Exploring the Impact of Organizational Support on Employee Resilience and Well-Being in the Service Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how perceived organizational support influences employee resilience and psychological well-being in the service sector. A qualitative research design was adopted to investigate the subjective experiences of service sector employees regarding organizational support and its impact on their resilience and well-being. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants working in various service-oriented roles in Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and diversity across industries such as hospitality, retail, and telecommunications. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework to identify key themes and subthemes. Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis: (1) perceived organizational support, (2) employee resilience mechanisms, and (3) psychological and workplace well-being. Within these themes, participants identified supportive leadership, emotional support programs, recognition systems, and transparent communication as critical components of organizational support. These factors facilitated the development of adaptive coping strategies, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. In turn, these mechanisms enhanced psychological outcomes such as job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and a heightened sense of belonging. Participants consistently described organizational support as a key enabler of their ability to manage workplace stress and remain engaged in high-pressure environments. The study highlights the vital role of organizational support in fostering resilience and psychological well-being among service sector employees. Supportive leadership, peer networks, emotional resources, and flexible work policies collectively contribute to a more resilient and satisfied workforce. Organizations aiming to enhance employee performance and retention should prioritize structured support systems that address both emotional and operational needs.

Keywords: organizational support, employee resilience, well-being, service sector, qualitative research, psychological safety, workplace stress

Introduction

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of the service sector—characterized by customer-facing roles, high emotional labor, and performance pressures—has made employee well-being a critical concern for organizational sustainability and effectiveness. In today's volatile economic environment, where service employees regularly encounter stressors such as job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, and customer hostility, the concept of resilience has emerged as an essential personal resource that enables individuals to bounce back from adversity and maintain psychological functioning (Luthans et al., 2006). While individual traits contribute to resilience, growing evidence suggests that organizational factors, particularly perceived organizational support (POS), play a crucial role in shaping both employee resilience and psychological well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Saks, 2006).

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The global shift toward service-dominated economies has intensified the importance of understanding employee well-being from a systems perspective. In the service industry, employees are the frontline representatives of organizational identity, and their emotional and psychological states significantly influence customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall service quality (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Unlike task-based sectors, service work often involves "emotional labor"—the need to regulate one's emotions to meet organizational expectations—making workers particularly vulnerable to burnout and emotional fatigue (Hochschild, 1983). This makes it imperative for organizations to provide not just material support but also socio-emotional resources that buffer the negative effects of these demands.

Perceived organizational support, a construct grounded in organizational support theory, refers to employees' belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Research has consistently demonstrated that higher levels of POS are associated with beneficial outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, commitment, and reduced turnover intentions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). More recently, scholars have begun to explore its connection with resilience and well-being, suggesting that POS may enhance an individual's ability to adapt to workplace adversity by providing psychological safety, fostering self-efficacy, and encouraging adaptive coping strategies (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Wang et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant in the high-pressure context of the service sector, where employee experiences are often shaped by fluctuating customer demands, emotional dissonance, and operational constraints.

Employee resilience, broadly defined as the capacity to maintain or regain psychological well-being in the face of challenge, is increasingly viewed not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process influenced by personal and contextual factors (Richardson, 2002). In occupational settings, resilience has been associated with lower burnout, higher engagement, and greater capacity to cope with organizational change (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Organizational factors that support autonomy, learning, and interpersonal relationships can significantly contribute to the development and sustainability of resilience among employees (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). In this light, POS is posited as a central contextual facilitator of resilience, especially when it translates into tangible policies, leadership behaviors, and supportive practices that empower employees to navigate stressors effectively.

Moreover, employee well-being—a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, psychological, and social aspects of functioning—is both a predictor and outcome of effective organizational systems (Diener et al., 2017). It influences not only individual performance and satisfaction but also organizational outcomes such as customer loyalty and financial performance (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Within the service sector, where human interactions drive core value creation, employee well-being is particularly salient. Poor well-being can lead to absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced service quality, while high well-being promotes innovation, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Harter et al., 2002). Importantly, resilience acts as a mediator between organizational conditions and well-being, further reinforcing the importance of fostering supportive environments that enable resilience to flourish (Robertson et al., 2015).

In light of these associations, recent scholarship has underscored the integrative role of organizational support in promoting both resilience and well-being. For example, Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model illustrates how organizational resources such as supervisor support, autonomy, and recognition can counterbalance job demands and enhance psychological health. According to this model, the presence of organizational support mechanisms not only mitigates burnout but also fosters resilience and engagement, particularly in emotionally demanding professions. Similarly, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory posits

that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect resources—both personal and organizational—to cope with stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Under this framework, POS functions as a key resource that not only reduces the likelihood of resource depletion but also facilitates resource gain, which is critical for well-being and adaptive capacity.

