The Impact of Despotic Leadership on Emotional Exhaustion: Mediating Role of Rumination and Moderating Role of Organizational Justice

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article **Article History:** Received 08 April 2024 Revised 29 June 2024 Accepted 01 September 2024 Published Online 08 December 2025 **Keywords:** Despotic leadership, Emotional exhaustion, Organizational justice, Rumination.	The aim of the current study is to investigate the impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion with the mediating role of rumination and the moderating role of organizational justice. In this study, data were collected from the sales force of the banking industry through a questionnaire, while 284 valid responses were analyzed. The findings of the study reveal that despotic leadership has a positive effect on emotional exhaustion, while rumination partially mediates this relationship. Furthermore, organizational justice reduces the impact of despotic leadership on rumination. This study is novel in examining the mediating role of rumination between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the study also investigates the moderating role of organizational justice between despotic leadership and rumination, noting that there is a dearth of academic literature on the aforementioned associations. The conservation of resources theory supports the study findings.

1. Introduction

The ability to influence subordinates and followers to help in achieving the organization objectives is called leadership (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018). It plays a key role in the organizational transformation and learning process of employees (Tajeddini et al., 2020). Since its inception, research on leadership has considered its positive aspect (Wang & Xie, 2020). Such types of leadership positively influence followers (Yu et al., 2020). Research on the leadership argues that positive leadership styles, such as empowering leadership (Chiang & Chen, 2020), ethical leadership (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019), authentic leadership (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Wang & Xie, 2020), servant leadership (Chon & Zoltan, 2019; Elche et al., 2020; Nazarian et al., 2020), and transformational leadership (Gui et al., 2020), has received more focus while ignoring the dark aspects of leadership (Naseer et. al., 2016; Shum et al., 2020). Therefore, future research should focus more on the dark aspects of leadership, as they negatively influence organizations and employees (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

Research argues that the aforementioned behavior has caused a number of outcomes such as emotional exhaustion (Schyns, 2013). The term emotional exhaustion is a prolonged state of emotional and physical depletion that occurs due to continuous stress in organizations, personal demands and unnecessary job-related requirements (K. Chen et al. 2019). Out of the various causes of such leadership behavior within organizations, at the supervisor and individual levels, such leaders deplete the social resources of followers, leading to stress and emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is related to the pressures from excessive work with no rest, resulting in physical energy exhaustion (Dahri et al., 2019).

In response to the calls of Jabeen and Rahim (2021), there is a need to identify the mechanism by which despotic leadership can influence subordinates' emotional exhaustion. We therefore extend the literature by assuming rumination as an explanatory variable in the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion. Such leaders exploit employees (Braun et al., 2018) and behave unethically (O'Reilly & Doerr, 2020), resulting in negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, such as rumination, which lead to negative work outcomes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018), including employee emotional exhaustion.

Rumination is a process of continuous, repetitive and passive thinking about a single issue which tend to be negative. Perceived stress experienced by the leader also influences rumination. When subordinates face stress, they tend to ruminate by continually thinking about the same negative thoughts (Li, et al., 2019). A habitual tendency to ruminate is associated with increased sadness, distress and anxiety. Rumination is directly linked with stress, such as when a manager mentally torments employees. This leads to a higher level of stress. Stress creates emotional exhaustion, which harms not only the individual employee but also the overall society (Shah et al., 2023).

This study, therefore, considers the conditional role of organizational justice, which is subordinates' perceptions of how fairly they are treated by the organization (De Clercq et al., 2021). As organizational justice can affect their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in the workplace, subordinates who perceive high organizational justice feel that they are valued, satisfied, and safe (Parray et al., 2023). Therefore, they are more likely to handle stresses by reducing the effects of negative workplace events, such as despotic leadership. When employees subsequently perceive low justice, they are prompted to perceive negative outcomes stressful, and consequently, have higher levels of strains. However, when employees perceive a high level of justice, they label negative outcomes as less negative and, thus, report lower levels of distress (Parray et al., 2023). Tepper (2000) asserts that employees evaluate their justice environment and their justice assessment influences the relationship between the perceived threats encountered at work and the strains experienced subsequently (Pradhan et al., 2020). On the basis of these arguments, the present research tends to fill the gaps by assuming organizational justice as a conditional role to address how despotic leadership affects employee work outcomes (Hetrick et al., 2022).

To date, previous studies were conducted in a particular country to explore the association of despotic leadership with work outcomes (Malik & Sattar, 2019). However, no study has investigated the relationship between negative thoughts (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020), such as rumination, with despotic leadership. The present study identifies the future calls to investigate how despotic leadership influences the lives of subordinates (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020). This study, therefore, aims to empirically

examine the impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion, with mediating role of rumination and moderating role of organizational justice (Hetrick et al., 2022).

