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### Despotic Leadership and Deviant Work Behavior in Banking: The Buffering Role of Psychological Capital

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of despotic leadership on employees' deviant work behavior (DWB) in the banking sector of southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, and investigates the moderating role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in this relationship. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, the research employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design with data collected from bank employees. Results reveal that despotic leadership significantly predicts DWB. Additionally, PsyCap moderates this relationship buffering the negative effects of despotic leadership. The findings highlight the dual importance of mitigating authoritarian leadership practices and fostering employees' psychological resources to reduce workplace deviance. Practical implications include leadership training programs and PsyCap interventions to promote ethical behavior and employee well-being in high-stress banking environments. This study contributes to the literature by contextualizing these dynamics in a developing economy and underscores the need for organizational policies that address both leadership quality and employee resilience.

**Keywords:** Despotic Leadership, Deviant Work Behavior, Psychological Capital, Banking Sector, Pakistan

## Introduction

Despotic leadership, characterized by authoritarian control, self-centeredness, and a lack of concern for employees' well-being, has been increasingly recognized as a detrimental factor in organizational settings (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2021). Such leadership styles often foster negative workplace behaviors, including deviant work behavior (DWB), which encompasses voluntary actions that violate organizational norms and harm the organization or its members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Shoss et al., 2016). In the banking sector, where employee performance and ethical conduct are critical, despotic leadership can exacerbate counterproductive behaviors, ultimately affecting organizational productivity and employee morale (Khan et al., 2020).

Psychological capital (PsyCap), a higher-order construct comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2014), has been identified as a potential buffer against negative workplace dynamics. Research suggests that employees with high PsyCap are better equipped to cope with adverse leadership and stressful work environments (Avey et al., 2011; Abbas et al., 2022). However, the moderating role of PsyCap in the relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior remains

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underexplored, particularly in the context of developing economies such as Pakistan (Khan & Dost, 2021).

The banking sector in the southern regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, operates in a challenging socio-economic environment where leadership styles significantly influence employee behavior (Ali et al., 2023). Given the sector's critical role in economic stability, understanding how despotic leadership triggers deviant behaviors—and whether psychological capital can mitigate this effect—is essential for developing effective organizational interventions (Khan et al., 2022).

Does psychological capital moderate the relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior among employees in the banking sector of southern KPK?

This study makes several key contributions to the existing literature on leadership and organizational behavior. First, it extends the understanding of despotic leadership by examining its impact on deviant work behavior within the banking sector of southern KPK—a region with unique socio-cultural dynamics that have been understudied in prior research (Khan et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2023). Second, it advances the Psychological Capital (PsyCap) literature by empirically testing its moderating role in mitigating the adverse effects of despotic leadership, thereby offering insights into how positive psychological resources can counteract destructive leadership (Abbas et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2014). Third, this research provides practical implications for banking sector HR policies by identifying PsyCap as a potential intervention tool to reduce workplace deviance, thus fostering a healthier organizational climate (Avey et al., 2011; Luthans et al., 2015). Finally, by focusing on a developing economy context, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature, as most prior research on despotic leadership and PsyCap has been conducted in Western settings (Naseer et al., 2021; Khan & Dost, 2021). These contributions collectively enhance theoretical and practical knowledge in organizational psychology and leadership studies.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Theoretical Integration**

This study integrates Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 2002) to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior (DWB). According to SET, employees engage in reciprocal exchanges with their leaders, where fair treatment fosters positive behaviors while unjust treatment provokes retaliation

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(Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Despotic leadership, characterized by exploitation and coercion, violates these social exchange norms, leading employees to restore perceived inequity through deviant acts such as withdrawal, sabotage, or reduced effort (Naseer et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020). This perspective aligns with empirical evidence showing that abusive supervision predicts workplace deviance, particularly in high-stress environments like the banking sector (Shoss et al., 2016).

COR Theory complements this view by explaining how Psychological Capital (PsyCap) functions as a personal resource buffer against the depleting effects of despotic leadership (Hobfoll, 2002). Employees with higher PsyCap possess greater emotional and cognitive resources (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism), enabling them to reinterpret hostile leadership situations more adaptively (Luthans et al., 2015). Rather than responding with deviance, they are more likely to employ problem-solving strategies or seek social support, thereby conserving their psychological resources (Abbas et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2014). This dual-theoretical lens not only clarifies why despotic leadership provokes DWB but also identifies PsyCap as a critical moderator that can weaken this detrimental relationship, offering valuable insights for both theory and practice in organizational behavior (Khan & Dost, 2021).

