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Corresponding Author: Muhammad Shahzad (Email: m.shahzad.soc@gmail.com)

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Knowledge Work and Discontent: A Comparative Analysis of Work Alienation by Age and Experience

Muhammad Shahzad [a] Dr. Zahira Batool [b] Dr. Faiza Anjum [c] Dr. Babak Mahmood [d] Dr. Ayesha Chauhdhry [e]

Abstract: Organizations are confronted with work alienation among workers, yet there is limited empirical research on how work alienation varies based on age and work experience. This study evaluated the difference in work alienation by age and work experience among agricultural knowledge workers. Using stratified sampling technique, data were collected from 350 respondents. Data were collected through in-person visits and Google forms. Kruskal Wallis test and Bonferroni correction methods were used to evaluated the study hypotheses. The results demonstrated that there are statistically significant differences in work alienation across various age and experience groups of agricultural knowledge workers. The study findings underscore the importance of sociodemographic factors in understanding the processes of work alienation. The study contributes to the existing knowledge of sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors contributing to work alienation and work engagement among various groups of agricultural knowledge workers.

Keywords: Work Alienation, Work Experience, Age, Agricultural Knowledge Workers

Introduction

In organizational research, work alienation has become an important topic, especially in knowledge-producing industries (Gook & Hoens, 2022). It is a psychological detachment from one's job (Musto, 2021). Because of the inherent complexity of their positions and the high degrees of autonomy sometimes associated with their tasks, knowledge workers are particularly vulnerable to work alienation (Nair & Vohra, 2010). Knowledge workers primarily rely on their expertise and intellectual capabilities instead of manual labour (Davenport, 2005). Their primary human capital is a set of analytical and critical skills. Understanding job alienation is essential for agricultural knowledge workers because it can affect their motivation, output, and overall contributions to agricultural progress.

Existing studies exploring the relationship between socio-demographic factors and work experience underscore the importance of age and work experience in influencing the employees' perceptions of, and engagement with their work (Singh & Randhawa, 2024). Age is not only a life stage in the human development process, but it also reflects expectations and a set of coping skills in dealing with workplace issues an employee may have to face (Ojobu, 2024). As an employee gets older, expectations attached to them and their resilience levels in coping with job challenges also vary (Jermier, 2019). Similarly, work experience also impacts job satisfaction, work engagement, levels of self-actualization, intrinsic motivation, and ability to deal with growing job demands (Chiaburu et al., 2014). However, there is a paucity of empirical research on the association between demographic factors like age and work experience, particularly in the context of agriculture knowledge workers (Vanderstukken & Caniëls, 2021).

[a] PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: m.shahzad.soc@gmail.com
[b] Chairperson, Department of Sociology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: zahbatool@gcuf.edu.pk
[c] Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, National Textile University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: faiza@ntu.edu.pk
[d] Professor, Department of Sociology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: babakmahmood@gmail.com
[e] Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: ayesha_noor@hotmail.com

This study aims to fill this important ant gap in literature by evaluating how work alienation varies across different age groups and levels of work alienation among agricultural knowledge workers. Specifically, the study proposes two main hypotheses: (1) there is a significant difference in work alienation among knowledge workers belonging to different age groups, and (2) there is a significant difference in work alienation among knowledge workers with varying levels of work experience.

Literature Review

Past research studies indicate that work alienation is correlated with job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2022), intrinsic motivation (Abdelmohsen, 2022), work engagement (Ojobu, 2024), job commitment (Dong et al., 2023), and employee performance (García-Contreras et al., 2022). Seeman, in his seminal work on work alienation, defines it as a multipronged concept. It includes meaninglessness, self-isolation, powerlessness, and feeling of self-estrangement. It is a state where employees feel worthless and meaningless. They are no longer interested in their jobs. Their work becomes boring and monotonous task (Seeman, 1991). Contemporary research expanded this concept by conducting empirical studies in various contexts, especially in industry settings (Liu et al., 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2024; Mahmoud Mohamed et al., 2024; Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Nair & Vohra, 2009). Recent studies indicate that work alienation is an emerging workplace challenge in knowledge-producing industries such as research organizations (Ümit & Ay, 2022), educational institutions (Abdelmohsen, 2022), and communication technology (Karayaman, 2024). Studies demonstrate that employees in these contexts have to confront the high cognitive demands of the job, resulting in adverse job experiences like job disengagement and work alienation (Deniz et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2023; Singh & Randhawa, 2024). Past research underscores how these industries may take a toll on employees in the form of mental Health and psychological well-being (Vinokurov & Kozhina, 2020). These work and health-related experiences make knowledge workers susceptible to negative job outcomes like job burnout and work alienation (Vinokurov & Kozhina, 2020; You et al., 2022). These outcomes take a toll on employee's productivity and intrinsic motivation (Abdelmohsen, 2022).