Despite the theoretical recognition of these relationships, empirical studies examining how organizational support fosters resilience and well-being in the context of the service sector remain relatively limited, especially in non-Western contexts. Much of the existing research has focused on corporate or clinical settings, often neglecting frontline service employees who operate under unique pressures and cultural expectations (Kuntz et al., 2016). Furthermore, quantitative studies, while valuable, often fall short in capturing the lived experiences and nuanced perceptions of employees regarding support and resilience. This calls for qualitative approaches that explore how service employees interpret, construct, and make sense of support mechanisms in their workplace environments.

Particularly in Tehran, a densely populated urban center with a rapidly expanding service economy, employees face a range of stressors including economic instability, demanding customer interactions, and systemic organizational inefficiencies. These challenges underscore the need for resilient workforces and supportive organizational systems. Understanding how employees in this context perceive organizational support and how it influences their resilience and well-being is critical for designing effective human resource interventions and enhancing organizational health.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the impact of organizational support on employee resilience and well-being in the service sector in Tehran. By focusing on employees' subjective experiences, this research aims to uncover the specific organizational practices, interpersonal dynamics, and emotional processes that shape resilience and psychological health in service settings. Semi-structured interviews with 20 participants from diverse service organizations provide the basis for thematic analysis, offering rich insights into how support is experienced and internalized by employees.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it expands existing research on POS by contextualizing it within the specific emotional and structural realities of the service sector. Second, it adds depth to the understanding of resilience as a socially embedded process rather than an isolated psychological trait. Third, it emphasizes the importance of employee voice in shaping organizational well-being strategies, providing practical implications for managers, HR practitioners, and policymakers aiming to build more supportive and resilient workplaces.

In sum, fostering employee resilience and well-being through organizational support is not merely a matter of ethical management—it is a strategic imperative. As service sector organizations increasingly rely on human capital for competitive advantage, understanding the psychosocial factors that sustain performance and well-being is essential. This study aims to illuminate these factors through the lens of employee experience, offering a grounded, context-sensitive understanding of how organizational support systems shape resilience and well-being on the frontlines of service work.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceived impact of organizational support on employee resilience and well-being in the service sector. A phenomenological approach was adopted to capture in-

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depth insights into employees' lived experiences regarding how organizational support mechanisms shape their coping strategies and emotional health in workplace settings. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The sample consisted of 20 service sector employees based in Tehran, representing diverse sub-sectors including hospitality, customer service, telecommunications, and retail. Inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of two years of full-time work experience in a service-related role and to have experienced either organizational support initiatives or workplace challenges impacting their well-being.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' experiences with organizational support and its perceived influence on their psychological resilience and well-being. An interview guide was developed, covering topics such as access to supportive supervisors, peer relationships, recognition programs, mental health initiatives, and employee feedback mechanisms. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in Persian. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved—that is, when no new themes or insights were emerging from additional interviews.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software to manage, code, and categorize the qualitative data systematically. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Codes were derived inductively from the data to allow themes to emerge organically rather than being imposed a priori. Credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing and researcher triangulation, while confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and reflexive memos. Trustworthiness was further supported by member checking, wherein a subset of participants reviewed and validated preliminary findings for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

Findings and Results

Theme 1: Perceived Organizational Support

Supportive Leadership

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of empathetic and accessible leaders in enhancing their resilience and overall well-being. Supportive leadership was perceived as a foundation of trust and motivation. One participant stated, "When my manager checks on me not just for tasks but also to ask how I'm coping, it really boosts my morale." Respondents appreciated open-door policies, consistent feedback, and personalized concern from supervisors, which fostered a sense of emotional security and belonging.

Emotional Support Programs

The availability of emotional support programs, such as counseling and stress reduction workshops, emerged as a significant subcategory. Several participants referenced employer-provided access to psychologists or mental health resources. As one employee noted, "The fact that my company offers mental health sessions tells me they

care. It makes me want to push through tough times." These interventions were perceived as vital for managing anxiety and preventing emotional exhaustion.

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Recognition and Reward Systems

Participants highlighted that consistent recognition—whether verbal, symbolic, or monetary—played a crucial role in their motivation and resilience. One participant said, "It's not just about salary—being named employee of the month made me feel seen." Recognition mechanisms helped reinforce positive behaviors and reduced feelings of workplace invisibility, thereby enhancing engagement and satisfaction.

Access to Resources

Employees stressed the importance of having adequate resources, tools, and training to do their jobs efficiently. Lack of such support often led to stress and frustration. As one participant explained, "Just having the right software or even a comfortable chair can change how you feel about your day." These resources were seen not just as functional aids but also as signals of organizational respect and investment in staff.

