes in healthcare organizations from developing countries. The sampling frame comprised 102 hospitals (42 public and 60 private) located in South Asia and East Asia countries. A stratified sampling technique was implemented to ensure proportional representation of both public and private healthcare institutions. This methodological choice was justified by the need to maintain appropriate representation across different hospital ownership structures while minimizing sampling error. The stratification process enhanced the sample's representativeness.

The data collection process was executed in two distinct temporal phases, employing a time-lagged design with a three-month interval between waves. This temporal separation was strategically implemented to minimize common method variance and establish temporal precedence for causal inference. This study used a questionnaire that was split into two parts. The first part, which was for employees, was administered in Phase 1, and the second part, which was for supervisors, was administered in Phase 2. In the first phase (Time 1), employees' data were gathered on demographics, unethical leadership, financial job dependency, attitudes toward doing well, and psychological empowerment. During the second phase (Time 2), immediate managers completed questionnaires containing information regarding workplace deviant behavior of the employees. In order to avoid mismatching, the employee and respective manager were given a special code prior to administration of questionnaires. This study assured confidentiality by providing each participant with a special code that ensured the participants' answers could not be identified. Informed

consent was also provided by all participants, emphasizing that the participation was wholly voluntary and they could leave anytime without any form of negative implications. The initial distribution encompassed 580 questionnaires, administered in English through in-person visits to ensure proper comprehension and response quality. The first wave yielded 402 completed questionnaires, while the second wave produced 392 responses. After rigorous data-cleaning procedures, including the removal of unmatched and incomplete responses, the final analytical sample comprised 384 supervisor-subordinate dyads.

Measures

We measured the unethical leadership by using unethical leadership scale developed by Pitesa & Thau [39]. This scale has 7 items and we rate the participant's response by using five-point Likert scale. Psychological empowerment was measured by using psychological empowerment scale developed by Spreitzer [44]. This scale has 12 items. Attitude towards doing well by using the attitude towards doing well scale developed by [25]. This scale has 3 items. Work deviant behavior by using the employees work deviant behavior scale developed by Bennett & Robinson [6]. This scale has 6 items and we rate the respondents' response by using the Five-point Likert scale. The moderator variable financial job dependency by using the financial job dependency scale developed by Clark [11]. This scale has 4 items.

Data analysis
Descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents demographic details about the supervisors and subordinates in a certain situation. 32.29% of the subordinates are female, while 67.70% of them are male. 31.25% of the supervisors are female, while 68.75% of

Table 1 Demographics information

Subordinate Information			Supervisor information	
Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender				
Male	130	67.70	132	68.75
Female	62	32.29	60	31.25
Age				
21-30 years	70	36.45	73	38.02
31-40 years	98	51.04	104	54.16
41-50 years	06	3.12	08	4.17
Above 50 years	3	1.56	3	1.56
Qualification				
Secondary level	28	14.58		
Higher secondary	45	23.44		
Bachelors	87	45.31	87	45.32
Post graduation/Professional Qualification	32	16.67	105	54.68
Experience				
Less than 1 year	28	14.58	30	15.62
1-5 years	49	25.52	53	27.60
6-10 years	38	19.79	34	17.71
11-15 years	35	18.23	21	10.94
16-20 years	29	15.10	32	16.67
More than 20 years	13	6.78	22	11.46
Job Position				
Paramedics	34	17.71		
Lab technician	25	13.02		
Dispenser	41	21.35		
Pharmacy assistant	22	11.46		
Nurses	70	36.46		
Head nurse			84	43.75
Medical officer			108	56.25

N: 384

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them are men. The age group of 31 to 40 years accounts for the highest percentage of subordinates (51.04%), and the age group of 31 to 40 years accounts for the highest percentage of supervisors (54.16%). The proportion of people who have a bachelor's degree is highest among subordinates (45.31%), and it is similar among supervisors (45.32%). The category of 1–5 years of experience has the highest percentages in both the subordinate and supervisor categories (25.52% for subordinates and 27.60% for supervisors). Nurses (36.46%) are responsible for the highest percentage of the subordinates, followed by dispensers (21.35%) and paramedics (17.71%). Medical officers hold the highest possess among supervisors (56.25%), followed by head nurses (43.75%). The information points to a fairly equal gender distribution, a predominance of middle-aged people, a sizable number of people with bachelor's degrees, and a concentration of experience between one and five years.

