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## Article

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# Mediating role of employees' trust in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviance in the public sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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## Abstract

The increase in deviant workplace behavior within organizations is compelling scholars and practitioners to find an appropriate solution to control this dilemma. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate the association between ethical leadership and workplace deviance, with employees' trust as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviance in the public sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. This research utilized survey strategy, with a quantitative method using a cross-sectional design, applied convenient sampling technique and usable questionnaires were 202 from the understudy sector. Furthermore, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to screen the data. SPSS was further used for computing preliminary data analysis, for instance, normality, reliability, standard deviation, mean, and frequencies for each construct. Furthermore, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. This study found (a) a negative and significant association between ethical leadership and workplace deviance, (b) a positive and significant relationship between ethical leadership and employees' trust (c) a negative and significant association between employees' trust and workplace deviance, and (d) that employees' trust mediates between the relationship of ethical leadership and workplace deviance. Therefore, this study highlights several theoretical and practical implications and provides further insight into how workplace deviance can be controlled specifically in the public sector hospitals of KPK. Lastly, limitations and suggestions for future researches are provided.

**Keywords** Ethical leadership · Employees' trust · Workplace deviance · Public sector hospitals

## 1 Introduction

Ethics has become an important issue because of the revelation of several high-profile corporate scandals like Enron and WorldCom thereby indicating the existence of deviant behavior in organizations. Previous literature shows that deviant workplace behaviors also exist in the public health-care sector of Pakistan (Ahmed et al. 2013; Faheem and Mahmud 2015; Somani and Khowaja 2012). For instance, verbal and physical violence (Jafree 2017; Shahzad and Malik 2014), bullying and mobbing behavior (Bano and Malik 2013; Gadit and Mugford 2008; Somani et al. 2015a, b), student nurses used as adjunct staff and non-reportage of

errors (Jafree et al. 2015), sexual harassment (Jafree 2017; Shaikh 2000; Somani et al. 2015a, b), corruption and bribery (Haroon 2014; Naz et al. 2012; Yousafzai 2015), protests (Abbasi 2014), and absenteeism (Naz et al. 2012; Saeed and Ibrahim 2005). Thus, several forms of deviant workplace behaviors exist in the public sector hospitals of Pakistan.

Robinson and Bennett (1995) define deviant workplace behavior as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of the organization, its members, or both” (p. 556). So, to decrease the emergence of workplace deviance in an organization, researchers are now more concerned about examining the role of a leader in an organization (Brown and Treviño 2006; Lemoine et al. 2019). Specifically, researchers are increasingly interested in examining the effect of ethical leadership on workplace deviance (Yasir and Rasli 2018). Brown et al. (2005) defined ethical leadership behavior as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and

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interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making” (p.120). Recently, scholars are also interested to understand the underlying mechanism through which ethical leadership is related to workplace deviance (Mo and Shi 2017; Neves and Story 2015). In this regard, employees’ trust in the leader plays an important role. Rousseau et al. (1998) described trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerable based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p.395).

Thus, this research intends to investigate the effect of ethical leadership on deviant workplace behavior directly and through the trust-building of employees in their leadership as a mediator for reducing deviant workplace behavior in the public-sector hospitals of KPK province of Pakistan. As patients require special attention from doctors and supporting staff working in these hospitals. For this purpose, it is very necessary to decrease workplace deviance in these organizations. Thus, the current research view that ethical leadership plays a key role through trust-building among their subordinate employees in their leadership/top-management thereby resulting in fewer chances of the occurrence of workplace deviance.

This research is from the public-sector hospitals of KPK because of its importance as it provides healthcare services in Pakistan. So, being a public-healthcare institution, they should be very much worried about the ethical issues and negative behaviors of the employees. Recently, Yasir and Rasli (2018) identified that further research is needed in the understudy sector thereby understanding what are the factors that influence the emergence of workplace deviance and how it can be controlled. Thus, further research is needed to study such problems particularly in the public sector hospitals of KPK.

