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Research Article

# Moderating influence of social support on the relationship of workplace loneliness and well-being of employees with special needs in Pakistan

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#### **Abstract**

Workplace Loneliness is a process, which begins with the psychological requirement of belongingness, and exposes on the reality of social relations within the organizations. This research finds out the impact of workplace loneliness of employees with special needs on their psychological well-being with moderating impact of perceived social support from co-workers and managers. For this purpose, 120 employees with special needs working on managerial role, belonging from public (37%), private (32%), and non-governmental (32%) sectors participated as respondents of the questionnaire-based survey, which was developed on a website according to international accessibility standards. The data was collected by circulating it through multiple social media platforms. The analysis of collected data was performed in MS Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics. Results are clearly showing that social support is an important factor in reducing workplace loneliness and in increasing the well-being of employees with special needs. Therefore, these special employees must be treated as differently abled bodies instead of disabled ones. Hindrances including Covid-19 and software inaccessibility were also faced during the whole process. On the basis of this study, future researchers can research further about type of social support that should be provided on workplace to employees with special needs.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, social isolation, lockdown, psychological stress, accessibility, managers, perceived social support.

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#### 1. Introduction

A human being is a social animal, not created to live alone. During the Prehistoric Times, humans created pairs and societies because of their innate need for social interaction and communication. This need for companionship and relationships within humans was an evolutionary result of the need for protection, safety, and inclusiveness, which were impossible to achieve by remaining alone. Every individual has been gifted with diverse sets of skills and abilities, unique in their own aspect. These skills and abilities collectively fulfil the multiple requirements and needs of an individual. This is the main reason behind their nature of interconnection and staying communicative with one another. That's why loneliness is an unacceptable idea among them (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Loneliness is known as a set of multifaceted feelings generated when the required social needs are not fulfilled as a result of staying intellectually and physically away from other individuals (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2006). A lack of socialization, brought about by sets of rules and regulations which does not allow people to build required communication and interaction with each other within the organization, leads to increased workplace loneliness and dissatisfaction (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014).

The factor of loneliness gets even higher when employees have certain disabilities. This is due to the fact the employees with disabilities have special needs and require additional facilities at the workplace in order to perform their duties. Therefore, co-workers and supervisors often consider this as an inability to perform certain tasks. This leads to subtle discrimination and procedural injustice (Snyder *et al.*, 2010). Disability is a state of the body, where the person is lacking in performing physical or sensory skills due to some disorder. It can be in various forms and levels of severity, which can be categorized as physical and sensory disabilities (Çağan & Ünsal, 2014). Workplace loneliness of employees with special needs can negatively impact their psychological well-being. If an employee is suffering from loneliness in the workplace, his/her psychological and physical well-being will decrease. That is why loneliness is considered as the predictor of poor psychological well-being at the workplace (Erdil & Ertosun, 2011). This study aims to find the impact of workplace loneliness among employees with special needs on their physical and emotional well-being.

The relationship between workplace loneliness and the well-being of employees is affected by the perceived social support, as it reduces the loneliness and increases the well-being of the employees. When a person is having the perception of the social support from his/her coworkers and supervisors, his/her well-being will increase, and the loneliness will decrease (Davis *et al.*, 1998). The social support is known as social behaviour, the influence of which makes the person feel as having support for any kind of psychological pressure and stress (Hegeston & Cohen, 2004; Tariq *et al.*, 2021).

Loneliness of people with special needs is required to be looked upon, as being dependent is a huge reason for loneliness (Çağan & Ünsal, 2014). Generally, Loneliness at workplace impact psychological well-being negatively (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014). gap found that the impact of workplace loneliness of employees with special needs has not been covered. Where an employee is having a feeling of workplace loneliness, which affects negatively his/her well-being, that employee desire social support from his/her supervisor or co-worker (Kuriakose *et al.*, 2019). The role of social support in the performance of employees with special needs is missing in the literature. In order to fill these mentioned gaps, this study aims to study the impact of workplace loneliness of employees with special needs on their psychological well-

being; to study the impact of perceived social support on the well-being of employees with special needs; and to study the impact of perceived social support on the relationship between workplace loneliness and well-being.

