



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Spiritual Leadership: A Beacon of Stress Relief for University Educators - Trust, Commitment, and Whole Life Management in Focus

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of spiritual leadership on stress among university teachers, focusing on the mediating roles of trust and commitment, and the moderating role of whole life management. The aim is to understand how spiritual leadership affects stress levels within the educational sector, specifically among university faculty. A cross-sectional research design targeted private universities in Lahore, Pakistan, with data collected via adapted questionnaires. Statistical analyses showed significant relationships between spiritual leadership, trust, commitment, and stress. Trust and commitment were found to mediate the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, while whole life management did not significantly moderate these relationships. The findings enhance our understanding of stress management strategies in educational institutions. Limitations of the study include the use of adapted questionnaires and the exclusive focus on private universities in a specific region. Despite these limitations, the research highlights the role of spiritual leadership in reducing stress among university faculty and suggests practical implications for educational leaders. This study contributes to the literature on stress management in educational settings and opens avenues for future research to explore further the impact of spiritual leadership and holistic well-being practices. This study's insights are particularly relevant for educational leaders seeking to foster a supportive and stress-free environment for faculty. By emphasizing spiritual leadership and addressing trust and commitment, educational institutions can better manage faculty stress, potentially leading to improved job satisfaction and retention. Further research is encouraged to validate these findings across different regions and types of educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of academia, where the pursuit of knowledge intersects with the demands of modern education, the well-being of university educators stands as a pivotal concern. The pressures inherent in academic life, ranging from research expectations to teaching responsibilities,

often cast a shadow of stress over educators, impacting both their professional performance and personal satisfaction. However, amidst these challenges, particularly faced by developing countries like Pakistan, a beacon of hope emerges in the form of spiritual leadership—a guiding light that offers relief from the burdens of stress. Pakistan is facing a lot of challenges in every aspect of life. Its people are talented and hardworking. They are very keen to see Pakistan out of these challenges. Currently, Pakistan is facing the serious issue of a bad economy. The value of the Pak-rupee is falling day by day, increasing prices of daily useable goods and services and closure of business units are getting common nowadays. In these severe circumstances, Pakistan's service sector did remarkable exports in the year 2021-2022 and its share of the GDP has reached nearly 61% (Khan, 2022). One of Pakistan's service units is the education sector. It is growing with every passing day with new colleges and universities despite facing a few challenges. Job stress is one of them (Rehmani et al., 2018). Haque et al. (2019) claim that job stress is found in the universities of Pakistan. Faisal, Noor and Khair (2019) and Malik and Björkqvist (2018) assert that depression and stress cause severe issues to the mental health of university teachers in Pakistan. The human resource of any organization is the backbone of the organization, especially for the service sector. It creates a competitive advantage for its organization (Elrehail et al., 2019). Its sound mental health ensures the success of the organization. Hence, human resource must be stress-free, tension-free, and anxiety-free. Stress is a state of getting disturbed mentally and psychologically. It causes fatigue, depression, anxiety, and tension in the individuals who are working in an organization (Usman et al., 2011). When an individual feels stressed during his job at work, his behavior towards his work gets negatively changed and it affects his performance badly (Riyadi, 2019; Mahmood & Tanveer, 2021). Hence, stress creates mental disorders in an employee at work and makes him unable to perform his assigned tasks efficiently. If the issue of stress is not overcome at an early stage, it can cause permanent health deficits which cannot be controlled at a later stage (Baek et al., 2021). Stress is a hot issue in the whole business world. It affects employee performance adversely and causes an employee mental disorder or loss of confidence (Thanem & Elraz, 2022; Tanveer, 2024). It threatens organizational success. Hence, stress management is crucial for organizational success (Altindag, 2020). Akhtar et al. (2018) claim that stress adversely affects the performance of Pakistan's service sector and Faisal, Noor and Khair (2019) claim that stress and depression are major issues of the teachers of universities of Pakistan. The studies reveal that stress is the primary and major death cause in the world (Pezel et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). There are other serious consequences of job stress which cannot be ignored (Bibi et al., 2020; Summers et al., 2020). Usman et al. (2011) suggest future research to look for antecedents of stress in the universities of Pakistan and Faisal, Noor, Khair, et al. (2019) and Quraishi et al. (2018) suggest to look for factors to eliminate or minimize stress among the university teachers of Pakistan. Therefore, there is a dire need of understanding the factors or elements that reduce stress at the workplace particularly the universities of Pakistan being the major contributor to the economy of Pakistan.