Moreover, this study addresses the literature gap as Neves and Story (2015), and Mo and Shi (2017) identified that little consideration is provided to probe the effect of ethical leadership on deviant workplace behavior, and also argue that more empirical researches are required to investigate the direct and indirect effect of ethical leadership on workplace deviance. Furthermore, trust in supervisor plays a key role in the association between leadership styles and work outcome (Breevaart and Zacher 2019; Yasir et al. 2016). However, past literature investigating employees’ trust as a mediator between ethical leadership and workplace deviance is in its infancy stage (Mo and Shi 2017). Thus, this research can assist in providing answers relating to the occurrence of workplace deviance in public-sector hospitals of KPK. In addition, how this deviant behavior can be controlled and, how much employees’ trust in leadership is helpful as a remedy in eliminating deviant workplace behaviors in the public-sector hospitals of KPK.

Thus, objectives of this study are; (a) to investigate the effect of ethical leadership on workplace deviance; (b) to examine the effect of ethical leadership on employees’ trust; (c) to investigate the effect of employees’ trust on workplace deviance; and (d) to analyze the mediating role of employees’ trust in the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviance in the public-sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Ethical leadership

Leaders play a pivotal role in determining the moral quality of a society and organization by influencing them negatively or positively (Yasir and Mohamad 2016). As Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) identified that when a leader’s behavior fails to be in line with the shared moral values, it causes moral cynicism, which is “like a cancer, corrodes the moral health of society” (p. 6). Furthermore, Derr (2012) highlighted that “ethics and leadership can be an important contribution to an organization and society. Without ethics in leadership, organizations may take on a role that could negatively impact the entire world” (p. 66). Thus, the concept of ethical leadership has emerged which specifically focuses upon moral and ethical aspects of leadership behavior (Brown and Treviño 2006). Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making” (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120). However, the notion of “normatively appropriate concept” identified in this definition raises the question of what principals the normative appropriateness of a leader will be measured against. Scholars suggest that the assessment of an ethical leader may lie in the eyes of the beholder (Giessner and Van Quaquebeke 2010), meaning that a leader is perceived as ethical when they are in line with the subordinates’ perception of ethical leadership behavior.

Recently, based on previous literature, Yasir (2017) provided a comprehensive conceptualization for ethical leadership and define it as a pattern of leader behavior that influences followers’ behavior through appropriate personal actions and interpersonal relationships and promotes an ethical workplace environment through justice and altruism. These leaders are honest, trustworthy, and courageous individuals who make fair decisions and guide followers in ethical dilemmas. Thereby proposes that ethical leadership encompasses five components and are important pillars of ethical leadership behavior, namely altruism, courage, ethical guidance, integrity, and fairness (Yasir and Rasli 2018).

## 2.2 Workplace deviance

The literature on workplace deviance is emerging (Zhu et al. 2019). Scholars define employees negative behaviors which harm the organizations and/or its members in several different ways, such as, counter-productive work behavior (Spector and Fox 2005), organizational misbehavior (Vardi and Weitz 2003), workplace incivility (Pearson et al. 2005), workplace aggression (Neuman and Baron 2005), mobbing/bullying (Einarsen et al. 2011), dysfunctional behavior (Griffin et al. 1998), workplace violence (Neuman and Baron 1998), corruption (Lange 2008), bad behavior (Griffin and Lopez 2005), organizational retaliatory behavior (Skarlicki and Folger 2004), unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010) and workplace deviance (Robinson and Bennett 1995). Although, the main theme of all these conceptualizations is the same and that these behaviors are extremely harmful to the organization and/or its members. Specifically, this research focuses on the conceptualization of workplace deviance provided by Bennett and Robinson (2003) because Griffin and Lopez (2005) view that the concept of workplace deviance is comparatively clear in terms of its construct dimensionality, to other bad behaviors identified in the literature. These academics further highlighted that the concepts of organizational misbehavior, bullying, and incivility are found in the previous studies, however, it lacks a substantial body of literature regarding any of them.