The current study gives empirical contribution in several ways. It links the despotic leadership with employee emotional exhaustion through rumination to fill the knowledge gap (Malik & Sattar, 2019). Rumination, as a mediated mechanism, is not yet examined in this relationship (Jabeen & Rahim, 2020). The moderating role of organizational justice between despotic leadership and rumination is also a new contribution in this study. This research provides a theoretical lens on how organizational justice can help followers to handle stress at work (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Prior studies indicate that Asian cultures have high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, and such cultures are well-known for tolerating and supporting stressors in the workplace (Sarwar & Muhammad, 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021). Therefore, this is the first attempt investigating rumination with despotic leadership in the Pakistani banking industry. However, based on the earlier discussion, this study considers the following four important research questions.

- Does the despotic leadership significantly influence the emotional exhaustion in the context of banking industry of Pakistan?
- Does rumination is significantly influenced by the despotic leadership in the context of Pakistani banking industry?
- Does rumination mediate the relationship between the despotic leadership and exhaustion in the banking industry of Pakistan?
- Does organizational justice play a moderating role in the relationship between despotic leadership and rumination in the context of Pakistani banking industry?

2. Literature Review
2-1. Theoretical Foundation
Conservation of resources (COR) theory supports this study, stating that "individuals attempt to maintain the current resources and pursue new resources" (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). This theory suggests that individuals experience stress from an actual or threatened loss of resources, and resource loss is more painful than resource gain (Hobfoll & hirom, 2001). COR theory predicts that stress occurs when individuals lose resources, face threat of resource loss, or fail to gain resources following significant resource investment. This theory states that individuals give more attention and energy to cope with the stress that occurs due to the aggressive and negative behavior of leaders, resulting in a loss of energy resources (Nauman et al., 2018).

The application of COR theory indicates that dark leadership style creates stress and depletion of resources among employees (De Clercq et al, 2018). The loss of resources, resulting from despotic leadership, also leads subordinates to experience increased levels of rumination, leading to emotional exhaustion. Considering the COR theory as a theoretical support, research indicates that despotic leadership cause stress in subordinates, as such leadership style is exploitative and authoritative (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016), leading to negative thoughts in power distant cultures, such as Pakistan. In this way, we theorize that despotic leadership is directly associated with emotional exhaustion and is indirectly related via rumination.

Therefore, using COR theory as a framework, the interaction among rumination, emotional exhaustion, organizational justice, and dictatorial leadership may be comprehended as a complex process of resource loss and protection. A lack of resources brought on by despotic leadership increases ruminating and wears one out emotionally. Organizational justice can lessen these impacts, though, by fostering a climate that encourages resource conservation among staff members (Naseer et al., 2016). Therefore, to improve organizational justice and lessen the detrimental effects of autocratic leadership, managers in Pakistan's banking industry should have a thorough awareness of these dynamics. This will help them establish methods that will ultimately improve employees' well-being and organizational performance (Nauman et al., 2018).

2-2. Empirical Literature Review
2-2-1. Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion
Toxic leadership, in the form of despotic leadership, is characterized by authoritarian control,

indifference to the well-being of employees, and personal benefit exploitation. Despotic leaders frequently enforce tight control, put their own interests ahead of those of their followers, and cultivate an environment of distrust and dread (Murad et al., 2021). Furthermore, feeling emotionally spent and low on emotional resources is referred to as emotional exhaustion, which is a fundamental aspect of burnout. It is a reaction to ongoing stress at work and is more common in high-stress settings like banking (Badar et al., 2023). Organizations face major issues as a result of emotional weariness, which can result in weak job performance, more absenteeism, and higher turnover rates (Islam et al., 2024).

Furthermore, exploitative and dictatorial traits of tyrannical leaders can create a toxic workplace that is marked by rudeness and interpersonal disputes. Employee stress and emotional weariness are made worse by such a poisonous environment (Nauman et al., 2021). Similarly, emotional tiredness, work satisfaction, and organizational commitment were adversely associated with autocratic leadership, while they were positively correlated with other leadership styles (Shah et al., 2023). Furthermore, Pakistan's banking industry is highly competitive and performance-driven, which fosters a high-stress atmosphere conducive to the growth of autocratic leadership. Particularly under authoritarian leadership, the emphasis on achieving strict deadlines and goals might make workers more stressed and emotionally spent (De Clercq et al., 2021).