Validity and reliability

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability and validity analysis for the instruments used in the study. Factor loadings represent the strength of the relationship between each item and its underlying factor. A factor loading of 0.5 or higher is considered acceptable. All factor loadings in Table 2 are above 0.5, indicating that each item is a good indicator of its underlying construct. Average Value extracted (AVE) represents the amount of variance in the items that is captured by the underlying construct. An AVE of 0.5 or higher is considered acceptable. All AVE values are above 0.5, indicating that the constructs have adequate convergent validity. Construct reliability (CR) represents the internal consistency of the items within each construct. The value 0.7 of CR or higher is considered acceptable. All CR values are above 0.7, indicating that the constructs have good reliability. Cronbach's Alpha is a commonly used measure of internal consistency reliability. Alpha values of 0.7 or higher are generally considered acceptable. All constructs have alpha values above 0.7, indicating that the items within each construct are internally consistent. Overall, the results of this analysis suggest that the instruments used in this study have good reliability and validity.

Correlation matrix

Table 3 shows that attitude towards doing well is positively correlated with psychological empowerment ($r=0.585$, $p<0.01$) and negatively correlated with unethical Leadership ($r=-0.541$, $p<0.01$) and Work Deviant Behavior ($r=-0.662$, $p<0.01$). Financial job dependency is negatively correlated with attitude towards doing well ($r=-0.578$, $p<0.01$) and positively correlated with Unethical Leadership ($r=0.563$, $p<0.01$). Psychological empowerment is negatively correlated with financial job dependency ($r=-0.599$, $p<0.01$) and work deviant behavior ($r=-0.656$, $p<0.01$) and positively correlated with attitude towards doing well ($r=0.585$, $p<0.01$). Unethical leadership is positively correlated with financial job dependency ($r=0.563$, $p<0.01$) and negatively correlated with attitude towards doing well ($r=-0.541$, $p<0.01$). Work deviant behavior is negatively correlated with attitude towards doing well ($r=-0.662$, $p<0.01$) and psychological empowerment ($r=-0.656$, $p<0.01$) (Table 3).

Hypothesis testing

The PLS-SEM approach was used to assess the significance of a link through PLSSEM algorithm, and the PLS-SEM bootstrapping technique in Smart PLS 3.5 was employed to calculate the value of the route coefficients. These both tasks were perfumed through using Smart PLS 3.5. The case count 500 bootstrapping sample were

Table 2 Reliability and validity of the instruments

Variable	Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbatch Alpha
Attitude towards Doing Well	0.833	0.516	0.745	0.717
	0.393			
	0.836			
Financial Job Dependency	0.876	0.562	0.784	0.793
	0.866			
	0.841			
Psychological Empowerment	0.758	0.503	0.858	0.802
	0.639			
	0.722			
	0.658			
	0.752			
	0.718			
Unethical Leadership	0.812	0.521	0.809	0.685
	0.721			
	0.787			
	0.533			
Work Deviant Behavior	0.385	0.523	0.804	0.676
	0.843			
	0.785			
	0.786			

Table 3 Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attitude towards doing well	**0.718**				
2. Financial Job Dependency	-0.578	**0.749**			
3. Psychological Empowerment	0.585	-0.599	**0.709**		
4. Unethical Leadership	-0.541	0.563	-0.705	**0.721**	
5. Work Deviant Behavior	-0.662	0.586	-0.656	0.563	**0.723**

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used to determine the outcome of this research. Straight-forward connections among variables are established throughout the model (H1 to H4).