Therefore, this research aims to investigate the impact of spiritual leadership on individuals' stress levels. Firstly, it seeks to understand whether spiritual leadership has a direct effect on individuals' stress. Secondly, it focuses on exploring whether whole life management acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, potentially influencing the strength or direction of this relationship. Thirdly, it aims to examine whether trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, indicating whether trust acts as a mechanism through which spiritual leadership influences stress levels. Lastly, it aims to assess whether commitment serves as a mediating factor between spiritual leadership and stress, suggesting whether commitment mediates the relationship between the two variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual leadership and Stress

Spiritual leadership is a type of leadership in which a leader develops one's closer link to God. It makes one's firm belief in God Almighty (Thompson, 2017). This establishes trust among employees that helps to improve their performance by developing an entrepreneurial attitude and motivating them to perform in the best interests of the organization (Usman et al., 2021). Spiritual leaders produce altruistic love, self-efficacy, and continuous learning in followers because spiritual leaders are commonly followed by people and impact them to perform welfare activities (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2019). Sheikh et al. (2019) claim that spiritual leadership has positive impact on job stress. The dawn of the modern world has ushered in profound transformations within organizational dynamics, significantly impacting the realm of spiritual leadership (Oh & Wang, 2020; Tanveer & Hassan, 2020; Shah et al., 2023). Prior to delving deeper into the concept of spiritual leadership, it is imperative to comprehend how employees' spirituality fosters a sense of connection with the organization. This emotional bond not only augments their intrinsic motivation but also instills a profound sense of belongingness, thereby amplifying productivity and overall happiness levels (Low & Ayoko, 2020). Spiritual leadership, in essence, cultivates a psychological bond between leaders and employees, engendering a remarkable sense of empowerment and identity beyond mere employment. This inner motivation, spurred by spiritual leadership, fuels heightened expectations from the organization and bolsters workplace loyalty and performance (Sani & Maharani Ekowati, 2020). Furthermore, it imbues individuals with the resilience needed to embrace change, positioning them to navigate the exigencies of the modern world with agility and adaptability. Importantly, spiritual leadership engenders an awareness of change as a continual process vital for organizational development and personal growth. While spiritual leadership diminishes stress levels, its efficacy is moderated by various psychological, social, and professional factors, with whole life management emerging as a pivotal moderator in this context (Supriyanto et al., 2020). By elucidating the intricate interplay between spiritual leadership, stress, and satisfaction, this research endeavors to offer a nuanced understanding of organizational dynamics and stress management strategies in the contemporary landscape.

It's commonly observed that resilient employees tend to experience lower levels of stress. However, stress itself is akin to a double-edged sword; when handled positively, it can be a motivating force, but when overwhelming, it can significantly hamper productivity (Vijayan, 2017). Stress is essentially the adverse mental and physical response of individuals to challenges in their job tasks (Beehr et al., 1976). Defining stress precisely is challenging; some describe it as the body's physical reaction to tasks (Szabo et al., 2012). It encompasses any aspect of an organization's environment detrimental to employee well-being, manifesting in decreased productivity and unmet financial needs (Caplan, 1975). Numerous scholars have examined stress and its correlation with various negative workplace behaviors, such as decreased performance and self-confidence, job dissatisfaction, and alcoholism (Vijayan, 2017; Vladut & Kallay, 2010). Role ambiguity and increasing job responsibilities contribute to heightened stress levels among employees (Karasek, 1990). In today's fast-changing organizational landscape, characterized by the imperative of continuous improvement and innovation, resilience is crucial for individuals to cope with mounting job demands while maintaining personal well-being (Vladut & Kallay, 2010). Resilient managers play a pivotal role in mitigating job stress and fostering employee performance (Avey et al., 2009). The rise of globalization has intensified work demands, encroaching on employees' social and family time, thereby exacerbating work-related stress and dissatisfaction (Tennant, 2001). Against this backdrop, spiritual leadership emerges as a potential mitigator of stress, forming the basis of the first hypothesis in this research:

H1: Spiritual leadership impacts stress.