Robinson and Bennett (1995) identified workplace deviant behaviors based on four quadrants: interpersonal vs organizational and minor vs serious. The first quadrant (production deviance) included relatively minor but still organizationally harmful behaviors. The second quadrant (property deviance) included serious and organizationally harmful behaviors. The third quadrant (political deviance) included relatively minor and interpersonally bad behaviors. Finally, the fourth quadrant (personal aggression) included serious and interpersonally bad behaviors.

## 2.3 Employees' trust

There are many definitions relating to the concept of trust. Rousseau et al. (1998) described trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerable based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 395), these authors described two major components that can be considered as more vital to the definition of trust: positive expectation and acceptance of vulnerable condition by the employees. Positive expectation is strong beliefs that are bound by the trustier towards the trustee for his competency, honesty, and caring behavior for trustee. Furthermore, Nyhan and Marlowe (1997) described trust as “the level of confidence that one individual has in another's competence and his or her willingness to act in a fair, ethical,

and predictable manner” (p. 616). Thus, trust comprises the individuals' beliefs, assumptions, and expectations regarding the positive outcomes of others' future behavior (Robinson 1996).

## 2.4 Ethical leadership and workplace deviance

Previous literature shows that when leaders treat their subordinates fairly and communicate the importance of ethics, consequently subordinates are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Bedi et al. 2016). Moreover, Gok et al. (2017) study show that ethical leadership is negatively related to employees' deviance. Thus prior studies show a negative association between ethical leadership and deviant workplace behaviors (Mayer et al. 2012; Mo and Shi 2017; Van Gils et al. 2015; Yasir and Rasli 2018). However, scholars also argue that only a handful of studies have examined the association between ethical leadership and workplace deviance, therefore further research is needed to shed more light on their relationship (Mo and Shi 2017; Neves and Story 2015). Thus, this research view that:

**Hypothesis 1** Ethical leadership is negatively related to workplace deviance.

## 2.5 Ethical leadership and employees' trust

The key features of trust are the willingness to accept vulnerability and positive expectations. Positive expectations are confident beliefs held by the trustier that the trustee is caring, honest, and competent. In addition, a willingness to accept vulnerability reflects an intention to depend on others (Rousseau et al. 1998). Moreover, social exchange theory suggests that through positive and acceptable behavior of the leaders, subordinates are motivated thereby leading towards developing quality exchange relationships in the organization (Blau 1964). The previous literature provides supportive empirical evidence that trust in the leader can be promoted by ethical leadership behavior (Mo and Shi 2017). Therefore, this study postulates that:

**Hypothesis 2** Ethical leadership is positively related to employees' trust.

## 2.6 Employees' trust and workplace deviance

Trust plays a vital role in a better working relationship as it fosters information sharing, aid management practices, decisions that facilitate cooperation and communication, and help to deal with differences (Demir 2011; Thau et al. 2009). In contrast, lack of trust may dwindle employees' readiness and efforts to make constructive contributions to the organization, thus badly upsetting the organization thereby leading

towards organizational deviance (Chiu and Peng 2008). Previous research shows that diminishing employees' faith in the organization can raise an individual's negative conduct (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007). Prior literature also shows a negative association between employees' trust and workplace deviance (Gatling et al. 2017). Thus, the third hypothesis of this study is that:

**Hypothesis 3** Employees' trust is negatively related to workplace deviance.

## 2.7 Employees' trust as mediator

Subordinates who are assisted by their leadership are at a smaller risk of burnout and are similarly less likely to engage in workplace deviance (Mo and Shi 2017). In addition, a subordinate who upholds trust-based association with their supervisors creates a durable sense of identification at the workplace. Consequently, getting motivation and make more efforts to achieve the desired result and show exemplary performance in the organization (Schaubroeck et al. 2012). Meta-analytic findings of Dirks and Ferrin (2002) showed that trust in leadership is significantly related to subordinate's behavioral outcomes. Previous literature also shows that employees' trust plays a key mediating role between leadership styles and work outcomes (Mo and Shi 2017; Yasir et al. 2016). Hence, the last hypothesis of this study is that:

**Hypothesis 4** Employees' trust mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviance.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Sampling

Sampling is a process for the selection of an adequate number of elements from the understudy population (Sekaran and Bougie 2010). The sample of this research is from the public sector hospitals of KPK, Pakistan, using a convenient sampling technique. Moreover, from 202 employees (doctors and nurses) data were collected in the understudy sector using a survey method.

### 3.2 Measurement instruments

Validated questionnaires were used for measuring constructs in this research. Respondents were asked to rate the questions on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree and (5) strongly agree. Ethical leadership was measured using a scale provided by Yasir and Rasli (2018) having seventeen items. Workplace deviance was measured using a scale provided by Bennett and Robinson (2000). This workplace deviance scale has total nineteen items, however in this study eighteen items were used because the respondents suggested removing the item "dragged out work in order to get overtime", as there was no overtime option in the understudy sector. Trust in supervisor was measured with seven items scale provided by Robinson and Rousseau (1994).

### 3.3 Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Normality

Multivariate normality was examined using histograms, scatter plot, and normal P-P plot of the regression standardized residual. A bell-shaped curve on the standardized residual histogram, straight line on the normal probability

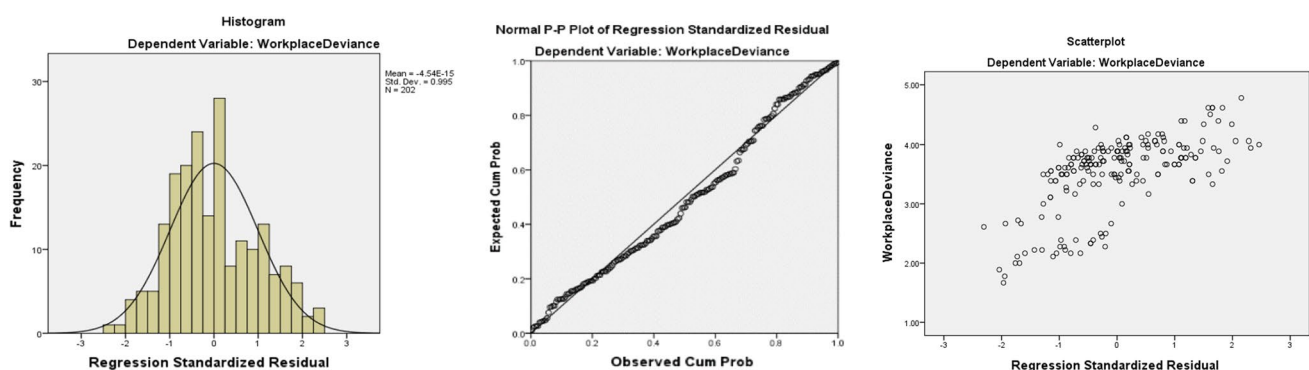


Fig. 1 Multivariate normality



**Table 1** Skewness and kurtosis

Items	Skewness	Kurtosis
EL 1	0.770	−0.645
EL 2	0.786	−0.256
EL 3	0.192	−1.384
EL 4	0.200	−1.247
EL 5	0.671	−0.688
EL 6	0.807	−0.387
EL 7	0.983	0.070
EL 8	0.852	−0.371
EL 9	1.231	0.944
EL 10	0.556	−0.530
EL 11	0.769	0.444
EL 12	0.777	−0.617
EL 13	0.702	−0.438
EL 14	0.738	−0.444
EL 15	0.152	−1.123
EL 16	1.025	−0.184
EL 17	1.017	0.090
WD 1	−0.624	−0.590
WD 2	−0.348	−1.073
WD 3	−0.776	−0.048
WD 4	−0.764	−0.159
WD 5	−0.873	0.034
WD 6	−0.830	−0.139
WD 7	−0.661	−0.360
WD 8	−0.685	−0.403
WD 9	−0.814	−0.249
WD 10	−0.817	−0.067
WD 11	−0.507	−0.729
WD 12	−0.160	−10.199
WD 13	−0.349	−0.882
WD 14	−0.356	−1.077
WD 15	−0.784	−0.115
WD 16	−0.989	1.027
WD 17	−0.884	0.724
WD 18	−1.050	0.340
ET 1	0.533	−1.006
ET 2	0.253	−1.195
ET 3	0.621	−1.114
ET 4	0.440	−0.963
ET 5	0.489	−0.874