The article presents the picture of all these above-mentioned relations by discussing the previously available literature, whereafter discussing every concept of individually, their relationship and the impact is presented. It also included with the hypothesis of the study. Then, the theoretical framework based on two theories, is there to elaborate the problem statement of the study. The overview of methodology aims to define the mode of research including instrument development, survey distribution, data collection, data analysis, time frame, and hindrances faced during the whole process of research. After that an overview of analysis of collected data from 120 employees with special needs is presented. And at the end, the details of research result in a descriptive manor are written. Study limitations and future recommendations are also there.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Loneliness

Human being has been created to live a social life in order to be helpful for the surrounded ones. The feeling of social connection with those surrounded ones, which include mates, family members, and broadly community members, enhances the affiliative behavior of an individual, this affiliative behavior lead towards the status of selflessness and co-operation, which builds an opportunity for the surrounded individuals to reach the age of productivity and effectiveness. Moreover, the social connection on both individual and collective level, make a human being able to survive in an unfriendly environment and be helpful for others as well in a productive manner (Lovejoy, 2009; Cacioppo et al., 2007). The state where all social relations and opportunities exist but the sense of connectivity and communication lack somewhere is considered as social isolation, which continues for a long time is perceived as loneliness. Loneliness is caused by impairment of attention, perception, and social behavior among human beings through intrinsic motivation (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Din et al, 2021). Another state, which causes loneliness is living away from closer relations and loved ones. a study revealed that students from all over the world living in academic hostels of America have a feeling of being lonely (Wawera & McCamley, 2019). Loneliness is defined as "A complex set of feelings that occurs when intimate and social needs are not adequately met" (Cacioppo et al., 2006, p.1055).

An evolutionary perspective of loneliness considers it as the adaptive biological capacity and disclose that it is not something, which cannot be affected negatively on attitude and behavior as it composed of genetic gift. Here the argument was developed that, loneliness has strong negative consequences especially in industrial society, which focuses on materialistic thinking more than humanity (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2014). Loneliness is a major source of multiple health declines, including depression and dysfunctionality. These health declines bring a person ultimately towards death especially older persons, who suffer more with swear illness, which is an important tool for the continuation of loneliness. One of the initiator studies presented the relationship of loneliness and functional decline and death of older persons via internationally represented populations (Perissinotto *et al.*, 2012). The older generation has been proved lonelier in their daily lives than middle-aged adults, as the older people ranging from 60 to 80

years old, are usually in their retirement period and the middle-aged adults ranging from 40 to 59 years old and are at peak of their professional career. That's why loneliness experience varies in different levels of life (Nicolaisen & Thorsen, 2014).

The above-mentioned tool named illness, which contributes to the continuation of loneliness has been proved in a relatively unique study that proved the existence of loneliness in women suffering from Brest cancer on its last stage, which is beyond procurement and treatment. Because of this disease women have the feeling of being alone (Rosedale, 2009). Similar to illness, there is another state of mankind, where loneliness takes place and affects negatively. It is known as disability, in which a person is unable to perform certain tasks because of the inexistence of any ability (Çağan & Ünsal, 2014). Being visibly different and dependent on other results in marginalization and loneliness (Lupton & Seymour, 2000). In society, the children and Adelson, who are suffering from chronic physical state, or any sensory disability feel lonelier than their non-disabled peers (Maes *et al.*, 2017).

## 2.2. Types of loneliness

There are several types of loneliness discussed by the scholars, which include but not limited to relational, emotional, cultural loneliness (McGraw, 1995) and workplace loneliness (e.g., Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Wright, 2005). This diverse nature exposes that, people experience a different kind of loneliness at different phases of life. This research is going to focus on the loneliness faced by people at their workplace is known as workplace loneliness, which is caused by several reasons discussed below.

## 2.3. Workplace loneliness

A workplace where most of the time individuals are surrounded by competitors, who are always in competition with each other in order to prove themselves better. At the workplace the individuals, who work around them are known as colleagues and co-workers. They can be senior and junior as well. The competitive norms of the workplace do not allow employees to share them most of the things with colleagues and co-workers in order to keep their key reasons for success hidden. This practice of less sharing and remaining in distance causes workplace loneliness for employees. Their intention of making themselves better than others, lead them towards selfishness, which is an important factor of moving toward loneliness (Peng *et al.*, 2017). Most of the time, at the workplace the individuals are surrounded by introvert personalities, who are mostly concern with their own thoughts and feelings instead of others'. They do not share their thoughts and feelings with others and do not allow other people to get closer. This is the point where loneliness takes place, because of insufficient and unsatisfactory social relations (Lam & Lau, 2012).