In Table 4 and Figure 1, the direct path analysis shows that attitude towards doing well has a negative and significant effect on work deviant behavior with a beta coefficient (β= -0.42 ($p < 0.001$). Financial job dependency also has a negative and significant effect on attitude towards doing well ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment (beta = -0.30, $p < 0.001$). Psychological empowerment has a negative and significant effect on

work deviant behavior ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < 0.001$). Unethical leadership has a negative and significant effect on attitude towards doing well (beta = -0.32, $p < 0.001$) and a strong negative effect on psychological empowerment ($\beta = -0.54$, $p < 0.001$).

The indirect path analysis shows that financial job dependency has a positive and significant indirect effect on work deviant behavior through attitude towards doing well ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$). Unethical leadership also has a positive and significant indirect effect on work deviant

Table 4 Direct and indirect effects results

Direct Paths	Beta	S. E	t-value	*P*-Values	LLCI	ULCI	VIF	f-square	R-square
ATDW → WDB	-0.42	0.05	8.33	0.00	-0.51	-0.35	1.52	0.26	0.55
FJD → ATDW	-0.40	0.06	7.22	0.00	-0.49	-0.31	1.47	0.18	
FJD → PE_	-0.30	0.05	5.76	0.00	-0.38	-0.21	1.47	0.14	
PE_ → WDB	-0.41	0.05	7.86	0.00	-0.49	-0.32	1.52	0.24	
UL → ATDW	-0.32	0.06	5.08	0.00	-0.42	-0.21	1.47	0.11	
UL → PE_	-0.54	0.05	11.74	0.00	-0.61	-0.46	1.47	0.45	
Indirect Paths									
FJD → ATDW → WDB	0.17	0.03	5.60	0.00	0.12	0.22			
FJD → PE → WDB	0.12	0.03	4.28	0.00	0.08	0.17			
UL → ATDW → WDB	0.13	0.03	4.44	0.00	0.09	0.19			
UL → PE → WDB	0.22	0.03	7.10	0.00	0.17	0.27			
Moderation									
UL x FJD PE → PE → WDB	-0.03	0.01	2.14	0.02	-0.04	0.00			
UL x FJD ATDW → ATDW → WDB	0.02	0.02	1.19	0.12	0.00	0.07			

ATDW Attitude towards doing well, *WDB* Work Deviant Behavior, *FJD* Financial Job Dependency, *PE* Psychological empowerment, *UL* Unethical leadership
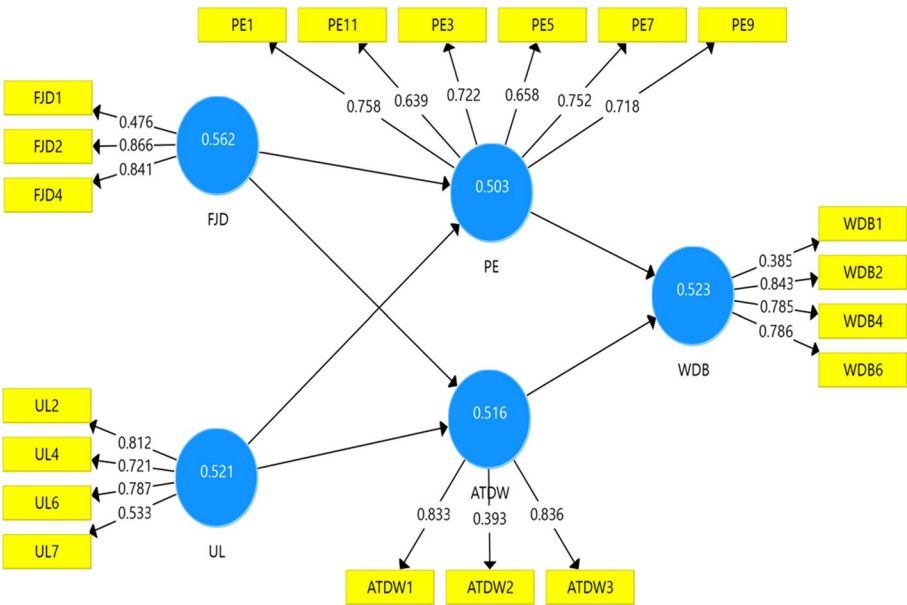

Fig. 1 Path coefficients

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behavior through attitude towards doing well (β = 0.13, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment (β = 0.22, $p < 0.001$). The moderation analysis shows that the interaction of unethical leadership and financial job dependency moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and work deviant behavior (β = -0.03, $p < 0.05$). However, the interaction between unethical leadership and financial job dependency does not have a significant effect on the relationship between attitude towards doing well and work deviant behavior (β = 0.02, $p > 0.05$).