Age is a significant sociodemographic factor that affects work-related experiences and attitudes (Dong et al., 2023; Guest & Bryson, 2009; Jermier, 2019; Ojobu, 2024). It also impacts the level of work alienation among employees. Past research suggests that younger employees often have to face higher levels of work alienation because of limited career advancement, stability, and high expectations of employers (Guest & Bryson, 2009). Employers have high expectations from them. Being new entrants to organizations, they have to struggle to meet the expected demand for job fulfilment. Mid-career professionals face work alienation due to career stagnation and their misalignment with organizational goals and values (Dong et al., 2023; Mahmoud Mohamed et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). Stuck in their careers, they see little chance of their future career prospects. This results in disengagement from work and work organization. Senior professionals report work alienation and job dissatisfaction because they are unable to influence work processes and policies due to bureaucratic redtapeism (Ali & Ishrat, 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2024; Mahmoud Mohamed et al., 2024). Notwithstanding these insights, there is little empirical research on the association between age and work alienation in the context of agriculture knowledge workers.

Similarly, work experience and work alienation are also correlated. Work experience plays an important role in shaping work-related attitudes including work alienation. Lack of autonomy in the workplace and unfamiliarity with organizational settings and dynamics cause work alienation and psychological stress in early-career employees (Singh & Randhawa, 2024). As employees get experience and become acquainted with work dynamics, they gain confidence by building meaningful relationships at the workplace These relationships mitigate feelings of work alienation and other negative work-related experiences (Chiaburu et al., 2014). However, highly experienced professionals may feel alienated due to burnout and disillusionment if their efforts and hard work are not recognized by the organizations they are working in (Ali & Ishrat, 2022; Kırklıkçı, 2021; Ojobu, 2024). They are also likely to experience work alienation if they perceive that the organization has limited opportunities for growth. While there the association between work alienation and work experience has been investigated in general organizational contexts, its ramifications for agriculture knowledge workers remain largely unexplored. This study builds on existing research by examining the association between age, work experience, and work alienation among agricultural knowledge workers.

Methodology

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique. Agriculture knowledge workers were the study respondents. Data were collected through in-person visits and Google forms. Data were collected from agriculture knowledge workers working in various research institutes located throughout the Punjab. For this study, all agricultural researchers/scientists are identified as agricultural knowledge workers. The inclusion criteria for the study respondents were (1) researchers/ scientists working on 17 scales or above and (2) working at Ayub Agricultural Research Institute, Faisalabad.

The study included a total of 350 participants, categorized into different age and experience groups. Among the age groups, participants aged 21–33 years, identified as Aspiring Knowledge Workers (ANW), accounted for 122 individuals, representing 34.9% of the sample. Participants aged 34–46 years, labeled as Experienced Knowledge Workers, made up 130 individuals or 37.1% of the sample. The Senior Knowledge Workers, aged 47–60 years, comprised 98 participants, contributing 28.0% to the overall sample.

In terms of work experience, 101 participants (28.9%) fell into the category of Novice Knowledge Workers, with 1–10 years of experience. Emerging Knowledge Workers with 11–20 years of experience included 80 individuals, constituting 22.9% of the sample. Seasoned Knowledge Workers, having 21–30 years of experience, made up 83 participants, or 23.7%. The most experienced group, Veteran Knowledge Workers with 31–40 years of experience, included 86 participants, representing 24.6% of the sample.

The study questionnaire had two sections. The first sections had information related to sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors like work experience, age, and job nature. The second section had information about the experiences of work alienation at the workplace. To gauge work alienation among agriculture knowledge workers, the work alienation scale developed by Noir and Vohra was used (Nair & Vohra, 2009); it had eight items (see appendix). The response format of this scale was agreement/disagreement. 1 denotes strongly agree and 5 to strongly disagree.