Whole Life Management:

A person's whole life encompasses two dimensions i.e. personal and professional. Personal life refers to the aspects of life relevant to his family, friends and relatives whereas professional life refers to the aspects of life relevant to his business, occupation or job. Both aspects of life are equally important for a person (Rasskazova & Savina, 2021). Therefore, both aspects of life need to be managed properly that refers to as whole life management. When he gives more time to one aspect of life as compared to the other, work life imbalance occurs because of this mismanagement. It gets difficult for a person to satisfy both family and professional life because if he finds good atmosphere at work, good peers and good remuneration, it shows he is fully satisfied with his job but this ignores his family life and vice versa. This conflict gradually moves from family to workplace (Wayne et al., 2019). Hence, he would be under stress. In this scenario, a spiritual leader can play his role by motivating such person towards minimizing his stress level (Tabor et al., 2020). On the other hand, whole life management can moderate the relationship of spiritual leadership and stress (Ahmad et al., 2021). An individual's professional and personal lives intersect, each carrying its own significance (Zahoor et al., 2021). With the advent of the new century marked by rapid technological advancements and increased multiculturalism, managing work-life balance has become increasingly complex, particularly in organizations experiencing heightened pace (Dizaho & Othman, 2013; Lewis, 2009). Various organizational behaviors can trigger stress, often resulting in high rates of burnout among individuals (Fuadiputra & Novianti, 2020). The conflict between work and family responsibilities, known as work-family conflict (WFC), arises when individuals struggle to balance their commitment to both realms, leading to dissatisfaction and stress (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001). Time management becomes critical in such scenarios, as individuals strive to meet the demands of both spheres, yet balancing them remains elusive (Warner & Hausdorf, 2009). Under the lens of role theory, conflicts emerge when individuals allocate disproportionate time to one domain, affecting satisfaction and performance (Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, et al., 1994). Stress-induced burnout is a common consequence, influencing job performance negatively (Fuadiputra & Novianti, 2020). Gender dynamics also play a role, shaping responses to workplace-family conflicts, with potential implications for emotional exhaustion, particularly among females (Butler & Skattebo, 2004). Overcoming such challenges requires motivation from both intrinsic (spirituality) and extrinsic (job rewards, recognition) sources (Usman et al., 2021). A robust spiritual life enhances intrinsic motivation, aligning individuals with their deeper purpose and contributing to job satisfaction (Aghdasi et al., 2011; Jia et al., 2014). Embracing whole life management allows organizations to recognize the interconnectedness of an employee's spiritual, personal, and professional lives, potentially enhancing job satisfaction and reducing organizational stress (Pradhan & Jena, 2015). The spiritual aspect of an individual's life significantly influences their professional conduct, profoundly impacting organizational performance (Pradhan & Jena, 2015; Riyadi, 2021). Spiritual beliefs foster integrity and honesty in work, enhancing both individual and organizational outcomes (Hoffman, 2010; Mucevher & Çetinceli, 2022). This emerging dimension in the modern workplace imbues individuals with a deeper sense of purpose, aligning their motivations with the organization's objectives (Neck & Milliman, 1994). Personal spirituality correlates directly with mental and physical well-being, contributing to job satisfaction and overall health (Elam, 2000). At the organizational level, spirituality fosters a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation, transforming employees into advocates for the organization (Hawley, 1993). Whole-life management emerges as a crucial moderator in the relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational stress, shaping the dynamics of this interaction (Fuadiputra & Novianti, 2020). Hence, the hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Whole life management moderates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress.