In addition, despotic leaders who are exploitative and autocratic cause stress for subordinates, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Fontaine et al., 2010). According to Dust et al. (2018), despotic leaders are very low in ethical behavior and personal commitment, thereby creating emotional exhaustion. When employees work seriously hard, beyond their responsibilities and working hours (Johnson et al., 2017), they feel the stress leading to emotional exhaustion (Galiatsatos et al., 2017). When supervisors mistreat subordinates, employees invest their time and energy to cope with these stressors and ignore employee's well-being (De Clercq et al., 2018), thereby leading to a loss of resource, which in turn, deplete employees emotionally.

Literature on the dark leadership style indicates that despotic leaders treat followers unethically, and such leaders have low ethical norms (Han et al. 2020). These leaders negatively affect the followers' work outcomes by using their position to meet personal demands that demotivate employees causing emotional exhaustion (Braun et al. 2018). According to H. Chen et al. (2020), the employees whose supervisors have pessimistic behavior often suffer from emotional burden, resulting in emotional exhaustion. Prior researchers claim that emotional wear and tear is the result of pathetic leadership (Nauman et al., 2018). Some scholars claim that the style of despotic leaders is highly autocratic, leading to less involvement of follower in organizations' decision making, which in turn creates stress for employees (De Clercq et al. 2020).

Drawing from COR theory, research suggest that despotic leadership depletes the social resource of employees, leading to stress and, subsequently, increasing emotional exhaustion (Grandey et al., 2004). Therefore, using COR theory as a foundation, we observed that subordinates' experience of despotic leadership depletes subordinates' energy, thereby increasing emotional exhaustion (Murad et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that:

H_1: Despotic leadership is positively associated with employee emotional exhaustion.

2-2-2. Despotic Leadership and Rumination

Despotic leadership is characterized by actions that are exploitative, controlling, and immoral. Despotic leaders create an atmosphere of mistrust and terror by putting their own objectives ahead of the needs and welfare of their staff. This type of leadership is incompatible with empowering and supportive leadership philosophies that prioritize the growth and welfare of their workforce (Shah et al., 2023). Rumination, on the other hand, is the habitual and passive attention paid to distressing symptoms as well as the potential origins and effects of these symptoms. It is an unhelpful cognitive process that can make stress, anxiety, and depression worse. Rumination at work can lower job satisfaction, hinder productivity, and raise the possibility of burnout (De Clercq et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a difficult work climate, where people constantly feel intimidated and undervalued, is created by autocratic leadership. Employees who feel heightened stress and anxiety may ruminate, thinking back on their unfavorable experiences and the injustices they encounter on a regular basis (Degbey et al., 2024). Similarly, the authoritarian nature of despotic leaders instills fear and insecurity

among employees. This fear, combined with the unpredictability of despotic behavior, can lead to continuous mental replay of distressing events, fostering rumination (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023). Similarly, under autocratic management, workers frequently feel uncontrollably disenfranchised from their positions. When employees struggle to find answers to their work-related difficulties and feel powerless to change their work environment, it can lead to rumination (Wang et al., 2024).

Similarly, disrespectful treatment received from a supervisor requires effort on the part of subordinates, thereby causing psychological costs (Tepper, 2000) and negative thoughts (Harms et al., 2017). Previous research has reported that leaders' despotic behavior has a restricted explanatory value for exhaustion. When employees experience injustice, the reaction of low-level supervisor fairness occurs (Tepper, 2000). Unfair boss behavior leads to ruminative thoughts due to the stress-producing experience of threat involved in perceptions of injustice (Ford & Huang, 2014), thereby negatively affecting subordinates when they experience mistreatment by a supervisor (Volmer & Ron, 2015). Therefore, the hypothesis is that mistreatment due to despotic leadership increases work-related rumination (Shah et al., 2023). Drawing from COR theory, research posit that despotic leadership lead to deplete social resource of subordinates, thereby leading to rumination (Grandey et al., 2004). Using COR theory as a foundation, we observed that subordinates' experience of despotic leadership depletes subordinates' energy and resources loss, increasing rumination (De Clercq et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that:

H$_2$: Despotic leadership is positively associated with rumination.

2-2-3. Mediating Role of Rumination Between Despotic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion

Despotic leadership increases emotional strain on staff members by fostering a hostile and unpleasant work atmosphere. This stress can be a direct cause of emotional tiredness, as can the absence of encouragement and acknowledgment from autocratic leaders. Because of the ongoing pressure and unfavorable interactions, workers under dictatorial leaders frequently suffer from significant levels of stress and burnout (Hetrick et al., 2022). Since rumination exacerbates the detrimental effects of leadership behaviors on workers' mental health, it can act as a mediator in the interaction between emotional weariness and autocratic leadership (Bendixen & Scheel, 2023). Furthermore, employees under autocratic leadership frequently experience unfavorable thoughts and emotions. Employees who are repeatedly exposed to exploitative and dictatorial actions tend to dwell on their bad experiences, which feeds a vicious cycle of anxiety and mental obsession (Murad et al., 2021).