Another situation of the workplace has been discussed, where employees due to certain surrounded behaviours start feeling, that their affiliation needs are not being met by the people they work with within the organizations. This feeling develops after a subjective and effective evaluation of the behaviours (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). One of the most recent studies presented workplace loneliness as a process, which begins with the hidden psychological demand or perception of higher relational and belongingness needs and exposed on the reality of employee's social relations and interactions. This process can cause perception of relational deficiency and negative emotions, which lead to psychological illness. That's how they have

proved that workplace loneliness is known as the psychological pain of perceived relational deficiency at the workplace (Wright & Silard, 2021).

## 2.4. Workplace loneliness of employees with special needs

If we specifically focus on the employees, who are suffering from any kind of disability, they are more in the feeling of lonely at the workplace because of their marginalization and any physical or sensory barrier, which is most of the times ignored by the society (Lupton & Seymour, 2000). Workplace loneliness cannot be procured and prevented under one fixed remedy, because it depends on the interpersonal and social relations, which an employee needs to build with co-workers and colleagues. This is a time taking, attention-seeking and effort consuming process. However, there is a common understanding that people can mould their selves according to the social environment of their organization if they find it friendly and comfortable. But literature proves this understanding is not true always, people can have the feeling of left out in the social environment of their organization, even in an informal social atmosphere (Cooper & Wright, 2013).

## 2.5. Outcomes of workplace loneliness

The workplace loneliness comes up with various negative outcomes because of its harmful effects on the personalities. One of the recent studies proved that it negatively affects job performance by reducing efficiency. The argument was developed as, exchange of professional resources in team working has a positive influence on the job performance by making employees able to gain more guidance and support (Liden *et al.*, 2000). Similarly, when employees are not exchanging their ideas and don't consider other's opinion within the organization, their performance will be affected on both individual and collective level, which is known as the job performance is being affected by the feeling of loneliness at the workplace (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). Along with this aperient effect, workplace loneliness has another negative effect, which has been discussed by various scholars, is named as well-being. Erdil and Ertosun (2011) proved loneliness as the predictor of the well-being of employees within their organizations as workplace loneliness has a negative influence on employees' well-being (Jamner & Stokols, 2000). Therefore, poor well-being is considered as the result of loneliness at the workplace, which is developed under Extremism in harmful work conditions (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014).

#### 2.6. Well-being

Well-being the most commonly studied concept based on the perception of a positive state and condition of life. It is known as having a state, where the person has a positive feeling and thinking regarding both internal and external emotions he carries out, including the realization of self-potentials, the courage of acceptance, and overall satisfaction with life. Well-being is considered as the judgment of life satisfaction and includes the feelings from depression to happiness (Diener *et al.*, 2009). Literature does not provide us one definition of well-being having consensus around, but there is an agreement found, which defines well-being as the existence of positive emotions in the absence of negative emotions, which lead towards satisfaction and comfortability (Afolabi *et al.*, 2018).

There are two main approaches to the well-being defined by the scholars. One is a subjective

approach known as subjective well-being and the other is an objective approach known as the psychological well-being (Wang & Gupta, 2005). The subjective well-being refers to the current evaluation of life satisfaction by the individual, who has experienced a sense of wellness. Subjective well-being (SWB) is operationalized as a high level of positive emotional state, low level of negative emotional state, and a high level of satisfaction with this current state of life. The person who is having these three effects at a time on their defined levels considered as hi in SWB. By following this path, SWB is measured by the level of happiness of the person. Maximization in the feeling of happiness shows maximization in the subjective well-being of the person (Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being is not only a way to think about well-being, which has a focus on happiness. Researchers defined another way known as the psychological approach, which discovered that being happy and being positively affective and satisfied, do not show the psychological wellness of the person. This approach concern with living well by utilizing human potentials. It is considered as a process of realizing and actualizing the inner spirit and true nature of the person in order to have an inherited life (Waterman, 1993).