Trust:

Trust is one's firm belief in the reliability of someone (Przegalinska et al., 2019). Trust in the organization develops friendly behavior among individuals. Employees trust their organizations and organizations respond in the same way. It is reciprocal to their behaviors (Joo et al., 2022). Terzi et al. (2020) claim that spiritual leadership significantly and positively impacts trust and Jiang et al. (2022) argue that stress literature shows a negative relationship of stress with trust. Hence, trust creates a link between spiritual leadership and stress. Trust fosters amicable interactions among individuals, facilitating the exchange of ideas and nurturing positive relationships (Kong et al., 2014). This reciprocal understanding between individuals and organizations forms the basis of trust, strengthening the employee-organization relationship (Shore et al., 2006). Employees who trust their organization demonstrate greater loyalty and are willing to invest beyond conventional working hours, bolstering organizational resilience (Paschina, 2023). Trust mitigates organizational stress, reducing job dissatisfaction and turnover rates (Lambert et al., 2022). Similarly, commitment plays a crucial role as a mediator of stress, fostering a sense of belongingness and passion for organizational goals (Shrotryia et al., 2022). Employees committed to their organization experience fewer stressors, leading to enhanced job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2020). The interplay between trust, commitment, and stress underscores their significance in organizational dynamics, as evidenced by prior research (Bishopp et al., 2020). Trust and commitment serve as vital mediators between spiritual leadership and stress, shaping organizational well-being.

H3: Trust mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress.

Commitment

Commitment is dedication, devotion, or loyalty to a cause. It is something that induces someone to do something in the future as per agreement (Okon et al., 2018). Commitment comprises many organizational behaviors actioned by an individual that compels him/her to be a part of that organization and perform good actions that benefit both the individual and the organization (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). The performance of a committed individual over a less committed individual is much better than the latter. Commitment is the devotion to being attached to an organization to serve better and the desire to be a part of that organization as long as they can (Utami et al., 2021). This is how individuals think they are because of their organization. Jeon and Choi (2020) argue that spiritual leader through his compassionate love may create motivation and commitment in employees that would lead to make him feel psychologically safe (stress-free). Commitment has emerged as a prominent concept in management literature, garnering significant attention in recent times (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). Various authors provide diverse definitions, yet commitment essentially entails the attachment of an individual to the organization, driven by factors such as monetary rewards, loyalty, and emotional bonds (Mahmood Aziz et al., 2021; Qin, 2022). This two-dimensional model underscores commitment's essence, emphasizing both value addition to the organization's goals and the individual's steadfast dedication (Hussain et al., 2020). Strong personal satisfaction, influenced by shared values and beliefs, fosters deep loyalty to the organization, manifesting in prolonged tenure and a sense of responsibility towards organizational success (Roney & Soicher, 2022). Commitment encompasses various organizational behaviors, motivating individuals to contribute positively to organizational objectives (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). This commitment evolves through stages, from pre-joining expectations to emotional loyalty developed during organizational tenure (Loan, 2020). It engenders resilience in employees, enabling them to embrace change and adapt to organizational transformations (İşıaık & Bülbül, 2022). Acting as a mediator, commitment fosters psychological attachment to the organization, nurturing positive relationships and enhancing task clarity, thereby mitigating organizational stress (Aghdasi et al., 2011). Therefore, it is hypothesized that commitment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress.

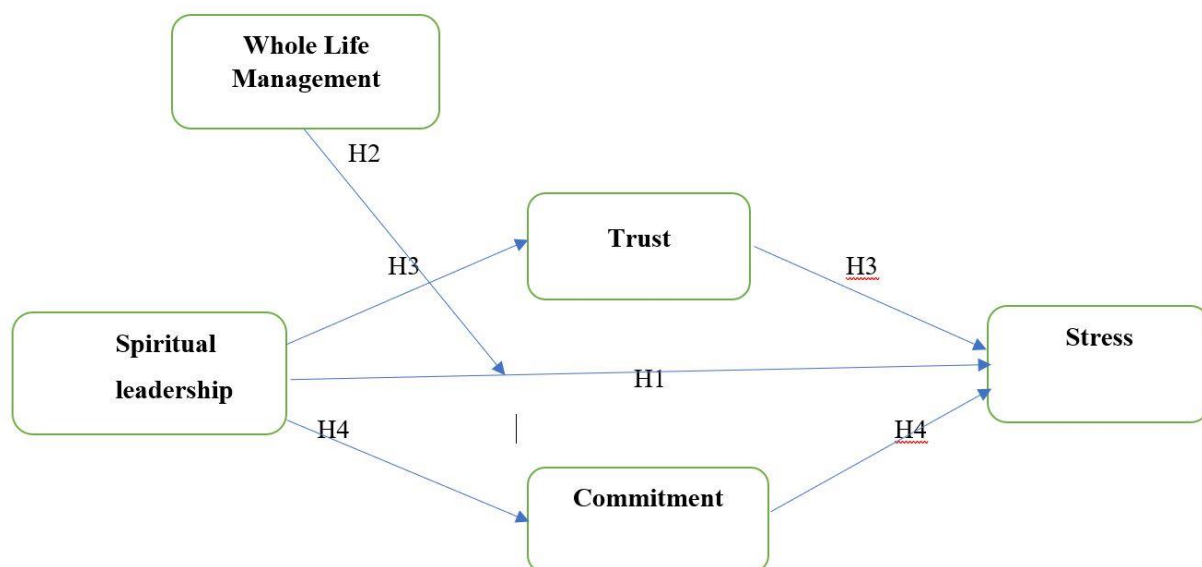
H4: Commitment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress.