Peer Support Culture

A strong culture of peer support was frequently mentioned as essential to both resilience and daily well-being. Informal help, emotional encouragement, and collaborative problem-solving were common. One interviewee shared, "When I'm overwhelmed, my team covers for me without making me feel guilty. That kind of support is priceless." Such peer-driven solidarity mitigated stress and created a shared sense of responsibility.

Work-Life Flexibility

Flexible work arrangements were recognized as critical to employee well-being. Whether through remote work opportunities or adaptable schedules, participants reported feeling more in control of their time. "Being able to shift my hours helped me care for my child and still meet deadlines," one participant said. These accommodations were linked to reduced stress and higher organizational commitment.

Transparent Communication

Clear, consistent, and honest communication was seen as a buffer against uncertainty and mistrust. Employees valued regular updates and open discussions with management. A participant remarked, "When rumors spread, anxiety rises. But when the company gives us facts directly, it calms everyone down." Transparent communication built trust and aligned employee expectations with organizational goals.

Theme 2: Employee Resilience Mechanisms

Adaptive Coping Strategies

Participants reported using positive reframing, mindfulness, and humor as tools to manage workplace stressors. These coping strategies allowed them to re-interpret challenges constructively. One participant described, "Sometimes I just laugh at the chaos—it's either that or break down." Such approaches were internal resources that strengthened employees' ability to bounce back.

Self-Efficacy and Confidence

Belief in one's own ability to handle challenges was seen as a resilience booster. Many participants shared stories of gaining confidence through repeated problem-solving. "Every time I resolve a complaint on my own, I feel more capable," said one respondent. High self-efficacy enabled employees to face workplace adversity with reduced anxiety.

Goal Orientation

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Setting and pursuing small, meaningful goals helped employees stay motivated and focused. Many framed their tasks within personal or professional targets. "Even if the day is hard, ticking off my to-do list gives me a sense of achievement," said one participant. This orientation toward progress contributed to long-term persistence.

Social Support Seeking

Participants noted that reaching out to coworkers or supervisors during stress was a key resilience mechanism. One said, "When I feel like I'm drowning, just talking to someone helps me reset." The act of seeking support was not seen as weakness but as a proactive coping strategy that alleviated emotional burden.

Emotional Regulation

Controlling emotional reactions was essential in maintaining professional interactions and personal well-being. Employees mentioned techniques such as deep breathing, walking away briefly, or pausing before responding. "When a client yells, I've learned not to take it personally," one participant reflected. Such regulation skills helped preserve emotional balance.

Learning from Adversity

Experiencing and overcoming past challenges provided participants with resilience resources. Reflective learning from previous crises or failures was common. "After getting through the pandemic layoffs, nothing else feels unmanageable," shared one employee. These lessons transformed hardships into growth experiences that enhanced future coping.

Theme 3: Psychological and Workplace Well-Being

Job Satisfaction

Participants linked organizational support and resilience to heightened job satisfaction. They felt more fulfilled and motivated when their contributions were recognized and their work was aligned with their values. "I feel proud of what I do here—it's not just a job," one employee stated. Satisfaction stemmed from both intrinsic and extrinsic sources.

Reduced Burnout

Employees who felt supported reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion and greater sustainability in their efforts. "I don't feel drained at the end of the day anymore because I know I can ask for help," one participant explained. Access to resources and emotional safety were cited as buffers against burnout.

Positive Affect and Mood

A positive emotional climate in the workplace was associated with optimism and morale. Participants noted improved mood when leaders and coworkers maintained a constructive tone. "It sounds small, but even morning greetings from my boss lift the mood," said one participant. Emotional contagion was a recurring theme.

Stress Management

Effective organizational practices enabled better stress regulation, such as balanced workloads and break policies. "Knowing I can take a 15-minute break without judgment is a game-changer," remarked one interviewee. Structures that allowed decompression were essential for daily stress management.

Sense of Belonging

Participants repeatedly emphasized that feeling included and valued within their teams contributed to both resilience and well-being. "I know this team has my back—it feels like a second family," shared one participant. A strong sense of belonging fostered loyalty, emotional security, and collective motivation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted role of perceived organizational support (POS) in shaping employee resilience and psychological well-being within the service sector. Through qualitative thematic analysis, several subthemes emerged that link POS to key psychosocial mechanisms, including emotional regulation, adaptive coping, self-efficacy, and workplace satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the growing body of research suggesting that organizational environments have profound impacts on employees' psychological capacities to manage stress and adversity (Robertson et al., 2015; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016).