In this study, well-being is excepted as its psychological approach because of its wide nature of looking upon the psychological conditions of happiness and satisfaction. Moreover, there is a strong influence of loneliness on mental health and well-being is found (Coplan *et al.*, 2007; Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). On the other hand, positive emotional feelings at the workplace are strongly related to the psychological well-being of employees (Zapf, 2002). Under this relation, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Workplace loneliness of employees with disability is negatively associated with their wellbeing.

### 2.7. Social support

Social support is an important factor, which has a positive effect on any kind of stress by making it minimize at both workplaces (Digman & West, 1988) and at the personal life of an individual, which is spent outside the work (Rook, 1987). The social behaviour, which can be included with both general or specific support for any physical or invisible act and action in order to reduce received negative psychological pressure, is known as social support. It helps individuals to identify those stressful events, which are having fewer threatening aspects. That's why it is considered one of the emotion-oriented coping methods (Hegeston & Cohen, 2004). Different research proved that social support has a positive impact on any kind of stress reduction (Abu Al Rub *et al.*, 2009; Mohammadi-Fakhar *et al.*, 2012)

At the workplace, the strong interpersonal relations of employees with their co-workers, managers, and supervisors, are considered as well as the social interaction, which leads toward the social support for each other within the organization. That social support has a correlation with psychological disturbance and absenteeism, which means a high level of social support at workplace makes psychological stress and absenteeism at a minimum level (Stansfield *et al.*, 1997). The workplace loneliness is also considered as psychological stress, which is strongly influenced by social support from supervisors and co-workers. It is stated that perceived social support brings up with maximization of stress and feeling of isolation and loneliness. Because of its importance, it is considered as the predictor of the workplace loneliness (Wright, 2005). One of the recent studies tested the relation between the workplace loneliness and perceived

social support by analysing the behaviour of teachers working in 170 primary schools of Turkey. In this study, results suggested that when an employee has the perception of social support from his/her surrounded ones, his feeling of loneliness at the workplace reduces (Oğuz & Kalkan, 2014).

Similar to the employees, the organizational leaders can also have a feeling of professional isolation, which can lead to the workplace loneliness. However, if they have the perception that, they can have social support from their working staff, they can deal with their feeling of loneliness easily. This support can be in the form of excellent performance on the employees' end. It has been proved through a study on the school principals, who were analysed by the social support from the teachers working in their schools and the principals of other schools in order to reduce their professional isolation. The results proved that social support from the teachers is more effective than the support from principals of other schools (Greene, 2016; see, Tariq *et al*, 2021).

Social support at the workplace is helpful in coping with occupational stress (Mohammadi *et al.*, 2018) as it is the predictor of well-being. Landy (1992) proved that the quality supervision consisting of social support has a positive influence on employee well-being by making it at the maximum level. The research explained social support at the workplace as an exchange phenomenon, which is based on both receiving and giving ends. When a person is receiving social support from the surrounded ones, he/she is libel to pay it back to those people. This liability is considered as perceived social support for the person, who is supposed to receive it, which has a positive impact on employee well-being (Nahum-Shani *et al.*, 2011). Not only support from co-workers, but supervisors' support has also impact on the psychological well-being of employees, as it has been proved through an exploratory study on the behaviour of supervisors, which has a strong impact on the psychological well-being of subordinates. When an employee has the perception of social support from super wiser, his/her psychological well-being will be at the maximum level (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). Under these assumptions, this study hypothesizes as:

H2: Perceived social support is positively associated with the wellbeing of employees with special needs.

Generally, social support has a unique association with loneliness and well-being. The availability of social support makes the feeling of loneliness at a minimum level, and then this minimum level of loneliness enhances the well-being of a person (Davis *et al.*, 1998). Kuriakose *et al.* (2019) proposed perceived social support as a moderating variable of the relationship between workplace loneliness and employee well-being and proved perceived social support the predictor of loneliness and well-being as well at the workplace. Therefore, it can affect the relationship of workplace loneliness and employee well-being. Another study revealed the role of social support at the workplace as a path moving toward the reduction of loneliness in the workplace and enhancement of the emotional well-being of employees (Wright, 2005). After this debate, this study hypothesizes that:

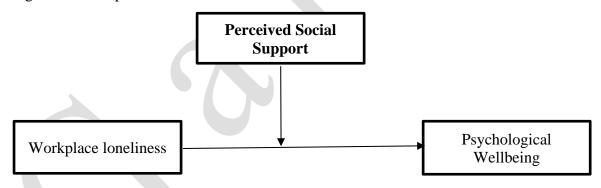
H3: Perceived social support moderates the relationship between workplace loneliness and wellbeing in such a way that this relationship is strengthened when perceived social support is high.