In Table 4, the direct path analysis shows that attitude towards doing well has a negative and significant effect on work deviant behavior with a beta coefficient (β= -0.42 ($p < 0.001$). Financial job dependency also has a negative and significant effect on attitude towards doing well (β = -0.40, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment (beta = -0.30, $p < 0.001$). Psychological empowerment has a negative and significant effect on work deviant behavior (β = -0.41, $p < 0.001$). Unethical leadership has a negative and significant effect on attitude towards doing well (beta = -0.32, $p < 0.001$) and a strong negative effect on psychological empowerment (β = -0.54, $p < 0.001$). The indirect path analysis shows that financial job dependency has a positive and significant indirect effect on work deviant behavior through attitude towards doing well (β = 0.17, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment (β = 0.12, $p < 0.001$). UL also has a positive and significant indirect effect on work-deviant behavior through attitude towards doing well (β = 0.13, $p < 0.001$) and psychological empowerment (β = 0.22, $p < 0.001$). The moderation analysis shows that the interaction of unethical leadership and financial job dependency moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and work deviant

behavior (β = -0.03, $p < 0.05$). However, the interaction between unethical leadership and financial job dependency does not have a significant effect on the relationship between attitude towards doing well and work deviant behavior (β = 0.02, $p > 0.05$).

It is indicated in Figure 2, the bootstrapping analysis suggested that both constructs psychological empowerment and attitude towards doing well are significant at the t- values 7.10 and 4.44 respectively. The bootstrapping confidence interval bias is corrected at the 95% class interval (CI) for psychological empowerment lower limit and upper limit [LL=0.17, UL0.27] and attitude towards doing well [LL=0.09, UL= 0.19], not single 0 between them showing that each mediation exists (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Thus, supporting H1 and H2.

Moderation analysis

The Beta value shows the correlation among variables, t-value and p-values provide the significance for the hypothesis. f square refers to the effect size and R square refers to variance in the dependent variable. However, LLCI indicates the lower limit of class interval and ULCI demonstrates the upper limit of class interval. Variance inflator factor (VIF) refers to the measurement of multicollinearity among constructs. The R2 (0.55) demonstrates that the independent variable (unethical leadership) and moderator (financial job dependency) explain the 55% variance in employee work deviant behavior.