ET 6	0.289	−0.983
ET 7	0.360	−0.981
Valid N (list wise)		

EL Ethical leadership, WD workplace deviance, ET employees' trust, N=202

plots and scatter plot (the relationship is linear) in Fig. 1

indicates a normal distribution of the data (Pallant 2005).

To confirm univariate normality, values of skewness and kurtosis were observed. Results of the analysis (see Table 1) indicates that the values of skewness and kurtosis are within the acceptable range of  $\pm 2$  (Kline 2015).

### 3.3.2 Common method bias

Prior research shows several statistical remedies to control and detect common method bias (CMB) (Chang et al. 2010). Therefore, current research utilized Harman one factor test to examine CMB. Table 2 illustrates the overall variance of 40.113 percent, which is less than the 50 percent threshold for substantive CMB.

### 3.3.3 Demographic description

Table 3 illustrates the demographic description of this study.

Table 3 demonstrates the demographic attributes of the sample. The sample consists of 67 male and 135 female respondents, making it 33.2% and 66.8% of sample size respectively. Moreover, the sample is comprised of individuals having age group less than 30 years were 37 individuals, 30–40 years were 152 individuals, and 41 to 55 years were 13 individuals, making it 18.3%, 75.2% and 6.4% of the sample respectively. Furthermore, an individual's education status was as following; diploma holders were 89 individuals, graduates were 105 individuals, and postgraduates were 8 individuals, making it 44.1%, 52%, and 4% of the sample size respectively. Lastly, the level of experience of the individuals was as follows; less than 1 year were 31 individuals, 1–5 year(s) were 105 individuals, 6–10 years were 35 individuals, and more than 10 years were 31 individuals, making it 15.3%, 52%, 17.3%, and 15.3% of the sample size respectively.

### 3.3.4 Descriptive statistics

Table 4 illustrates the descriptive statistics of this study.

In Table 4, the mean value varies between the highest value of 3.536 to the lowest value of 2.539 of workplace deviance and ethical leadership respectively.

### 3.3.5 Cronbach alpha

Cronbach's alpha (CA) is mostly utilized for measuring the instruments internal consistency and acceptable value for CA is suggested to be above 0.7 (Sekaran 2006). The value of Cronbach's alpha for ethical leadership was 0.935, workplace deviance was 0.926, and employees' trust was 0.898, hence it is within the acceptable range.