#### 3. Theoretical framework

This research is predominantly centred on two theories, one is Social Cognitive theory (Wood & Bandura, 1989), which reflects the relationship of workplace loneliness and employee wellbeing, whereas the moderating impact of social support can be seen in Buffering Hypothesis Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social Cognitive Theory is considered as major guidance for loneliness study, as it deals with the individual's perception and evaluation of his/her social relations. That is how it defines loneliness as a result of the perceived difference between perception and reality of social relations (Perlman & Peplau, 1984). The social cognitive theory refers to the social functioning based on triadic reciprocal connection, in which personal factors and environmental events act as interactive determents by influencing each other. In the organization, it is seen as employees' well-being is affecting by the feeling of loneliness, which is an outcome of an environmental factor within the organization (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This study proves theory very well, as it is presenting negative impact of workplace loneliness of employees with special needs on their psychological well-being.

Buffering Hypothesis Theory states that perceived social support is based on social relations, the individual is having in daily life. These social relations are considered as the source to get relief from various stressful events (Cohen, 1984; House *et al.*, 1988). Under this theoretical reflection, perceived social support is considered as protection and resistance of loneliness, which influences the well-being positively in daily life and workplace as well (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In this study, social support has been proven as the protection for employees with special needs at their workplaces against their poor psychological well-being, which exists in the result of workplace loneliness.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



## 4. Methodology

This research was quantitative in nature, consisting of descriptive statistics and regression analysis in order to analyse the moderating impact of the perception of social support (from supervisors and colleagues). The study was designed for the employees with special needs on the relationship of their workplace loneliness and psychological well-being. The data is collected via web-based survey form from Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. The participants were 120 employees with special needs working on managerial role belonging from public (37%), private (32%), and non-governmental (32%) sectors. Only employees with special needs or having any kind of disability were targeted. The participants included people with Mobility disabilities (21%), visually impaired people (23%), Hearing impaired

participants (26%), participants with Cognitive disabilities (17%), and people with psychological disabilities (14%).

## 4.1. Sampling technique

Non-probability "Snowball Sampling" technique was adopted, in which Available respondents help reaching whole sample by referring to the relevant ones. It is most recommended especially in the era of pandemic (culture of work from home), as it was proven most convenient in order to collect data online via a web-based form. Moreover, the present study focused on people with special needs who are generally hard to locate but they remain interconnected with their community.

#### 4.2. Instrument

In order to collect the data, the instrument was a questionnaire based on 3 sections. First aimed to have the level of special needs. In the second section, the demographic information of the respondents was asked, which included both personal and professional information. The last third one was there to measure all the variables through 5 points Likert scale. The scale of Workplace loneliness (WL) composed of 19 items adapted from the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell *et al.*, 1980), well-being (WB) scale had 12 items adapted from (Evers *et al.*, 2000), and the scale of Perceived Social Support (PSS) consisted of 5 items, was adopted from (Ilies *et al.*, 2011). The adapted scales for Workplace Loneliness and Wellbeing were optimized for our targeted audience i.e., employees with special needs.

### 4.3. Analysis

The data was analysed through multiple software packages. Most of the statistical analyses were performed in Microsoft Excel version 2019 with Analysis Tool Pack due to its compatibility with screen reading software which is Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) by NV Access Limited. For some specific deep analysis, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 23 by IBM Corporation was used. The inaccessible nature of IBM SPSS made me dependent on a sighted person to handle the software.

#### 4.4. Limitations

The topmost hindrance which was faced during this research is Novel Coronavirus pandemic. Due to lockdown situation in the country, the movements were restricted and as a result study has to proceed with small sample size. It also effected the responses of the participants, as people were in a stressful situation that some of their responses were going to unnatural direction. Another setback that caused trouble during this research was the inaccessibility of IBM SPSS software for screen reader users. Therefore, an alternative was adopted i.e., Microsoft Excel with Analytics Tool Pack addon.