METHODOLOGY

The research design of this study is quantitative based on positivism approach. According to positivism approach, the hypotheses have been developed and then tested using different statistical analyses in this study. The data collection is done through survey questionnaire that has been adopted from previous researchers having five point Lickert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The construct spiritual leadership has been operationalized through 14 items (Fry & Matherly, 2006). The construct stress has been operationalized through eight items (Garg & Saxena, 2020). The construct whole life management has been operationalized through 19 items (Eaves et al., 2008; Hassan et al., 2022). The construct organizational commitment has been operationalized through 11 items and organizational trust through 6 items (Loes & Tobin, 2020). The probability sampling technique i.e. stratified sampling has been used in this study to collect data. The target population i.e. university teachers is divided into two strata. One includes the Deans and HODs and the other includes rest of the teaching staff. Sample size was calculated by using the formula i.e. number of items x 7 (Black et al., 2010). Hence, the sample size was (59 x 7) 413. The data was collected from 413 respondents from five leading private universities of Lahore out of 2513 total faculty members of these five universities. There were 375 valid responses. These include University of Central Punjab (UCP), University of Lahore (UOL), University of Management and Technology (UMT), University of South Asia (USA) and Lahore Leads University. The items relating to spiritual leadership were responded by Deans and HODs and the remaining items were responded by other teaching faculty.

This research utilizes SPSS, a statistical tool, to analyze data. The primary aim is to establish the direct and indirect associations among variables, employing a mediated moderation model. Specifically, the process macro developed by Andrew F. Hayes (Model 5) is applied due to its capability to accommodate multiple mediators, a requirement not met by simple regression. In this model, the investigation centers on elucidating the direct link between spiritual leadership and stress, alongside exploring the mediated pathways, denoted as Path A and Path B. Furthermore, the analysis delves into the direct correlation between overall life management, spiritual leadership, and stress. By employing Model 5 in the process macro, the study effectively addresses all its hypotheses, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships under scrutiny.

Research Framework



Data Collection and Analysis

The following table illustrates that out of the total 375 valid responses, 52.8% of the respondents are male, while 47.2% are female. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents fall within the 35-45 age bracket, comprising 36.0% of the total, followed by the 45-55 age bracket with approximately 30.9%. Participants aged 25-35 constitute around 25.8%, while those aged 55-65 and above 65 constitute 4.9% and 2.4% respectively. Regarding qualifications, 73.9% of respondents hold post-graduation degrees such as M.Phil./MS/Equivalent, while 26.1% hold a PHD.

Table 1: Demographics

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	198	52.8
Female	177	47.2
Age		
25-35	96.75	25.8
35-45	135	36.0
45-55	115.85	30.9
55-65	18.375	4.9
Above 65	9	2.4
Qualification		
M.Phil./MS/Equivalent	277	73.9
PHD	98	26.1