[12] guides Figure 3 including 0.02 small, 0.15 medium, and 0.35 large,so, based on this criterion we concluded that attitude towards doing well has medium effect size on work deviant behavior (0.152), financial job
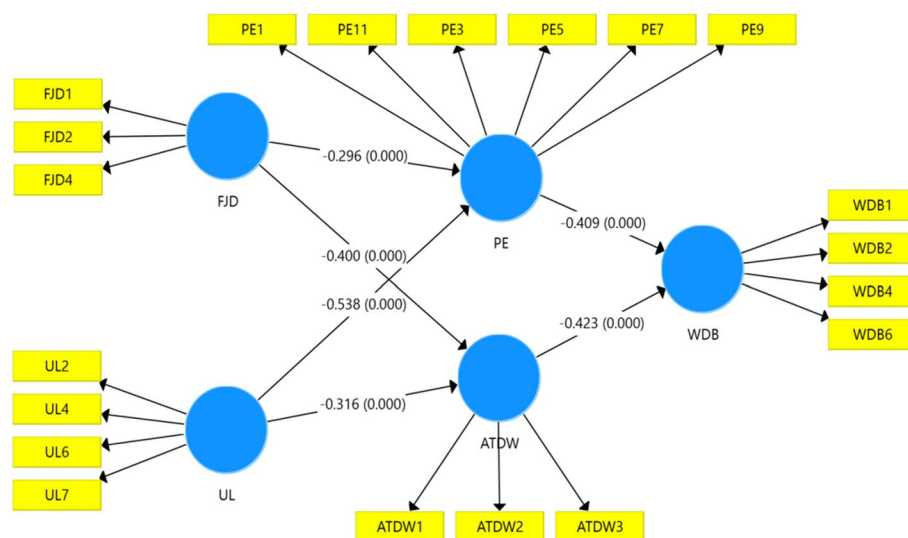
Fig. 2 Inner model assessment
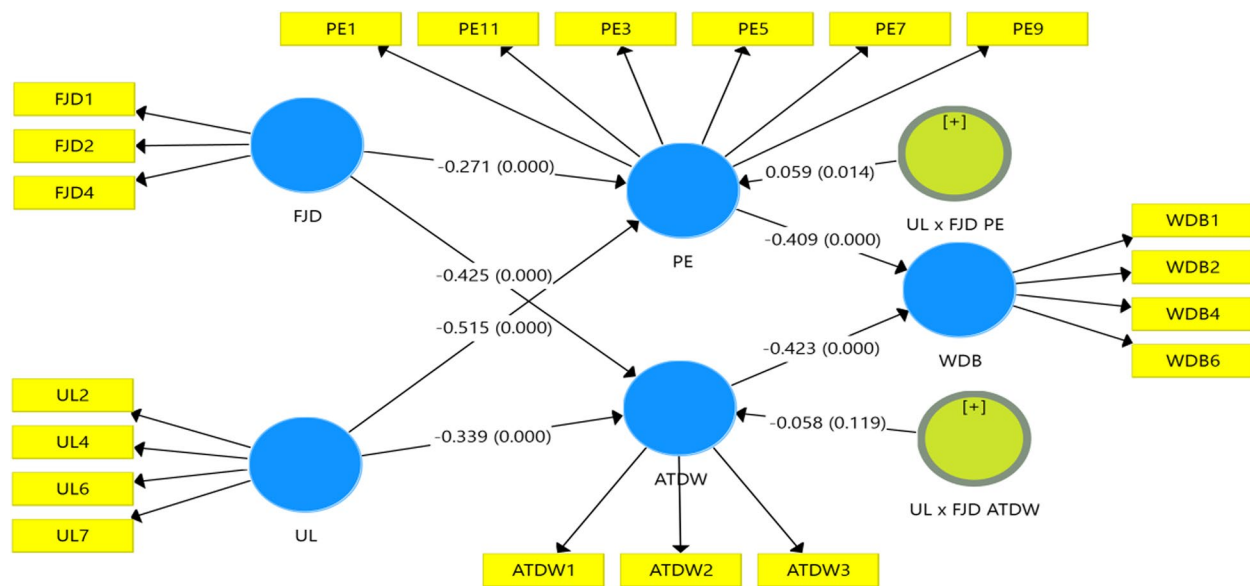
Fig. 3 Mediation-moderation effects

dependency on attitude towards doing well (0.147), financial job dependency on psychological empowerment (0.147), psychological empowerment 67 on work deviant behavior (0.152), unethical leadership on attitude towards doing well (0.147) and ethical leadership on psychological empowerment (0.46) it has large effect. Variance inflator factor (VIF) should be less 3.3 [18] and Hair et al. [26] argued that VIF should be less than < 5.0. The findings showed that the VIF ranges from 1.47 to 1.52 and falls in acceptable range. From the bootstrapping test can interpret interaction term. The t- test provided the cut off value 1.65 (α=0.05) and 2.33 (α=0.01). The finding shows *p*-value (0.02) which is less than the 0.05 which indicates that the financial job dependency moderates the relationship between unethical leadership and psychological empowerment so the H3 is accepted. The finding for last hypothesis shows the p-value (0.12>0.05) which is greater the p-value 0.05, which demonstrate that financial job dependency does not moderates the relationship between unethical leadership and attitude towards doing well. Moderation effect does not exist here so, the H4 is rejected.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the mechanisms through which unethical leadership influences employee work deviant behavior in the healthcare sector. By integrating social exchange theory, this research highlights the critical role of psychological empowerment and performance attitudes as mediating variables in this relationship. The results confirm