## 5. Data analysis

The internal consistency of scales used in the instrument indicates that the values of WL and WB are Reliable (Workplace loneliness = 0.851, Well-Being = 0.860), whereas the value of PSS is Robust (0.824) (Table-1).

Table-1: Reliability analysis

Variable name	No of valid cases	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
WL	120	19	0.851
WB	120	12	0.860
PSS	120	5	0.824

(WL = Workplace Loneliness, WB = Well-Being, PSS = Perceived Social Support, n = 103). The values of each variable are above 0.08, which are high (0.76-0.95) (Taber, 2018).

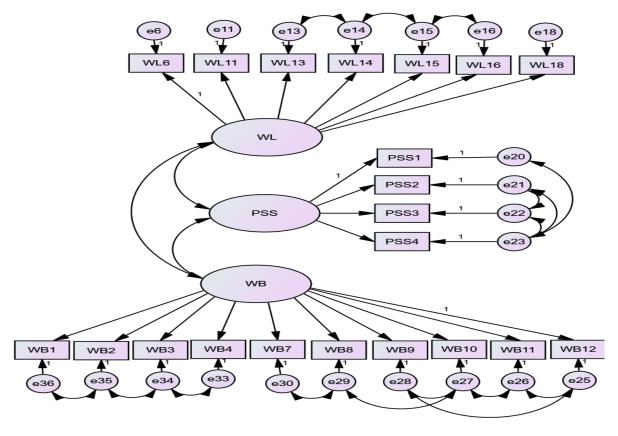
Validity of adopted instrument is measured through confirmatory factor analysis presented in Table-2, which clearly shows that initially pre-CFA was conducted. The fit indices were not up to the mark therefore, we had to remove several items and draw modification indices as suggested by software. Final values of fit indices comply the desired criteria (p corresponding to CMIN<0.05; CMIN/df>1<3; RMR<0.05; RMSEA<0.08; IFI>0.9; CFI>0.9 and TLI>0.9). Initially, there were 36 items in the model, however 15 items were removed due to low factor loading (less than 0.5) or exuberant variance and were creating problems in model fitness. The latest model has 21 items that fulfil the desired criteria for the validity of the data (figure 2).

Table-2: Model fit indices

Model	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	RMR	IFI TLI	CFI	RMSEA
CFA	1004.055	591	.000	1.699	.117	.747 .724	.741	.077
Revised Model CFA	248.303	170	.000	1.461	.092	.926 .904	.923	.062

p corresponding to CMIN<0.05; CMIN/df>1<3; RMR<0.05; RMSEA<0.08; IFI>0.9; CFI>0.9 & TLI>0.9).

Figure 2: Revised model CFA



In this research, gender, disability status, and organization type are considered as demographic factors, which contained essential information for results. Since the data was collected using web-based form which had the ability to restrict the respondent from proceeding further without accurate information, the demographic entries are 100% valid. The demographic analysis of respondents is given in Table-3.

Table-3: Demographic analysis of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Mail	69	57.5	57.5	57.5
Gender	Female	51	42.5	42.5	100
Analysis	Total	120	100	100	
	Mobility	25	20.833	20.833	20.833
	Vision	27	22.5	22.5	43.333
Disability	Hearing	31	25.833	25.833	69.167
Analysis	Cognitive	20	16.667	16.667	85.833
	Psychological	17	14.167	14.167	100
	Total	120	100	100	
	Public	44	36.667	36.667	36.667
Analysis of	Private	38	31.667	31.667	68.334
Organizational	NGO	38	31.667	31.667	100
Type	Total	120	100	100	

N = 120

The impact of all these demographic factors on workplace loneliness has been measured through one-way ANOVA which revealed that there was significant variation in Workplace Loneliness on the basis of Disability Type (Table-4: f = 2.849, p<.05). Other demographic variables such as Gender and Organization Type had no significant impact on Workplace Loneliness.