On the other hand, rumination further exacerbates the stress brought on by autocratic leadership. Employees who focus on unfavorable interactions and injustices at work are more stressed out, which might eventually wear them out emotionally (Nauman et al., 2021). Employees under authoritarian leadership, on the other hand, reported higher levels of rumination, which was linked to greater emotional tiredness. Their results highlight how crucial it is to deal with rumination to lessen the negative consequences of autocratic leadership (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023). Finally, rumination is a crucial moderator in the connection between emotional tiredness and dictatorial leadership. Organizations, particularly those in the banking sector in Pakistan, can lessen the negative impacts of autocratic leadership on employee well-being by reducing rumination through the implementation of tailored strategies based on an awareness of this mediation (Shah et al., 2023).

Similarly, rumination is one of the psychological processes leading to emotional exhaustion because subordinates do not accomplish work-related tasks, both physically and emotionally, they think about their work and ruminate about work-related problems. Consequently, this depletes their energy level and social resources (Parray et al., 2023). Therefore, we claim that ruminative thoughts over a long period of time lead to emotional exhaustion (Degbey et al., 2024). Rumination enhances the negative effects of adverse life events on mental condition by enhancing the negative thoughts and recurring thinking about the same negative things. Rumination is positively associated with perceived stress (P. Liu et al., 2019). Rumination is positively associated with negative emotions and decreased suppression of negative information. This uniform mechanism works as a catalyst in the cycle of cognitions and negative emotions (W. Liu et al., 2013). When individual emotional demands exceed their ability in dealing with social interactions at work, emotional exhaustion occurs (Maslach, 2001). Negative leaders exacerbate subordinates' depression (Tepper, 2000) and burnout (Aryee, 2008) since

they mentally torment employees. According to conservation of resources theory, despotic leaders are aggressive and exploitative, using subordinates for self-benefit. This depletes subordinates' resources and increases employee rumination, leading to emotional exhaustion (Degbey et al., 2024). Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that:

> **H₃**: Rumination mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion.

2-2-4. Moderating Role of Organizational Justice Between Despotic Leadership and Rumination

The concept of organizational justice pertains to the degree to which workers believe that workplace policies, practices, and results are equitable. It is commonly broken down into three categories: interactional justice (perceived fairness in the interpersonal treatment received during the execution of procedures), procedural justice (perceived fairness of the process used to determine outcomes), and distributive justice (perceived fairness of outcome distributions) (Shah et al., 2023). Similarly, studies have demonstrated that workers who work under autocratic leadership engage in more rumination (De Clercq et al., 2021). Rumination is sparked by the tense atmosphere that is created by the unfavorable actions of autocratic leaders, such as their authoritarian decision-making, lack of support, and unfair treatment (Degbey et al., 2024). Workers under autocratic managers are more prone to ruminate, as they are always thinking back on their bad experiences and the injustices they encounter (Asim et al., 2024). However, by reducing the perceived severity of the leader's bad behavior, organizational justice may be able to attenuate the association between rumination and dictatorial leadership (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023). The perceptions of high organizational justice can increase the likelihood that workers will believe the company values ethics and fairness, which can mitigate the negative consequences of autocratic leadership (Badar et al., 2023).

Likewise, organizational justice is related with subordinates' perceptions of how fairly they are treated by the organization (Greenberg, 2005). There is significant evidence representing that subordinates' perceptions of organizational justice can affect their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors in the workplace (Yang et.al., 2014). Employees who feel that they are satisfied and safe experience an increase in their well-being in an organizational structure where employees have higher perceived organizational justice (Shah et al., 2023). Organizational justice positively influences the sense of inner satisfaction, and employees feel valued at the workplace (Karakus, 2014). Organizational justice is very important and plays a critical role in shaping the behavior and attitudes of the employees, leading to low level of rumination. This is because employees feel that they are valued and focus on their career development and promotions (Asim et al., 2024).

When employees feel that they got fair treatment and receive merit-based promotions, they less ruminate and become loyal with the organization because, in the context of social exchange theory, if one party gives any favor, the other party feels obliged to give something in return (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023). Regarding the above discussion, it is concluded that the perception of higher organizational justice weakens the relationship between despotic leadership and rumination (Hetrick et al., 2022). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

> **H₄:** Organizational justice moderates the relationship between despotic leadership and rumination.