We employed a quantitative research design to evaluate the study hypotheses. The study applied nonparametric tests to assess the association between age, work experience, and work alienation. Specifically, the Kruskal Wallis test and the post hoc test of Bonferroni were used to assess the study hypotheses. Both tests are used when data is skewed and ordinal. They are also used when data do not meet the basic assumption of parametric tests (Akpojaro, 2020). Kruskal Wallis test is used to assess whether there is a significant difference in more than two or three categories concerning the dependent variable (Johnson, 2022). IBM SPSS software (27 edition) was used to apply these tests.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussions of the study.

Table 1

Loadings, Reliability, Construct Validity, and Collinearity Statistics for Work Alienation Scale

Scale items	loadings	Alpha	AVE	CS
Work alienation scale		.92	.62	
Work alienation 1	.825			.356
Work alienation 2	.835			.351
Work alienation 3	.800			.386
Work alienation 4	.716			.510
Work alienation 5	.767			.446
Work alienation 6	.821			.369
Work alienation 7	.722			.469
Work alienation 8	.820			.353
Median (Q1, Q3)	22 (18, 27)			

Note: AVE= average variance extracted, CS= collinearity statistics, Tolerance values are reported for CS, Q1= first quartile, Q3= third quartile

Table 1 presents loadings, reliability, construct validity, and collinearity statistics for the Work Alienation scale used in the study. The table includes the following tabular information: scale item loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), average variance extracted (AVE), and collinearity statistics (CS), specifically tolerance values. The scale comprises eight items, each measuring a different aspect of work alienation. The table also provides the median score for work alienation with its corresponding first and third quartiles (Q1, Q3).

The factor loadings for each item on the Work Alienation scale range from .716 to .835, indicating that all items have strong contributions to the underlying construct of work alienation. These loadings are above the commonly accepted threshold of .70, which suggests that each item explains a substantial portion of the variance in the overall construct. The Cronbach's alpha for the Work Alienation scale is .92, indicating excellent internal consistency. This high alpha value suggests that the items in the scale are measuring the same underlying concept reliably.

The AVE for the Work Alienation scale is .62, which is above the recommended threshold of .50. This indicates that the scale is well-converged, as more than 50% of the variance in the items is captured by the construct of work alienation, confirming adequate construct validity. The tolerance values range from .353 to .510, which are above the commonly acceptable threshold of .10. This indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern in the scale, as all scale items are not highly correlated with each other.

The median score for work alienation is reported as 22, with the first quartile (Q1) at 18 and the third quartile (Q3) at 27. This suggests a moderately skewed distribution of work alienation scores, where the central tendency is somewhat higher than the lower quartile but not as extreme as the upper quartile. Thus, the results presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the Work Alienation scale is a reliable and valid measure of the construct of work alienation among the study respondents. The high factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE values provide strong evidence of both internal consistency and construct validity. Furthermore, the tolerance values indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern, suggesting that the scale can be used without issues in advance analyses. The distribution of work alienation scores, as indicated by the median and quartiles, suggests a moderate level of work alienation, with some variability across the study respondents. These findings highlight the strong psychometric properties of the Work Alienation scale.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Groups	Name	N	Mean	s.d	95% CI for Mean		Min.	Max.
					LB	UB		
Age								
21-33	ANW	122	15.99	2.573	15.53	16.45	8	19
34-46	ENW	130	22.38	1.789	22.07	22.70	19	26
47-60	SNW	98	31.01	3.545	30.30	31.72	26	40
Experience								
1-10	NNW	101	15.37	2.390	14.89	15.84	8	18
11-20	ENW	80	20.33	1.123	20.08	20.57	19	22
21-30	SNW	83	24.11	1.457	23.79	24.43	22	27
31-40	VNW	86	31.64	3.322	30.93	32.35	27	40

Note: CI= confidence interval, LB= lower bound, UB= upper bound, s. d= standard deviation
ANW= aspiring knowledge workers, ENW= experienced knowledge workers, ANW= senior knowledge workers, NNW= novice knowledge workers, ENW= emerging knowledge workers, SNW= seasoned knowledge workers, VNW= Veteran knowledge workers

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables, focusing on work alienation across different age and experience groups among agricultural knowledge workers. For each group, the table provides the number of participants (N), the mean, standard deviation (s.d.), and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the mean (Lower Bound [LB] and Upper Bound [UB]), as well as the minimum and maximum scores.