Process Macro Model 5

In utilizing Process Macro Model 5 for data analysis, researchers can efficiently evaluate multiple relationships between mediation and moderation, facilitating the examination of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects among variables. Davies et al. (2023) highlight the significance of this method in discerning the presence or absence of such relationships through indicators like P-values and unstandardized regression coefficients. The selected model, Model 5 by Andrew F. Hays, accommodates one independent, one dependent, and up to ten moderator and mediator variables, with a sample size of 375. The first hypothesis posits that spiritual leadership impacts stress, substantiated by prior research and literature (Widodo & Suryosukmono, 2021). The analysis of Model 5 reveals a significant direct relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, denoted by a low P-value (0.0000), high t-value (6.5513), and substantial standardized coefficient (0.5136), affirming the hypothesis. Moreover, the study hypothesizes the moderating role of whole life management on the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, aligned with existing literature (Fuadiputra & Novianti, 2020; Zahoor et al., 2021). Process Macro Model 5 confirms a significant moderation effect, evidenced by a variance in stress ($R^2=0.0051$, $p=0.076$, one-tailed significant), with a change in stress level of 0.57% attributed to the interaction term. To mitigate multicollinearity risks, an interaction term between whole life management and stress is incorporated (Md Altah et al., 2022). Results elucidate an inverse relationship, indicating that lower levels of whole life management correspond to higher stress levels (2.8000), while increasing whole life management to 4.0323 decreases stress levels from 0.1937 to 0.1474. Both lower and upper levels exhibit significance, underscoring the moderating influence of whole life management on the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress.

Table 2: Path Analysis

Path	Variable	Coefficient (b)	t-value	P-value	Mediation Type	Interpretation
A1 (Direct Effect)	Spiritual Leadership	0.5136	9.7592	0.0000	Direct	Significant impact of spiritual leadership on trust
A2 (Direct Effect)	Spiritual Leadership	0.5705	10.0720	0.0000	Direct	Significant impact of spiritual leadership on commitment
B1 (Mediation)	Trust	0.1412	2.4390	0.0152	Partial Mediation	Trust mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress
B2 (Mediation)	Commitment	0.1238	2.4206	0.0160	Partial Mediation	Commitment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress
Interaction	Spiritual Leadership x Whole Life Management	0.0570	1.7776	0.0764	-	Significant interaction effect between spiritual leadership and whole life management on stress

The above table presents the results of mediation and interaction analyses from Process Macro Model 5. Firstly, it shows the significant direct effects of spiritual leadership on trust ($b=0.5136$, $t=9.7592$, $p=0.0000$) and commitment ($b=0.5705$, $t=10.0720$, $p=0.0000$). Secondly, it indicates partial mediation, with trust ($b=0.1412$, $t=2.4390$, $p=0.0152$) and commitment ($b=0.1238$, $t=2.4206$, $p=0.0160$) mediating the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress. Additionally, the interaction effect between spiritual leadership and whole life management on stress is significant ($b=0.0570$, $t=1.7776$, $p=0.0764$), suggesting that the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress is moderated by whole life management.

Table 3: Effect of Whole Life Management on Stress

Level of WLMP	Effect	P-value
2.8000 (lower level)	0.1937	0.0007
4.0323 (higher level)	0.1474	0.0780

The above table displays the effect of Whole Life Management (WLMP) on stress levels at two different levels: the lower level (2.8000) and the higher level (4.0323). At the lower level of WLMP, the effect on stress is 0.1937, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.0007. Conversely, at the higher level of WLMP, the effect decreases to 0.1474, although the p-value is 0.0780, indicating marginal significance. This suggests that as the level of Whole Life Management increases, there is a trend towards reducing stress levels, albeit with differing degrees of statistical significance.

Table 4: Hypotheses Acceptance/Rejection

Hypothesis	Description	Decision
H1:	Spiritual leadership has an effect on Stress.	Accepted
H2:	Whole life management has moderation effect between spiritual leadership and Stress	Accepted
H3:	Trust mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and Stress.	Accepted
H4:	Commitment has mediated the relationship between Spiritual Leadership and Stress.	Accepted