3. Methodology

3-1. Research Design

The current study has employed a survey research design. This design offers questionnaires for data collection and hypothesis testing (Ary et al., 2002; Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2012). As the researcher collects data in a natural setting with minimal interference, the study is conducted in a non-contrived setting. A field study was conducted to retrieve data from the respondents at the workplace. In order to collect honest responses, the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their data. Data were collected from the employees/salesforce, so the unit of analysis was individual. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is the most appropriate method due to its ability to collect a large amount of information in a short period of time and in an economical manner.

3-2. Population and Sample

The population of the study is the salesforce of banking industry. Banking industry have to work in dynamic, innovative and competitive environment (Slack, 2014). The salesforce of banking industry has to work in challenging environment and meet the goals set by the top management. Therefore, the leaders of the banking industry may have the despotic characteristics as there is a high pressure of work experienced in this sector (Sabir, 2021). In this study, data were collected from the employees of banking sector of Pakistan by dividing the banking sector into four types, including commercial banks, Islamic banks, specialized banks, and microfinance banks. In addition, the employees of each banking sector were divided into three meaningful groups by applying the stratified technique, including top-level management, middle-level management, and lower-level management for collecting data for this study. As far as the sample size is concerned, the sample size depends on the population characteristics (Ruane, 2005). It is also claimed that study should take 10 respondents for each item of the instrument (Steven, 2002). Considering the assumptions of Steven (2002), the study took 10 respondents for each item. A total of 380 questioners were distributed to the sales force of the pharmaceutical industry, from which 284 useful responses were received. The current study employs snowball sampling technique.
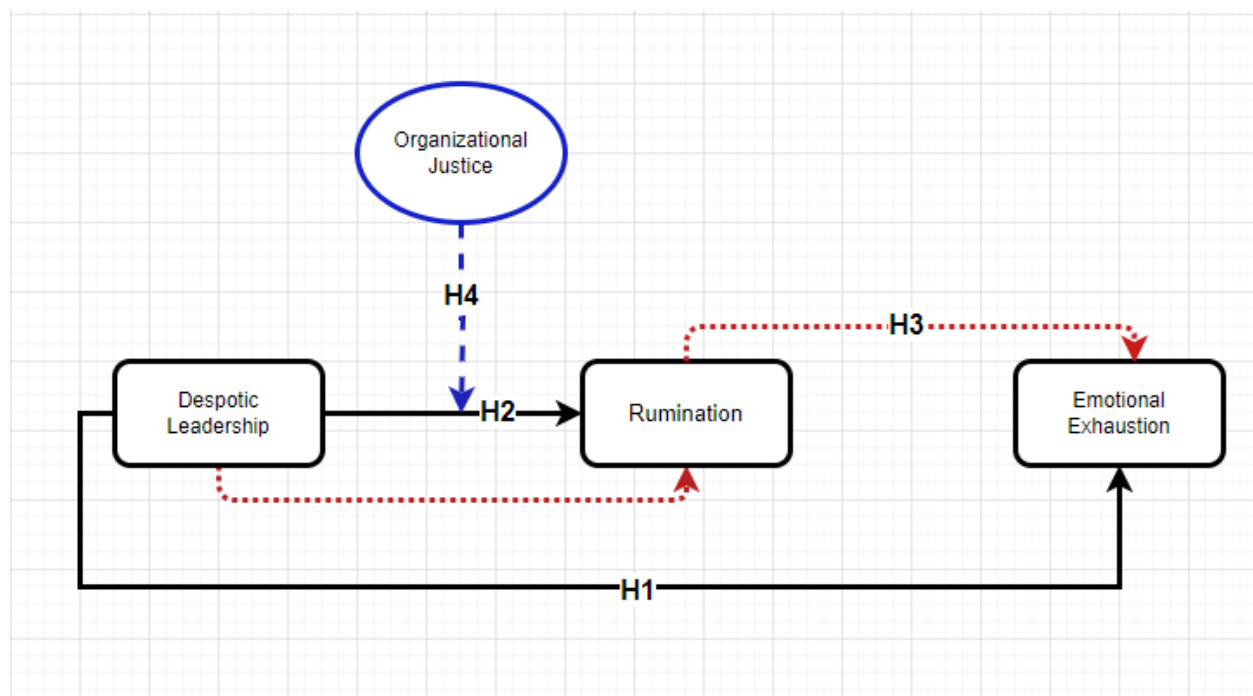

Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework

3-3. Data Collection Instrument and Measures

Despotic leadership was measured using 6 items scale developed by Hanges and Dickson (2004) and also used by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008). Sample items include "My leader expects unquestioning obedience of those who report to him/her," "My leader is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, and gives orders." The alpha reliability for despotic leadership was indicated as α= 0.80. Rumination will be measured using an eight-item scale that was inspired by the intrusiveness subscale of the Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz et al., 1979). Sample items include "I found myself playing the offense over and over in my mind." To measure the employee emotional exhaustion, we used a 9-item scale developed and used by previous researchers (Pines A. &., 1988). Responses were rated using a five-point Likert scale where 1=never and 5=very often. Examples of items are "I feel emotionally exhausted" and "I feel that I can't take it anymore." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was reported as α= 0.76. Organizational justice will be measured using a scale developed by Colquitt (2001) through an exploration of four dimensions that is in alignment with prior studies. However, this study takes only three dimensions: procedural justice (6 items), interpersonal

justice (4 items), and distributive justice (4 items). Sample items include "has (he/she) treated you with dignity" and "is your (outcome) justified, given your performance."