**Table 2** One factor model

Factor	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	17.420	41.475	41.475	16.848	40.113	40.113
2	2.636	6.277	47.753			
3	2.109	5.021	52.773			
4	1.523	3.625	56.399			
5	1.291	3.073	59.472			
6	1.215	2.894	62.365			
7	1.195	2.845	65.210			
8	1.009	2.403	67.614			
9	.996	2.371	69.984			
10	.956	2.276	72.260			
11	.893	2.127	74.387			
12	.814	1.938	76.325			
13	.715	1.703	78.028			
14	.666	1.585	79.613			
15	.640	1.524	81.137			
16	.583	1.387	82.524			
17	.557	1.325	83.849			
18	.534	1.271	85.120			
19	.494	1.175	86.295			
20	.489	1.165	87.460			
21	.473	1.127	88.586			
22	0.416	0.990	89.576			
23	0.389	0.927	90.503			
24	0.384	0.915	91.418			
25	0.351	0.837	92.255			
26	0.331	0.788	93.044			
27	0.317	0.754	93.797			
28	0.290	0.690	94.488			
29	0.254	0.604	95.092			
30	0.238	0.567	95.659			
31	0.227	0.541	96.200			
32	0.214	0.510	96.710			
33	0.204	0.486	97.196			
34	0.181	0.430	97.626			
35	0.170	0.404	98.030			
36	0.162	0.385	98.415			
37	0.143	0.341	98.757			
38	0.129	0.307	99.064			
39	0.123	0.292	99.356			
40	0.111	0.264	99.620			
41	0.093	0.221	99.841			
42	0.067	0.159	100.000			

Extraction method: principal axis factoring

### 3.3.6 Correlation

Table 5 summarizes the correlation analysis of this study.

Table 5 shows that a negative and significant relationship exists between ethical leadership and workplace deviance

( $r = -0.741$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, a positive and significant relationship exists between ethical leadership and employees' trust ( $r = 0.734$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). And a negative and significant association was found between employees' trust and workplace deviance ( $r = -0.676$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3** Demographic description

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	67	33.2
Female	135	66.8
Total	202	100.0
Age		
Less than 30 years	37	18.3
30–40 years	152	75.2
41–55 years	13	6.4
Total	202	100.0
Education		
Diploma	89	44.1
Graduate	105	52.0
Postgraduate	8	4.0
Total	202	100.0
Experience		
Less than 1 year	31	15.3
1–5 year(s)	105	52.0
6–10 years	35	17.3
More than 10 years	31	15.3
Total	202	100.0

**Table 4** Descriptive statistics (N202)

Constructs	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Ethical leadership	1.41	4.18	2.5399	0.61939
Workplace deviance	1.67	4.78	3.5369	0.61734
Employees' trust	1.57	4.29	2.8182	0.75243

### 3.3.7 Regression

This section shows the regression analysis of the under-study constructs.

Table 6 illustrates regression analysis carried out for ethical leadership and workplace deviance. The value of  $R^2 = 0.549$  which reveals that 54.9% variation in workplace deviance is brought because of ethical leadership. Beta value is -0.741 which reveals a negative association between ethical leadership and workplace deviance.

Table 7 illustrates the regression analysis carried out for ethical leadership and employees' trust. The value of  $R^2 = 0.539$  which reveals that 53.9% variation in employees' trust is brought due to ethical leadership. A beta value of 0.734 reveals a positive effect of ethical leadership on employees' trust.

Table 8 shows the regression analysis conducted for employees' trust and workplace deviance. The value of  $R^2$

**Table 5** Correlation matrix

	Ethical leadership	Workplace deviance	Employees' trust
Ethical leadership			
Pearson correlation			
Sig			
N			
Workplace deviance			
Pearson correlation	-0.741**		
Sig	0.000		
N	202		
Employees' trust			
Pearson correlation	0.734**	-0.676**	
Sig	0.000	0.000	
N	202	202	

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

was 0.457 which reveals that 45.7% variation in deviant workplace behavior is brought due to employees' trust. A beta value of -0.676 indicates a negative association between employees' trust and workplace deviance.

### 3.4 Mediation analysis

Scholars have identified four main assumptions for analyzing mediation. For instance; (1) the independent variable (ethical leadership) and dependent variable (workplace deviance) should be related; (2) the independent variable (ethical leadership) must be related to the mediating variable (employees' trust); (3) a relationship exists between mediating variable (employees trust) and dependent variable (workplace deviance); (4) if the beta weight is reduced and remained significant then it shows that the mediation is partial. But, if beta weight reduces and turns non-significant thus it will be full-mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Table 9 highlights the mediating role of employees' trust between ethical leadership and workplace deviance. As beta weight reduced from -0.741 to -0.531 and remained significant indicating partial mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986).