CONCLUSION

This research is built upon the objectives of examining the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, assessing the moderation role of whole life management, and exploring the mediation roles of trust and commitment. The first objective delves into the direct impact of spiritual leadership on stress, which aligns with previous literature suggesting that spiritual leadership can mitigate stress levels (Tabor et al., 2020). This relationship is affirmed through statistical analysis, supporting Hypothesis 1. The second objective focuses on the moderating effect of whole life management, indicating that a balanced approach to personal, professional, and spiritual life can amplify the stress-reducing impact of spiritual leadership. This finding is consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of holistic well-being in stress management (Marlena, 2021; Sumbul, 2023). Additionally, the mediation roles of trust and commitment are investigated, confirming that both variables play significant roles in mediating the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress (Djaelani et al., 2021; Terzi et al., 2020). These findings align with theoretical frameworks such as social exchange theory and social support theory, which highlight the importance of trust, commitment, and holistic well-being in mitigating stress and fostering positive organizational outcomes. This research centers around stress, a pervasive concern impacting organizations globally, posing a threat to their success. It investigates the relationship between spiritual leadership (SL) and stress, with whole life management serving as a moderator, encompassing personal, professional, and spiritual aspects. Additionally, trust and commitment act as mediators. Given the emerging nature of whole life management, this study fills a gap in the literature. It aims to mitigate the escalating stress levels, emphasizing its significance in enhancing satisfaction, reducing turnover, and fostering positive workplace behaviors. Drawing on social exchange theory and social support theory, the research underscores the importance of a balanced approach to well-being in stress management. Focused on the service sector, particularly within the educational domain in Lahore's private universities, this study offers insights to help teachers navigate stress and guides leaders in considering individuals' holistic well-being. This research offers new insights by introducing whole life management as a moderating factor in the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, an aspect not thoroughly explored in previous studies. It also adds to the existing literature by empirically showing how trust and commitment serve as mediators, illustrating the intricate ways in which spiritual leadership reduces employee stress. These findings enhance our understanding of how holistic leadership can create a more supportive and resilient work environment, providing fresh perspectives for both academic inquiry and practical implementation in organizations.

DISCUSSION

The research presents novel insights by integrating the concept of whole life management as a moderating factor in the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, an area previously underexplored. Additionally, the study extends existing literature by empirically demonstrating the dual mediating roles of trust and commitment, revealing the complex mechanisms through which spiritual leadership impacts employee stress. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding

of how holistic leadership approaches can foster a more supportive and resilient workplace, offering fresh perspectives for both academic research and practical application in organizational settings.

H1: Spiritual leadership has an effect on stress.

The results confirm that spiritual leadership significantly reduces stress among employees. This finding is consistent with previous literature, such as (Tabor et al., 2020), which suggests that leaders who exhibit spiritual qualities—like compassion, integrity, and a sense of purpose—can create a supportive and nurturing environment. Such an environment can alleviate employees' stress by providing them with a sense of meaning and belonging. The statistical analysis demonstrates a direct negative correlation between spiritual leadership and stress levels, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Moderation by Whole Life Management

The study reveals that whole life management moderates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, enhancing the stress-reducing impact of spiritual leadership. Whole life management involves balancing personal, professional, and spiritual lives, which contributes to overall well-being. This finding aligns with prior research by Marlina (2021) and (Sumbul, 2023), emphasizing that individuals who manage their lives holistically are better equipped to handle stress. Therefore, the presence of effective whole life management practices amplifies the positive effects of spiritual leadership, confirming Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: Mediation by Trust

The mediation analysis indicates that trust significantly mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress. Leaders who practice spiritual leadership foster trust within their teams, as evidenced by (Djaelani et al., 2021). Trust, in turn, reduces stress because employees feel more secure, supported, and valued in their roles. This trust-building process is crucial, as it creates a stable and predictable work environment, mitigating the uncertainty and anxiety that often contribute to stress. Thus, the data supports Hypothesis 3, highlighting the critical role of trust in this dynamic.

Hypothesis 4: Mediation by Commitment

The findings also confirm that commitment mediates the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress. Spiritual leadership enhances employees' commitment to their organization by aligning their personal values with organizational goals, as supported by (Terzi et al., 2020)). This increased commitment can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and a greater sense of purpose, which reduces stress. Employees who are committed to their organization are likely to be more engaged and resilient, further mitigating stress levels. Therefore, the acceptance of Hypothesis 4 underscores the importance of fostering commitment through spiritual leadership.