4. Results
4-1. Descriptive Statistics
Table 1 covers the descriptive statistics which reflect the mean, standard deviation, minimum values, and maximum values.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Devi.	Min.	Max.
Despotic leadership	4.67	0.86	0.09	2.11
Rumination	4.72	0.89	0.05	1.29
Emotional exhaustion	4.43	0.91	2.41	2.95
Organizational Justice	3.72	0.9	1.223	7.09

4-2. Data Screening, Normality and Multicollinearity
The data were examined for missing values, outliers, and normality, and were found to be normal with no missing value. Skewness and kurtosis were used to assess the normality. Values of skewness and kurtosis were within the recommended ranges (Values are ±1 for skewness, and ±3 for kurtosis, respectively), so the data were found to be normal. As presented in Table 2, multicollinearity was also assessed using tolerance and VIF, indicating that VIF <5; therefore, there is no issue of multicollinearity.

Table 2. Multicollinearity

	Tolerance	VIF
DL	.343	4.465
RU	.354	3.432
CSE	.332	1.678

Note: *Dependent Variable= EE*

4-3. Reliability and Validity Analysis
The current study follows the instructions proposed by Anderson and Anderson (1988). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied in two stages. In the first stage, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The reason for performing the confirmatory factor analysis is that current scale was taken from previous studies and established on theoretical perspectives (Anderson & Anderson, 1988). For the current study, the model is fit, i.e., $x2/df$ = 2.98, CFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.89, SRMR = 0.066, and RMSEA = 0.058. Additionally, the values of factor loadings were noted and found to be within the acceptable limits and ranges. As per reliability analysis all the measures are reliable.

Table 3. Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Despotic leadership	0.823	6
Emotional exhaustion	0.799	9
Rumination	0.866	8
Organizational Justice	0.746	14

4-4. Common Method Variance
CVM problem is associated with studies containing self-reports from the same resources such as questionaries' studies and interviews. There are two ways for detecting and removing common method bias. The first way is the methodological and the second one is the analytical way. The first approach claims that there will be no issue of common method bias when we collect data in time lags. The second one uses Harman's single factor test to detect that issue. In the current study, Harman's single factor test shows that 27.432% of the variance is explained by one factor, so there is no issue of common method bias.

4-5. Direct and Indirect Effects Path

Secondly, for path coefficients, current research employed the measurement model, and fit indices value was noted to be good and in a normal limit/range, i.e., $x2/df$ = 3.85, CFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.86, SRMR = 0.076, and RMSEA = 0.058. Table 4 shows the path coefficients which indicates that despotic leadership have significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion of the subordinates (β = .16, P = 0.000, CR = 3.11), thereby confirming the hypothesis H1. These findings are consistent with prior studies (Braun et al., 2018; Dust et al., 2018). Similarly, despotic leadership have a positive impact on rumination (β = .18, P = 0.000, CR = 3.23) which supports the hypothesis H2 and is also consistent with prior studies (Grandey et al., 2004; Tepper, 2000). The mediation of rumination between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion was tested using both paths. First, the direct path between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion was tested and noted as significant (β=.17, P=0.00). Second, the indirect path was tested and investigated by multiplying the two paths (i.e., coefficient of despotic leadership rumination × rumination – emotional exhaustion) and a significant effect was found (i.e., indirect path=.11, P=0.00). The direct and indirect paths are noted to be significant. Therefore, rumination partially mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and emotional exhaustion, which confirms our suggested hypothesis H3.

Table 4. Direct and Indirect Path

Hypothesis	B	C.R	P	Result
DL-EE	0.16	3.10	0.000	H_1 Supported
DL-RU	0.18	3.23	0.000	H_2 Supported
RU-EE	0.60	10.19	0.000	
OJ-RU	0.05	1.20	0.11	
Mediating effect of Rumination				
DL-RU-EE				
Direct path	0.17		0.00	H_3 Supported
Indirect path	0.11		0.00	

Note: - ***DL***=Despotic leadership, ***EE***=Emotional exhaustion, ***RU***=Rumination, ***OJ***=Organizational justice.