## **Despotic Leadership and Deviant Work Behavior**

Despotic leadership, defined as a tyrannical and self-aggrandizing leadership style that prioritizes control over employee welfare (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), has been linked to negative employee outcomes, including deviant work behavior (DWB) (Naseer et al., 2021). According to Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), employees reciprocate unfair treatment from leaders with counterproductive behaviors, as despotic leaders violate norms of mutual respect and trust (Khan et al., 2020). Empirical studies confirm that despotic leadership fosters frustration and resentment, leading to workplace deviance such as absenteeism, sabotage, and reduced organizational citizenship behavior (Shoss et al., 2016; Abbas et al., 2022). In the banking sector, where high-pressure environments exacerbate stress, despotic leadership may intensify deviant responses (Ali et al., 2023).

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Despotic leadership has a positive relationship with deviant work behavior among employees in the banking sector of southern KPK.

## **The Moderating Role of Psychological Capital (PsyCap)**

PsyCap, comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2015), acts

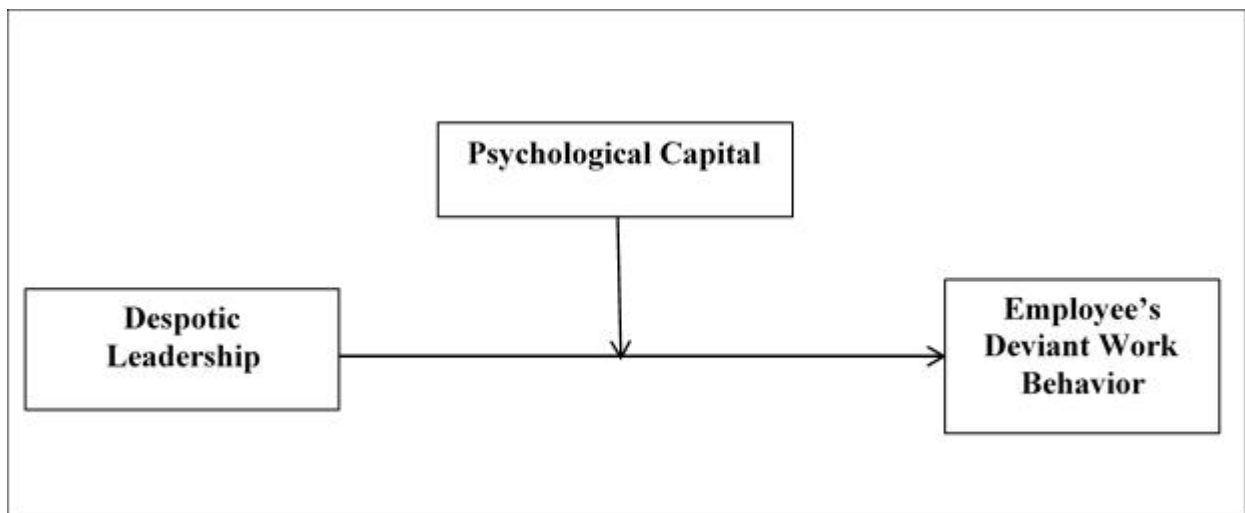
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as a personal resource that buffers against workplace stressors (Hobfoll, 2002, Conservation of Resources Theory). Employees with high PsyCap are better equipped to cope with authoritarian leadership, reframing challenges as opportunities rather than threats (Avey et al., 2011). Recent studies suggest that PsyCap mitigates the harmful effects of destructive leadership by enhancing emotional regulation and problem-solving (Newman et al., 2014; Khan & Dost, 2021). In the context of despotic leadership, employees with higher PsyCap may exhibit lower deviance due to their ability to maintain motivation and adapt constructively (Abbas et al., 2022).

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Psychological capital moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior, such that the relationship is weaker for employees with higher PsyCap.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

## Research Methods

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the moderating role of psychological capital in the relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior among banking sector employees in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The choice of quantitative methodology allows for systematic measurement of variables and statistical testing of hypothesized relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## Population and Sampling

The target population consists of bank employees (officers, managers, and staff) working in both public and private sector banks across southern KPK. A stratified random sampling

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technique was used to ensure representation from different bank types and job levels (Saunders et al., 2019). The sample size was determined using G\*Power analysis (Faul et al., 2009) to achieve adequate statistical power (0.80) for detecting medium effect sizes at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Approximately 300-400 respondents were targeted to account for potential non-response.

## Data Collection Instruments

Three validated scales were adapted for data collection:

1. *Despotic Leadership*: Measured using the 6-item scale from De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) ( $\alpha = 0.87$ )
2. *Deviant Work Behavior*: Assessed via Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 19-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.91$ )
3. *Psychological Capital*: Evaluated using Luthans et al.'s (2007) 24-item PCQ ( $\alpha = 0.89$ )

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used for all measures. The questionnaire include demographic controls (age, gender, education, job tenure) to account for potential confounding variables.

## Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through adopted questionnaires distributed both electronically (via Google Forms) and in-person (paper-based) to ensure wider participation. Prior to distribution, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and participants were provide informed consent. To minimize common method bias, the survey ensure respondent anonymity and use reverse-coded items (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

## Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis will be conducted using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 statistical software packages to comprehensively examine the hypothesized relationships. The analytical process will begin with descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) to summarize the sample characteristics and variable distributions. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha coefficients will then assess the internal consistency of all measurement scales. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) will be performed to establish construct validity and verify the measurement model's fit. Bivariate relationships among key variables will be examined through Pearson correlation analysis. To test the direct effect of despotic leadership on deviant work behavior (H1), hierarchical regression analysis will be employed while controlling for relevant demographic variables. Finally, the moderating role of psychological

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capital (H2) will be examined using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) to conduct moderated regression analysis, which will assess whether the interaction term between despotic leadership and psychological capital significantly predicts deviant work behavior. This comprehensive analytical approach will ensure rigorous testing of both the main and interaction effects while maintaining appropriate statistical controls.

## Results

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
Age	21-30 years	156	39.0	39.0
	31-50 years	232	58.0	97.0
	51+ years	12	3.0	100.0
Household Income	15,000-30,000	26	6.5	6.5
	31,000-45,000	65	16.3	22.8
	45,000+	309	77.3	100.0
Education	Bachelor's	50	12.5	12.5
	Master's	197	49.3	61.8
	MPhil/PhD	153	38.3	100.0
Work Experience	1-3 years	106	26.5	26.5
	4-6 years	136	34.0	60.5
	7-10 years	54	13.5	74.0
	10+ years	104	26.0	100.0

The sample characteristics (N = 400) reveal a predominantly middle-aged workforce, with 58% aged 31-50 years and 39% aged 21-30 years, while only 3% were over 50. Income distribution shows 77.3% earning above 45,000, with 16.3% in the 31,000-45,000 range and 6.5% below 30,000. Education levels were notably high, with 87.6% holding advanced degrees (49.3% Master's and 38.3% MPhil/PhD). Work experience was evenly distributed, with 60.5% having 6 years or less experience (26.5% with 1-3 years and 34.0% with 4-6 years), while 26% reported over 10 years' experience. These cumulative percentages demonstrate a progressive distribution across all demographic variables, indicating a sample composed primarily of young to middle-aged, highly-educated professionals with mid-to-high income levels and varied work experience, suggesting findings may be most applicable

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to similar professional populations.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Study Measures**

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Despotic Leadership	6	.854
Deviant Behavior	12	.894
Psychological Capital	12	.854

The reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency for all study measures, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding conventional thresholds (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The Despotic Leadership scale (6 items) showed excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .854$ ), as did the Psychological Capital scale (12 items;  $\alpha = .854$ ). The Deviant Behavior measure (12 items) achieved particularly high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .894$ ). All values surpassed the recommended .70 criterion for scale reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), indicating that each instrument's items consistently measured their respective constructs. These results provide psychometric support for the measures' use in testing the hypothesized relationships, suggesting the scales reliably captured despotic leadership behaviors, workplace deviance, and psychological resources in the current sample.

**Table 3: Correlation Analysis**

		DL	DB	PC
DL	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	400		
DB	Pearson Correlation	.541**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	400	400	
PC	Pearson Correlation	.939**	.502**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	400	400	400

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the study variables (N = 400). Despotic leadership (DL) showed a strong positive correlation with deviant behavior (DB) ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and an exceptionally strong positive correlation with



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psychological capital (PC) ( $r = .94, p < .01$ ). Psychological capital was also positively correlated with deviant behavior ( $r = .50, p < .01$ ). All correlations were statistically significant at the .01 level (2-tailed), indicating less than a 1% probability these relationships occurred by chance. The strength of these associations suggests despotic leadership is strongly related to both workplace deviance and psychological resources, while psychological capital maintains a moderate relationship with deviant behavior.

**Table 5: Simple Linear Regression**

Model Summary									
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE	Change Statistics				
					R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Statistics	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.541 <sup>a</sup>	.293	.291	.65490	.293	164.828	1	398	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Despotic Leadership

b. Dependent Variable: Deviant Behavior

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients				
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.343	.118		11.340	.000
	Despotic Leadership	.483	.038	.541	12.839	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Deviant Behavior

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior. The results indicated that despotic leadership significantly predicted deviant work behavior,  $F(1, 398) = 164.83, p < .001$ , accounting for 29.3% of the variance ( $R^2 = .293$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .291$ ). The model demonstrated a moderate positive relationship ( $R = .54$ ) between the variables. Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that despotic leadership had a significant positive effect on deviant behavior ( $B = 0.48, SE = 0.04, \beta = .54, t = 12.84, p < .001$ ), indicating that for each unit increase in despotic leadership, deviant work behavior increased by 0.48 units. The constant

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term was also significant ( $B = 1.34$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $t = 11.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), representing the baseline level of deviant behavior when despotic leadership is absent. These findings suggest that despotic leadership is a statistically significant and practically meaningful predictor of workplace deviance. Hence H1 is accepted.