Significance of the study

This study holds paramount significance within the context of the service sector, particularly in Pakistan's educational realm, by addressing the pervasive issue of stress management. Its findings offer valuable insights into the efficacy of spiritual leadership in mitigating stress levels, while also highlighting the crucial roles played by factors such as whole life management, commitment, and trust. By elucidating the mediating effects of commitment and trust, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which spiritual leadership influences stress outcomes. Furthermore, its exploration of whole life management as a relatively underexplored concept adds a novel dimension to the discourse on stress management strategies. Ultimately, this study not only enriches theoretical understanding but also furnishes practical implications for policymakers and organizational leaders seeking to cultivate environments conducive to stress reduction and overall employee well-being in the service sector.

Theoretical Implications of the study:

This study significantly enhances the theoretical understanding of leadership by integrating the concept of spiritual leadership with stress management, thereby highlighting the importance of a holistic approach in leadership theory. Traditionally, leadership theories have focused on transactional and transformational models, but this research shifts the focus toward spiritual leadership, which emphasizes qualities such as compassion, integrity, and a deep sense of purpose. By empirically establishing the moderating role of whole life management—balancing personal, professional, and spiritual aspects of life—and the mediating roles of trust and commitment, the study offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which spiritual leadership impacts employee well-being. This suggests that future leadership models should not only consider the direct effects of leadership behaviors on employee outcomes but also take into account the broader life context of employees and the underlying psychological processes, such as trust and commitment, that mediate these effects. Thus, this research contributes to the ongoing evolution of leadership theories by advocating for the inclusion of spiritual and holistic perspectives in leadership studies.

Practical Implications of the study:

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study offer valuable insights for organizational leaders and HR practitioners aiming to reduce employee stress and enhance overall well-being. The research highlights the effectiveness of spiritual leadership in creating a work environment where employees feel supported, valued, and motivated. Leaders who exhibit spiritual qualities, such as compassion, integrity, and a sense of purpose, are more likely to foster trust and commitment within their teams, which in turn leads to reduced stress levels. This suggests that organizations should prioritize the development and promotion of leadership styles that incorporate these spiritual elements, as they can contribute to a more positive and resilient workplace culture. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the critical role of whole life management in amplifying the positive effects of spiritual leadership. Organizations should consider implementing programs and policies that support employees in managing their personal, professional, and spiritual lives more effectively. This could include offering flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and opportunities for personal and professional development that align with employees' values and life goals. By fostering an environment that encourages whole life management, organizations can enhance employee well-being, increase job satisfaction, and ultimately build a more engaged and resilient workforce. These practical implications underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach to leadership and employee well-being, which can lead to long-term benefits for both employees and organizations.

These implications of this study are significant for the service sector in Pakistan, particularly the educational domain, and for policymakers grappling with stress management issues. The findings underscore the critical role of spiritual leadership in alleviating stress, supported by factors such as whole life management, commitment, and trust. Firstly, the research emphasizes the importance of incorporating spiritual leadership practices to mitigate stress effectively. Secondly, it highlights the need for increased awareness and implementation of whole life management strategies to combat stress and address negative workplace behaviors. Additionally, the study confirms the mediating role of commitment in the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, amplifying the stress-reducing effects. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature by shedding light on the significance of whole life management, an underexplored concept. Moreover, fostering an environment of trust is essential for facilitating knowledge exchange and stress alleviation. Overall, the specified model comprising spiritual leadership, stress, whole life management, and two mediators provides valuable insights applicable to the educational sector in Lahore, Pakistan, with potential generalizability to similar contexts in the service sector.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

While this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between spiritual leadership and stress, it is not without its limitations. The research design employed for this study was cross-sectional, with participants drawn from the service sector, specifically the educational domain. However, considering the limitations posed by time constraints, a longitudinal study design could be considered in the future to delve deeper into the impact of time on the study variables. While the questionnaire used in this research was adapted from existing literature due to time constraints, future endeavors could involve developing a bespoke questionnaire tailored to the specific nuances of the organizational context. This would offer a fresh perspective and potentially uncover new insights into the constructs under investigation. In terms of future directions, subsequent research could benefit from examining the impact of spiritual leadership across different cultural contexts or industries to determine the generalizability of the findings. While this model focuses on specific variables, future research could explore the inclusion of additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, expanding the study to include public universities alongside private ones, and increasing the sample size, would enhance the generalizability of the findings to the broader population.

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