4-6. Moderating Effects

Finally, using the hierarchical regression method moderating effects of organizational justice were tested. In the first step, organizational justice and despotic leadership were included and regressed with rumination and its significance was found. The study shows both a significant impact of despotic leadership (β=.23, P=0.00) on rumination and insignificant impact of organizational justice (β=.01, P=.55) on rumination. In the second step, a (conditional) interactional term DL×OJ was examined to see its effect on rumination and a significant impact was revealed (β=.20, P=0.00). Therefore, the study noted that individuals with organizational justice weaken the association between despotic leadership and rumination and vice versa. These results support and confirm the proposed hypothesis H4. These results support the findings of prior research (Greenberg, 2005; Karakus, 2014). This means that employees feels that they are satisfied, safe, and that their well-being increases in an organizational structure where they have higher perceived organizational justice. When employees feel that they got fair treatment and receive merit-based promotions, they ruminate less and become loyal with the organization.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression for Moderation

Variables	M1(B)	M1(B)
Step 1		
DL	.23**	
OJ	0.01	
R2	0.14	
Step 2		
DL*OJ		.20**
R2		0.29
Delta R2		0.22

Note: - ***DL***=Despotic leadership, ***CSE***=Core self-evaluation; **P<0.01, *P<0.05"

4-7. Correlation Matrix/Analysis

Table 6 shows correlation matrix which reflect the relationship among variables. The objective of correlation matrix is to test the severity of relationship among variables. There is a high significant positive relationship between despotic leadership and rumination. Despotic leadership shows positive influence on emotional exhaustion. There is a significant positive relationship between rumination and emotional exhaustions.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

Variables	Despotic Leadership	Rumination	Emotional Exhaustion	Organizational Justice
Despotic Leadership	1			
Rumination	.424 **	1		
Emotional exhaustion	.608 **	.344 **	1	
Organizational Justice	.702*	.664*	.688*	1

4-8. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the impact of despotic leadership on emotional exhaustion through explanatory role of rumination and conditional role of organizational justice. The hypothesis 1, arguing that autocratic leadership is positively correlated with emotional tiredness in employees, is accepted, and this has important ramifications for the banking industry in Pakistan. This study demonstrates the negative effects of authoritarian leadership styles on worker well-being by showing that workers under autocratic leadership are more prone to suffer from severe emotional weariness. This association adds to the difficulties experienced by banking professionals in a field already marked by high levels of stress and demanding workloads (Galiatsatos et al., 2017). With its focus on control, use of harsh measures, and lack of support, despotic leadership exhausts workers' psychological and emotional reserves, resulting in burnout and poor work output. This realization necessitates a reevaluation of leadership techniques and the application of tactics to lessen the detrimental impacts of certain leadership philosophies for managers (H. Chen et al., 2020). Emotional weariness can be lessened by supporting leadership development initiatives that prioritize empathy, support, and employee empowerment as well as by creating an equitable and just company culture. Banks can increase employee well-being, decrease employee turnover, and boost overall organizational performance by addressing the underlying causes of stress and fostering a more supportive work environment (Han et al. 2020).

The Pakistani banking industry will be greatly impacted if Hypothesis 2, which holds that rumination is positively correlated with dictatorial leadership, is accepted. This research suggests that workers under autocratic management are more likely to ruminate—a term that refers to recurrent, negative, and persistent thoughts about upsetting events. This propensity can increase workers' mental strain and impair their capacity to concentrate on work duties in the taxing and high-stress atmosphere of banking (De Clercq et al., 2021). Despotic CEOs instill fear and uncertainty in their workforce by acting in an authoritarian and punitive manner, which makes them focus on their own transgressions and perceived injustices. Constantly thinking negatively can have bad effects on productivity, job satisfaction, and mental health risk (Shah et al., 2023). Understanding this connection highlights for managers how critical it is to implement more equitable and supportive leadership techniques (Wang et al., 2024). Managers can help lessen rumination and its negative impacts by creating a welcoming and inclusive work atmosphere, encouraging open communication, and offering mental health resources. This will eventually improve employee well-being and organizational performance (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023).

The hypothesis 3, according to which autocratic leadership and emotional exhaustion in the banking sector of Pakistan are mediated by rumination, is accepted. This finding emphasizes the importance of internal cognitive processes in comprehending workplace dynamics (Hetrick et al., 2022). This research implies that workers in Pakistani banks may experience increased emotional tiredness as a result of persistent and bothersome thoughts about work-related stressors when faced with autocratic leadership (Bendixen & Scheel, 2023). This study emphasizes the psychological mechanisms through which dictatorial leadership affects employee well-being in this particular organizational context by recognizing rumination as a mediator (Murad et al., 2021). By taking these

findings into consideration, Pakistani banks may be able to develop tactics that reduce emotional tiredness and enhance workers' general resilience and productivity (Nauman et al., 2021).