## 4 Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the underlying mechanism that links ethical leadership with workplace deviance having a mediating role of employees' trust in the context of



**Table 6** Regression analysis for Ethical Leadership and Workplace deviance (N202)

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients $\beta$	T	Sig
		B	Standard error			
1	Constant	5.413	0.124		43.765	0.000
	Ethical leadership	−0.739	0.047	−0.741	−15.611	0.000

$R^2=0.549$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.547$   $F=243.716$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$

**Table 7** Regression analysis for Ethical Leadership and Employees Trust (N202)

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients $\beta$	T	Sig
		B	Standard error			
1	Constant	0.553	0.152		3.627	0.000
	Ethical leadership	0.892	0.058	0.734	15.295	0.000

$R^2=0.539$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.537$   $F=233.932$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$

**Table 8** Regression analysis for Employees Trust and Workplace Deviance (N202)

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients $\beta$	T	Sig
		B	Standard error			
1	Constant	5.100	0.125		40.903	0.000
	Employees trust	−0.555	0.043	−0.676	−12.973	0.000

$R^2=0.457$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.454$   $F=168.311$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$

**Table 9** Regression analysis for Ethical Leadership, Employees Trust and Workplace Deviance (N202)

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients $\beta$	T	Sig
		B	Standard Error			
1	Constant	5.413	0.124		43.765	0.000
	Ethical leadership	−0.739	0.047	−0.741	−15.611	0.000
2	Constant	5.543	0.123		45.235	0.000
	Ethical leadership	−0.529	0.067	−0.531	−7.914	0.000
	Employees trust	−0.235	0.055	−0.286	−4.263	0.000

$R^2=0.587$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.583$   $F=141.407$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$

public-sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. Consistent with our hypothesis one, findings of this research show that ethical leadership is negatively related to deviant workplace behavior in the understudy context. This is also in line with the previous researches which shows the negative association between ethical leadership and workplace deviance (Aryati et al. 2018; Van Gils et al. 2015; Yasir and Rasli 2018). Thus, when supervisors fairly treat their employees, thereby, the response of employees is mostly positive and vice versa. That is why the role of ethical leadership is very significant because the followers respond with an ethical attitude to the positive behavior of their leadership. Moreover, employees' behavior is being influenced through suitable personal

actions and interpersonal relationships of their leaders. Ethical leaders are honest, trustworthy, and courageous individuals who make fair decisions and guide followers in ethical dilemmas. Hence, ethical leaders have the ability to influence deviant workplace behavior.

Consistent with our second hypothesis, the results of this research illustrate that ethical leadership is positively related to employee's trust in the understudy context. This is also in line with the prior literature which illustrates the positive association between ethical leadership and employees' trust in a leader (Mo and Shi 2017). As ethical leaders always behave with subordinates in such a way that employees feel honor and trust for them in the workplace environment. Such type of leadership has good manners, influencing

personality, and kind behavior with their subordinates. So, when they talk to their followers about their respective jobs, they used to remind them about their reward in case of showing efficiency and responsibility in their work and vice versa. Moreover, if some issues or conflicts are raised among the management and employees whereas the role of top management is tolerant and they listen to the employees' opinions also. In this way trust in the management is promoted among the employees thus ethical leadership plays a vital role.

Consistent with the third hypothesis of this study, findings of this research demonstrate that employees' trust is negatively related to deviant workplace behavior in the understudy sector. This is also in line with the past literature indicating a negative association between employees' trust and workplace deviance (Gatling et al. 2017). Two-way communication during different issues between management and workers plays a vital role in promoting employees' trust. Thus, employees begin to perform their duties heartedly and devotedly. So, when the employees are treated in an honored manner they reciprocate with positive behavior because they feel relaxed in their working environment, resulting in less workplace deviance.