that unethical leadership negatively impacts psychological empowerment and employee attitudes toward performance, which, in turn, increases workplace deviant behaviors. These findings align with previous research that has established the detrimental effects of unethical leadership on employee behavior and organizational outcomes [36, 38, 54]. Yet, through empirically demonstrating the mediating roles of psychological empowerment and employee attitudes, this research extends earlier studies and deepens our understanding of the indirect mechanisms by which unethical leadership leads to deviant workplace behaviors.

One of the most significant contributions of this research is that it identifies financial job dependency as a moderating variable in the link between psychological empowerment and unethical leadership. The results indicate that when faced with unethical leadership, highly financially job-dependent employees are less psychologically empowered. This confirms earlier claims that the ability of workers to endure poor working conditions is dictated by economic necessity and dependence on a job [4, 48]. Workers who are dependent on their jobs for their survival may not be as empowered psychologically because they cannot resist corrupt leadership. These findings highlight how crucial financial stability is in influencing the manner in which personnel react to unethical leadership, with broad implications for companies seeking to curtail the damage wrought by such behavior.

Interestingly, evidence went against the hypothesis that financial job dependence is a mediator between unethical leadership and employee perceptions of performance.

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Financial job dependence is possibly not strong enough to act as a shield against the negative impact of unethical leadership on the willingness of employees to perform, as this reverse finding indicates. The role of cultural and religious influences on employee attitudes and behavior is one such explanation for this finding. Monetary incentives may not be as important a factor in employee commitment to their careers in some cultural contexts as are intrinsic values, ethical principles, and spiritual teachings [50]. The finding highlights the sophistication of employee reactions to improper management and recommends that further research investigate more explicitly how cultural, ethical, and economic factors interact to affect work actions.

Overall, this study adds a great deal to the literature by clarifying the conditional impacts of financial job dependency as well as the mediating roles of psychological empowerment and performance attitudes in the association between unethical leadership and work deviant conduct. Policymakers and administrators in the healthcare industry can benefit from these insights. To reduce workplace deviance, organizations should concentrate on cultivating moral leadership techniques that increase psychological empowerment and favorable employee attitudes. Designing solutions to lessen the detrimental impacts of unethical leadership should also take financial dependency into account. Additional moderating factors, such corporate culture and ethical environment, should be investigated in future studies to improve our comprehension of the intricate relationships between workplace conditions, employee behavior, and leadership.

Theoretical implications

This study makes several significant theoretical advances in the subject of health sector management.

First, this study specifies the relationship between unethical leadership and aberrant job behavior by employees, thereby broadening the use of social exchange theory. Specifically, the research proposes that attitudes towards performance and psychological empowerment act as mediating mechanisms between unethical leadership and the behavior of employees in public sector organizations. Through the establishment of these mediating mechanisms, the research promotes the implementation of initiatives by leaders to prevent aberrant health care behaviors.

Second, the study contributes to the literature by illuminating how unethical leadership influences employee behavior, decreasing attitudes and costs to the organization associated with abnormal work practices [20]. Theoretically and empirically connecting immoral leadership to deviant behavior highlights how crucial it is to understand the basic processes that connect these notions. Our

knowledge of the forces operating in the health sector is reinforced by this paper, which gives us valuable information regarding how bad leadership can adversely affect employee conduct.

Third, this study adds to the field of social psychology by investigating the impact of unethical leadership on employees' psychological empowerment. Based on existing research on unethical leadership, the results offer a more detailed explanation of how unethical leadership affects employee behavior through performance attitudes and psychological empowerment as mediators. This view provides more insight into leadership dynamics in the healthcare industry.