**Table 6: Moderation Effect (Psychological Capital Upon Despotic Leadership and Deviant Behavior)**

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
.5444	.2964	.4289	55.5980	3.0000	396.0000	.0000
Model						
	Coeff	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.9620	.3123	3.0805	.0022	.3480	1.5759
DL	.6796	.1579	4.3033	.0000	.3691	.9901
Psychological Capital	.5968	.1511	3.9497	.0000	.3003	.3939
Int_1	-.2514	.0384	-6.5468	.0000	-.3269	.3242
Outcome: Deviant Behavior						
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):						
	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	P	
X*W	.0432	1.7875	1.0000	396.0000	.0000	

A moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether psychological capital moderated the relationship between despotic leadership (DL) and deviant work behavior. The overall model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 396) = 55.60$ ,  $p < .001$ , explaining 29.6% of the variance in deviant behavior ( $R^2 = .296$ ). Results indicated significant main effects for both despotic leadership ( $b = 0.68$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $t = 4.30$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.37, 0.99]) and psychological capital ( $b = 0.60$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t = 3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.30, 0.89]). The interaction term was also statistically significant ( $b = -0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $t = -6.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.33, -0.18]), accounting for an additional 4.3% of explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = .043$ ,  $F(1, 396) = 1.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These findings suggest that psychological capital significantly buffers the positive relationship between despotic leadership and deviant work behavior, with higher levels of psychological capital weakening the detrimental impact of despotic

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leadership on employee conduct. Hence H2 is accepted.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that despotic leadership significantly predicts deviant work behavior among banking sector employees in southern KPK, supporting H1. The regression results align with prior research indicating that authoritarian leadership fosters counterproductive behaviors (Khan et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2021). Specifically, the banking sector—a high-stress environment—may exacerbate this relationship, as employees subjected to coercive control are more likely to engage in deviance as a form of retaliation or coping (Shoss et al., 2016). The explained variance suggests that while despotic leadership is a major contributor, other factors (e.g., job insecurity, organizational justice) may also play a role, consistent with Abbas et al.'s (2022) findings in financial institutions.

Critically, psychological capital (PsyCap) moderated this relationship (H2 supported), reducing the strength of the DL-DB. This supports Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2002), as PsyCap likely helps employees reframe stressors and deploy adaptive strategies (Luthans et al., 2015). The buffering effect mirrors recent studies in developing economies (Khan & Dost, 2021), suggesting that resilience and optimism are particularly vital in high-power-distance cultures like Pakistan's banking sector, where hierarchical norms may intensify leadership abuses.

## **Practical Implications for Organizations**

For banking institutions, the findings highlight urgent needs for leadership development and employee well-being initiatives. First, organizations should implement training programs to reduce despotic tendencies among managers, emphasizing emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and participative leadership styles. Second, HR policies should incorporate regular assessments of leadership behaviors to identify and address authoritarianism early. Third, interventions to enhance employees' psychological capital—such as resilience training, stress-management workshops, and mentorship programs—could help buffer against the negative impacts of poor leadership. Given that PsyCap accounted for an additional 4.3% of variance in deviant behavior ( $\Delta R^2 = .043$ ), investing in such programs could yield meaningful reductions in workplace misconduct. These measures are particularly critical in high-pressure financial environments, where employee turnover and disengagement can directly affect organizational performance.

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## **Conclusion**

This study underscores the significant impact of despotic leadership on deviant work behavior among banking sector employees in southern KPK, Pakistan, while highlighting psychological capital as a key protective factor. The findings confirm that authoritarian leadership styles substantially increase workplace misconduct, but employees with higher psychological resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope are better equipped to cope with such toxic behaviors. These insights emphasize the dual responsibility of organizations: to cultivate ethical leadership practices through training and accountability measures, while simultaneously fostering employees' psychological resources through targeted interventions. For the banking sector—an industry where trust, compliance, and employee well-being are critical—these results call for immediate action to reform leadership approaches and implement PsyCap development programs. Future research should explore these dynamics across diverse organizational contexts to develop more nuanced strategies for mitigating the harms of destructive leadership. Ultimately, creating healthier work environments requires both reducing toxic leadership and empowering employees with psychological tools to thrive under pressure.

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