The results of this study are consistent with our fourth hypothesis. As results of this research show that employees' trust mediates between ethical leadership and workplace deviance in the public sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Thus, establishing employees' trust in leadership is very much necessary because in this way all the subordinates can be motivated to the achievement of their combined goal. Therefore, employees' trust plays a key role in the link between ethical leadership and workplace deviance.

#### 4.1 Theoretical implications

In literature, little consideration is provided to the significance of ethical leadership in minimizing deviant workplace behavior. Considering this literature gap in the existing literature, this research improves the current literature by further understanding the importance of ethical leadership in diminishing deviant behavior at the workplace. Secondly, this research acknowledges employees' trust in leaders plays a key role between ethical leadership and employee work outcomes. Findings show that greater the perceived ethical leadership leads towards greater levels of trust in leadership thereby resulting in minimum workplace deviance and vice versa.

#### 4.2 Managerial implications

Several important practical implications have been taken up by this study. Current research view that ethical leadership plays a key role in individuals' bad behaviors. Thus,

organizations must recognize and encourage individuals who exhibit the necessary ethical values as leaders. On the other hand, an organization should choose to put ethics training seminars and workshops for the supervisors in order to develop their ethical behavior. Furthermore, a leader should concentrate on issues, for instance, the degree to which they are believed by subordinates and the level to which workforces feel competent enough to express their internal feeling. Moreover, when employees have little trust in their leadership and/or scared to communicate openly with their leadership thereby leading towards bad behavior in the workplace. Thus, a leader can only be successful when he or she is honestly trusted by subordinates. Hence, a leader should create an ethical workplace environment thereby emphasizing interpersonal trust and also affecting their attitude and behavior.

### 5 Limitations

This research has some limitations as well. For instance, the sample of this research is drawn from the public-sector hospitals of KPK, Pakistan, thus, caution might be taken while generalizing the results of the current study. Additionally, current research investigated the mediating role of employees' trust and shows that ethical leadership with employees' trust has the ability to lessen the probability of the emergence of deviant behavior at the workplace, but, several other mediating mechanisms also exists that can play a key mediating role between ethical leadership and deviant behavior in workplaces. Therefore, current research has not included other protentional mediating variables in this understudy framework. Moreover, this study did not analyze the association between the components of the understudy variables. Furthermore, current research is grounded on the standard sample size, but it seems to be comparatively small. Moreover, current research employed a convenience sampling technique which is nonprobability sampling, therefore it might be one of the limitations of the current study.

### 6 Future research

Current research is based on a survey from the public-sector hospitals of KPK, further research is needed to examine the understudy model in other dissimilar culture. Moreover, further research is needed to examine other potential mediating variables that may further clarify the underlying mechanism that links ethical leadership with deviant workplace behavior. Furthermore, a relatively long period is required for examining the link between ethical leadership behavior, creating employees' trust and investigating its effect on deviant workplace behavior, thus, further research is required

to examine the link between ethical leadership, employees' trust and deviant workplace behavior thereby utilizing longitudinal research design. Further research is also needed to examine the relationship between the components of the understudy variables. In addition, further research is needed to investigate other factors affecting deviant behavior in the workplace such as autocratic leadership, and/or fear instilled within the organization for a variety of reasons. Future studies are also needed thereby analyzing the understudy model on doctors and nurses separately. Lastly, further research is needed thereby utilizing the probability sampling technique.

## 7 Conclusion

Like that of other sectors and organizations, public sector hospitals need to maintain ethical leadership, foster employees' trust, and lessen deviant workplace behavior. And for achieving this objective, the current research aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the association between ethical leadership, employees trust, and deviant behavior at the workplace, as it support and shows the importance of the ethical leadership style, which helps in fostering employees trust, that leads towards minimizing the likelihood of the emergence of deviant workplace behavior in the public-sector hospitals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

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