The hypothesis 4, which states that organizational justice moderates the association between rumination and dictatorial leadership in the banking industry of Pakistan, is accepted. This implies that fairness and equity views play a critical role in organizational settings (De Clercq et al., 2021). This research suggests that the detrimental effects of autocratic leadership on rumination may be lessened when workers perceive better levels of organizational justice, such as fairness in decision-making, transparency, and equitable treatment (Degbey et al., 2024). On the other hand, workers under autocratic leadership may experience more rumination when there is a lack of organizational justice, which could result in stress and a decline in well-being (Asim et al., 2024). These findings highlight how crucial it is to advance justice and fairness in organizational procedures in order to mitigate the negative impacts of autocratic leadership on the mental well-being of bank employees in Pakistan (Badar et al., 2023).

4-9. Implications for Managers

This research delves into the complex relationships that exist between dictatorial leadership, rumination, emotional weariness, and organizational justice in the banking industry of Pakistan. Knowing these links offers practical insights that banking organizations may use to reduce the negative consequences of autocratic leadership and promote a more positive work environment. Creating and administering training programs with a focus on transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership are also significant. These programs should be targeted to provide leaders with the tools they need to govern with justice, empathy, and honesty. Additionally, leadership actions should be evaluated on a regular basis using 360-degree feedback systems. These evaluations offer chances for remedial action and are capable of spotting authoritarian tendencies early on.

Nevertheless, authoritarian management can make matters worse by fostering a climate in the workplace where workers feel weak and unappreciated, which raises stress levels and causes burnout. Positively, managers who understand the negative consequences of autocratic leadership can take steps to lessen emotional weariness by cultivating a more accepting and inclusive work environment. This can involve supporting professional development, encouraging work-life balance and offering chances for employee feedback. Managers in Pakistan's banking industry can boost overall organizational performance, lower staff turnover, and promote employee well-being by addressing the detrimental effects of autocratic leadership.

Moreover, a dictatorial leader's precise instructions and controlled atmosphere can lessen uncertainty and ambiguity in a high-stress setting, such as banking, by giving staff members a clear route and goals. With less time spent overanalyzing choices and actions, employees may focus more confidently on their tasks thanks to this clarity. By realizing this potential advantage, managers can leverage the methodical and decisive qualities of autocratic leadership to foster a more secure and less ruminative work environment, which will ultimately improve productivity and focus among their staff.

Furthermore, rumination—a condition in which workers keep thinking about unpleasant encounters and experiences—is frequently brought on by stress. Their emotional weariness is caused by this mental obsession, which increases their stress levels. It is possible for managers to disrupt this loop by putting strategies into place once they realize it. Managers can mitigate the emotional tiredness that dictatorial leadership may otherwise intensify by reducing the inclination for rumination, encouraging open communication, and giving resources for stress management. Managers that are aware of this mediation can foster a more encouraging work atmosphere, which will ultimately improve productivity and employee well-being.

Finally, this effect can be considerably mitigated by high organizational justice, which is defined as the belief among employees that policies, practices, and interactions are fair. The detrimental effects of authoritarian leadership on workers' propensity to ruminate are mitigated when staff members believe they are treated fairly and equally in the organization. This indicates that managers might lessen the negative consequences of autocratic leadership by cultivating an atmosphere of organizational justice. Rumination and the stress it causes can be decreased by implementing open and transparent decision-making procedures, assuring that resources are distributed fairly, and upholding fair interpersonal interaction. This promotes a more positive and productive work atmosphere.

Furthermore, this study makes it possible for the banking sector to improve organizational justice. To guarantee fairness and transparency, it is necessary to standardize organizational processes for resource distribution, promotions, and performance reviews. The perception of procedural justice among employees can be improved by using clear and consistent methods. Employee participation in decision-making is encouraged, particularly when it directly impacts them. This collaborative method can lessen the detrimental effects of autocratic leadership and raise opinions of procedural justice. Similarly, by preserving open lines of communication where information is openly exchanged and transparency is practiced, this study helps the banking sector to develop trust and transparency.

In addition to fostering trust, this can lessen the damaging effects of autocratic leadership on emotional tiredness. The study concludes with a discussion of the negative consequences of autocratic leadership, which are mediated by rumination and tempered by organizational fairness, on worker well-being. By putting these useful recommendations into practice, Pakistani banking institutions can lessen the negative effects of autocratic leadership and foster a happier, more supportive workplace. These tactics eventually increase organizational effectiveness and sustainability in addition to improving employee well-being.

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