Supportive leadership emerged as one of the most salient forms of organizational support identified by participants. The availability and empathy of supervisors were described not only as sources of guidance but also as anchors of emotional stability. This aligns with Shanock and Eisenberger's (2006) findings that supervisor support directly enhances employees' perceptions of organizational care, leading to increased engagement and performance. By cultivating trust and demonstrating emotional availability, supervisors help employees perceive their organization as a secure base, which is fundamental to fostering resilience (Luthans et al., 2006). Furthermore, the presence of emotional support programs such as counseling services and stress management sessions corroborates previous studies demonstrating the positive effects of institutionalized well-being initiatives on employee health outcomes (Robertson et al., 2015).

Recognition and reward systems were found to have a substantial psychological impact on employees' resilience. Interviewees emphasized how both formal and informal acknowledgment—such as praise or symbolic awards—instilled a sense of meaning and belonging. This reinforces the notion that recognition serves as a form of social validation, which contributes to psychological capital and motivation (Avey et al., 2011). In particular, consistent positive reinforcement was shown to buffer against emotional exhaustion and workplace stress, a finding that mirrors earlier work on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that job resources such as appreciation and career development opportunities act as protective factors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Participants' narratives around access to resources—whether technical tools or ergonomic conditions—underscore the importance of organizational infrastructure in psychological well-being. Access to the "right tools" was frequently linked to reduced frustration, higher job satisfaction, and greater emotional regulation. This is in line with the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which posits that individuals strive to retain and protect resources; thus, a resource-rich environment reduces the likelihood of emotional depletion and facilitates resilience. Moreover, the presence of a strong peer support culture as described by interviewees—characterized by collaboration, shared responsibilities, and emotional backing—resonates with Grandey and Gabriel's (2015) assertion that social support from colleagues acts as an emotional buffer in service-oriented roles. When peer interactions are positive, they contribute to a culture of shared resilience, allowing individuals to cope more effectively with external stressors.

Work-life flexibility was another subtheme linked closely to well-being and resilience. Participants highlighted the value of remote work options, flexible scheduling, and time-off policies, especially in balancing personal and professional responsibilities. These findings are consistent with the literature showing that flexibility in work arrangements contributes to lower burnout, higher organizational commitment, and improved mental health (Allen et al., 2013). Flexible policies not only address logistical challenges but also serve as symbols of organizational trust and respect for employees' autonomy, which further enhances emotional resilience.

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Transparent communication, as highlighted in the findings, plays a key regulatory role in shaping psychological safety. Regular updates, open forums, and access to decision-making processes were perceived as crucial for managing uncertainty and aligning expectations. This aligns with the findings of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), who emphasized that communication quality is a core component of POS. In service environments where ambiguity can lead to stress and misalignment, transparent communication functions as both an informational and emotional resource.

Turning to employee resilience mechanisms, adaptive coping strategies such as reframing, humor, and mindfulness were cited as common responses to stress. These strategies are well-supported in the psychological literature as effective tools for emotional regulation and resilience building (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Self-efficacy was also a recurring theme; participants linked their confidence in handling workplace challenges to supportive environments that enabled autonomy and skill development. This echoes Bandura's (1997) theory that self-efficacy is influenced by mastery experiences and social persuasion—both of which were present in the organizational contexts described by participants.

Social support seeking, particularly the comfort in reaching out to coworkers or supervisors during high-stress situations, reinforces the idea that resilience is not solely an individual trait but a socially embedded process (Kuntz et al., 2016). The encouragement to ask for help and the absence of stigma surrounding emotional struggles were described as key facilitators of adaptive behavior. This supports the notion that resilient organizations cultivate cultures of psychological safety that normalize vulnerability and support.

Furthermore, emotional regulation strategies and reflective learning from adversity were evident across narratives. Participants who had undergone significant stressors—such as pandemic-related job insecurity or difficult customer interactions—reported gaining valuable coping skills and emotional maturity. These insights reflect the metatheory of resilience proposed by Richardson (2002), which posits that disruption followed by reintegration with greater strength constitutes the essence of resilience.

Psychological and workplace well-being outcomes—such as job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and enhanced mood—were consistently attributed to supportive organizational practices. Participants linked their sense of belonging and positive affect to environments where their efforts were recognized and their needs considered. These findings are corroborated by Diener et al. (2017), who highlight the close relationship between well-being and organizational health. In high-stakes, emotionally demanding service roles, positive affect and stress management are crucial for maintaining employee engagement and performance.

Ultimately, this study confirms that the interplay between organizational support, employee resilience, and well-being is both intricate and powerful. Organizational support, when perceived as genuine and consistent, can catalyze psychological resources that help individuals navigate adversity, remain engaged, and sustain emotional health. These findings not only reinforce existing theories such as JD-R, COR, and organizational support theory but also extend them by providing rich, context-specific insights from service sector employees in Tehran.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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