Finally, it is crucial to examine financial job dependency as a valuable concept of social exchange theory. This study took evidence from developing economies dealing with various types of cultural and economic issues and explores the moderation of financial job dependency in a new way. The results provide evidence that few-income employees would put up with corrupt management and stick with their firms. In addition to deepening our knowledge of the relationship between employee conduct, unethical management, and financial reliance, this work draws attention to the demand for context-driven approaches to leadership in diverse environments.

Practical implications

This study presents several practical implications for health sector professionals and practitioners.

First, hospitals are mandated to inculcate moral leadership practices within administrative leaders and managers to deter deviant conduct among nurses. It has been established that unethical management practices are adverse in so far as they influence the behavior of nurses. If employees are undervalued or treated shabbily, they might act in a way that they would feel powerful or dominant. For this reason, inculcating a culture of moral leadership is critical in reducing such behavior.

Secondly, the hospital management should implement performance-enhancing practices and boost the psychological empowerment of employees. Empowering the nursing staff with instruments to control difficult and confrontation-prone scenarios is crucial. Based on a study by [38], dishonest behaviors like discrimination and insincerity can reduce employee morale and job satisfaction and, therefore, undermine psychological empowerment. Therefore, managers need to emphasize ethical conduct that encourages engagement and empowerment.

Third, the research suggests that unethical leadership mediates the link between unethical leadership and deviant work behavior through an influence on employee performance attitudes in a negative way. For building an organizational culture of honesty, trust,

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and responsibility, hospital administrations must place utmost priority on ethical leadership. Maintaining staff motivation and inculcating a positive attitude towards great performance requires such a culture.

Finally, there are important real-world implications to learning about the economic reliance of healthcare industry workers. Hospital administrators must be aware of the economic strains on their employees and implement strategies to mitigate these issues. Hospitals can improve employee attitudes toward performance, which will reduce deviant behavior and improve patient care, by improving the financial security and employee satisfaction of nursing staff. This holistic strategy is essential to the creation of a healthy and successful healthcare environment.

Limitations and future research directions

This study acknowledges several limitations and proposes directions for future research.

First, self-reported questionnaires were used to evaluate every variable under investigation. This prompts questions regarding possible biases in self-reported statistics. To strengthen the validity of the found relationships, future studies ought to consider about using different data gathering strategies, such observational approaches or third-party evaluations. Researchers can support the observed links and offer more empirical evidence by combining different approaches.

Second, although this study employed a time lag methodology and gathered data over two separate waves, this strategy was limited by financial and temporal constraints. To further evaluate and support the results, future research could benefit from using either cross-sectional or longitudinal approaches. A more comprehensive view and a more sophisticated comprehension of the relationships being studied would result from such methods.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions limited the study's ability to cover the population. Many respondents prioritized their safety during the health crisis, making them reluctant to participate in physical data gathering. Furthermore, within the larger literature, there is a dearth of studies that are especially concerned with unethical leadership. A thorough analysis of unethical leadership is still lacking, despite the exploration of related topics like toxic leadership and abusive supervision. To further our understanding of unethical leadership, future studies can look at possible changes in this setting and evaluate causal links throughout time.

Fourth, the links between unethical leadership, psychological empowerment, attitudes toward performance, job dependency, and deviant work behavior need to be understood in light of the possible impact of unmeasured variables, such as business characteristics, labor sector, and income. These important outside aspects should be included in future investigations to improve the research model. Furthermore, investigating and incorporating additional unmeasured variables that could influence the observed correlations would yield a more thorough analysis.

Finally, data for this study came solely from developing Asian economies. The findings might have varied compared to other worldwide contexts due to this area's cultural and geographic circumstances. Different industries have different dynamics, work conditions, and organizational structures, which may have an impact on the links this study looks at. This means that extrapolating these findings outside of the hospital sector should be done with caution. Future studies should examine how these associations apply to various geographical locations and occupational contexts, using bigger sample numbers to confirm and more widely generalize the results.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate
The research protocol underwent a thorough evaluation and received approval from the Noon Business at the University of Sargodha Ethics and Research Committee (under ORIC). This study was done by the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants provided their written informed consent before taking part and retained the option to withdraw from the survey at any point before submission.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

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