Table-4: One-way ANOVA

Demographic Variables	Workplace Loneliness	
	F	P Stats
Gender	1.057	0.306
Disability Type	2.849	0.027*
Organization Type	2.560	0.082

<sup>\*&</sup>lt;0.05 N = 120

There is a significant relationship among all the mentioned variables, as their value is (p=0.000, <0.01). Moreover, the values are well above 0.3 and less than 0.8, which shows that the data is safe from Multicollinearity and is acceptable for regression analysis (Table-5). Here the Workplace Loneliness is negatively associated with psychological wellbeing (r = -0.401, p <.01) and perceived social support (r = -0.353, p < .01) which means that if an employee with special needs is lonely at the workplace due to deficiency of perceived social support, then his/her psychological wellbeing will be decreased. It can also be observed that perceived social support is positively associated with psychological wellbeing (r = 0.427, p < .01) indicating that if the social support will be provided then the employee will be psychologically stable and vice versa.

Table-5: Correlation Analysis

	WL	WB	PSS	
WL	1			
WB	-0.401**	1		
PSS	-0.353**	0.427**	1	

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

 $\overline{WL} = Workplace\ Loneliness,\ WB = Well-Being,\ PSS = Perceived\ Social\ Support,\ p = <0.01,\ N = 120$ 

Table-6 indicates the moderated regression analysis. The first hypothesis (H1) of the study is that WL is negatively associated with WB. Based on the results presented in table-6 H1 is supported. The second hypothesis (H2) of the study is that PSS is positively associated with WB. Thus, based on the afore-mentioned results H2 is also supported. The third hypothesis (H3) of the study is that perceived social support moderates the relationship between workplace loneliness and wellbeing in such a way that this relationship is weak when perceived social support is high. Thus, based on the result presented in Table-6 H3 is also supported.

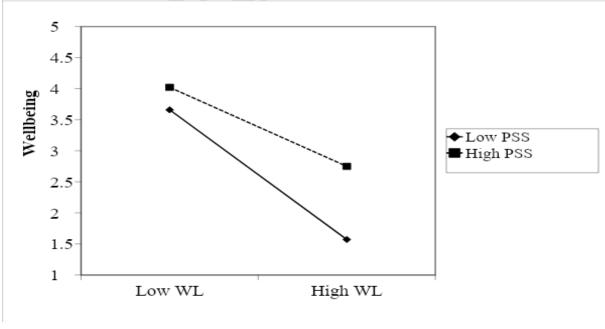
Table-6: Moderated Regression Analysis

		5 ~ ~ J ~					
Model	Coeff	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI	
Constant	0.031	0.071	0.438	0.663	-0.110	0.172	
WL	-0.840	0.283	-2.971	0.004	-0.280	-1.401	
PSS	0.385	0.160	2.401	0.018	0.703	0.067	
Int_1	0.204	0.058	3.522	0.001	0.319	0.089	

IV: WL, DV: WB, Moderator: PSS, p = <0.05, N = 120

Figure 3 illustrates the significant interaction for the high and low value of moderator. It is clear that the negative relationship between workplace loneliness and employee wellbeing is weaker when perceived social support is high, thus confirming hypothesis 3 of the study.

Figure 3: Interactive effect of workplace loneliness and perceived social support on employee wellbeing



#### 6. Results and discussion

## **6.1.** The impact of workplace loneliness of employees with special needs on their wellbeing

The first hypothesis of this study has been tested through correlation analysis (table-5). The relationship of Workplace Loneliness of employees with special needs with their Well-Being is significantly negative among them ( $-0.401^{\cdot p} < 0.01$ ). The moderated regression has negatively significant impact of Workplace Loneliness of employees with special needs on their Wellbeing (Table-6: t = -2.971, p < 0.05). According to previous research, workplace loneliness has been proven a predictor of well-being at workplace because it negatively impacts the wellbeing of employees (Erdil & Ertosun, 2011). High level of workplace loneliness can decrease well-being of employees (Jamner & Stokols, 2000). Therefore, poor well-being of employees is considered as the result of feeling of loneliness at workplace (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014), which is known as the difference between expected relations and reality of relations (Wright & Silard, 2021). Social Cognitive Theory explains this impact as the influencing interaction of environmental and personal factors (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

## **6.2.** The impact of perceived social support on the well-being of employees with special needs

The second hypothesis is supported as perceived social support has significantly positive impact on the well-being of employees with special needs (Table-6: t = 2.401, p < 0.05). Moreover, the relation among perceived social support and well-being of employees is also proven significantly positive (Table-5: t=0.427, p < 0.01). Social support is considered as the social behaviour, which includes support for any specific action in order to minimize negative psychological pressure (Hegeston, and Cohen, 2004). And having perception of this social support from the surrounded ones is called Perceived Social Support, which is measured through the level of help received (Ilies *et al.*, 2011). As social support can reduce negative psychological pressure, it is proven a predictor of well-being, which is positively related to well-being (Mohammadi *et al.*, 2018). The quality supervision consisting of social support has a positive influence on employee well-being (Landy, 1992). Social Support can be considered as an environmental factor according to Social Cognitive theory, which has a positive influence on personal factor of well-being (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

## 6.3. Moderating impact of perceived social support on the relationship of workplace loneliness and well-being

The third hypothesis of the research is also supported as the interaction of impact of perceived social support (Moderator) is significantly positive on workplace loneliness (Independent Variable) (Table-6: t = 3.522, p = 0.001). Previously perception of social support has been proven beneficial in decreasing workplace loneliness of employees and in increasing their wellbeing (Shaw, and Gant, 2004). It has an inverse relation with workplace, as its increasing value has the ability to decrease loneliness at workplace (Mohapatra, Madan, and Srivastava, 2020, Lindorff, 2001). According to Buffering Hypothesis Theory perceived social support is considered as protection and resistance of loneliness, which influences the well-being positively in daily life and workplace as well (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

#### 7. Conclusion

A human being is a social animal, who is not created to live alone. This study discusses the loneliness at the workplace with a prime focus on employees with special needs. The employees having different types of disabilities belonging to public, private and non-profit sectors proved through their responses that workplace loneliness is inversely proportional to psychological well-being. The higher a person feels lonely at workplace, the lower his/her well-being becomes and vice versa. It can also be concluded that perceived social support is directly proportional to psychological well-being. Which means if the supervisors and co-workers will provide more social support to employees with special needs, their psychological well-being will increase, and their job performance will significantly improve. The last objective of this research was to study the perceived social support as a moderator of relation between workplace loneliness and psychological well-being. It has been found out that perceived social support is directly proportional to psychological wellbeing and inversely proportional to workplace loneliness. We also found out that the type of disability that an employee has affects the amount of lonely that employee feels. On the other hand, the gender of the employees and the sector to which they belong does not make a difference on the amount of loneliness.

## 7.1. Managerial implications

When employees with special needs are given proper social support, they become psychologically well and feel lesser lonely at workplace. There are several recommendations to supervisors and co-workers of employees with special needs: They must be treated as differently abled bodies rather than disabled ones; the help should be provided to them in performing a task through alternative means and generally navigating the workplace environment. For example, helping out an employee with mobility disorder in moving around; Special instructions should be provided by supervisors when giving an assignment to them when required. For instance, if there is additional information being spoken out in a presentation, it should be delivered in sign language for employees with hearing impairment; Employees with visual impairment often have different concepts and perceptions due to their world focused on sounds. Therefore, if there is a clash in perception, advice should be given to them explaining the difference in scenario of the rest of the society; If there are employees with cognitive disabilities, matters should be explained well in easy-to-understand manner; In case of employees with psychological issues, opinions should be given about their work in a lighter note optimized according to their personality. These are just some of the examples and can be rotated among different categories of special needs. The right form of social support should be planned and provided depending on the workplace environment and circumstances.

#### 7.2. Directions for future studies

This research proves the importance of perceived social support at workplace that it improves the psychological well-being of employees with special needs and reduces the chances of them feeling lonely. It tells the co-workers and supervisors of employees with special needs to socially support them but does not provide the guidelines for which form of social support should be provided to which category of employee with special needs and to what level. This gap can be filled by studying the problems and perceptions of various categories of employees with special needs at workplace and how those can be addressed by co-workers and supervisors. Secondly, this study concludes with difference in form and amount of loneliness

that employees with special needs feel at workplace but does not tell which category feel lonelier than others and why. Future researchers can study different amount of loneliness in different categories and also compare them with reasons. Due to small sample size, the difference in loneliness based on gender could not be observe. The future researchers can take a larger sample size and draw the difference of loneliness based on male and female gender.

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