Descriptive statistics for work alienation were calculated for different age and experience groups of agricultural knowledge workers (Table 2). For age groups, Aspiring Knowledge Workers (21–33 years) reported a mean score of 15.99 (s.d = 2.573, 95% CI [15.53, 16.45]), while Senior Knowledge Workers (47–60 years) reported a higher mean of 31.01 (s.d = 3.545, 95% CI [30.30, 31.72]). For experienced groups, Novice Knowledge Workers (1–10 years) had the lowest mean of 15.37 (s.d = 2.390, 95% CI [14.89, 15.84]), whereas Veteran Knowledge Workers (31–40 years) recorded the highest mean of 31.64 (s.d = 3.322, 95% CI [30.93, 32.35]). These findings highlight significant variations in work alienation based on age and professional experience.

The results suggest that both age and work experience are positively associated with higher work alienation among agricultural knowledge workers. The increasing mean values across age and experience groups indicate that older and more experienced workers may perceive higher levels of alienation, potentially due to factors like job burnout (Usman et al., 2020), role stagnation (Ojobu, 2024), or reduced organizational engagement (ÖZTÜRK ÇİFTCİ, 2021). The relatively low standard deviations within groups suggest consistent perceptions of work alienation among agriculture knowledge workers in each group.

Table 3

Comparative Analysis of Work Alienation Across Age and Experience of Knowledge Workers

Groups	Name	Mean rank	df	Median(QI, Q3)	X^2	p
Age			2		307.779	.000
21-33	ANW	61.93		16 (15, 18)		
34-46	ENW	187.23		22 (21, 24)		
47-60	SNW	301.32		30 (28, 34)		
Experience			3		326.125	.000
1-10	NNW	51.00		16 (14, 17)		
11-20	ENW	142.44		20 (19, 21)		
21-30	SNW	222.20		24 (23, 25)		
31-40	VNW	307.40		31 (29, 34)		

Note: Kruskal Wallis Test, Q1= first quartile, Q3= third quartile, ANW= aspiring knowledge workers, ENW= experienced knowledge workers, ANW= senior knowledge workers, NNW= novice knowledge workers, ENW= emerging knowledge workers, SNW= seasoned knowledge workers, VNW= Veteran knowledge workers

Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of work alienation among agricultural knowledge workers based on their age and work experience, using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The analysis includes mean ranks, medians with interquartile ranges (Q1, Q3), chi-square statistics (X^2), degrees of freedom (df), and significance levels (p). Results are reported separately for age and experience groups.

Hypothesis 1: *There is a significant difference in work alienation across knowledge workers belonging to different age groups.*

Hypothesis_1 assesses whether there is a statistically significant difference in work alienation across various age groups of agriculture knowledge workers. The findings (see Table 3) demonstrate that there are statistically significant differences in work alienation among at least one pair of groups (X^2=307.779, df=2, p<.001). For age groups, mean ranks ranged from 61.93 (Aspiring Knowledge Workers) to 301.32 (Senior Knowledge Workers), with medians increasing from 16 (Q1 = 15, Q3 = 18) to 30 (Q1 = 28, Q3 = 34). Consequently, hypothesis_1 is proved. Moreover, the results of multiple comparisons using Bonferroni adjustments revealed significant differences in work alienation across age groups (see Table 4). Specifically, the Aspiring Knowledge Workers (21–33 years) exhibited significantly lower work alienation scores compared to both Experienced Knowledge Workers (34–46 years) and Senior Knowledge Workers (47–60 years), with mean differences of -6.393 (95% CI: -15.72, -14.31, $p < .001$) and -15.018 (95% CI: 5.74, 7.05, $p < .001$), respectively. Additionally, Experienced Knowledge Workers (34–46 years) had significantly lower work alienation scores compared to Senior Knowledge Workers (47–60 years), with a mean difference of -8.626 (95% CI: 14.31, 15.72, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 2: *There is a significant difference in work alienation among knowledge workers with varying levels of work experience.*

Hypothesis_2 evaluates whether there is a statistically significant difference among knowledge workers with varying levels of work experience. The findings indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in work alienation based on work experience among at least one pair of agricultural knowledge workers (X^2=326.125, df=3, p<.001). Further, mean ranks for experience groups rose from 51.00 (Novice Knowledge Workers) to 307.40 (Veteran Knowledge Workers), with corresponding medians ranging from 16 (Q1 = 14, Q3 = 17) to 31 (Q1 = 29, Q3 = 34). Thus, hypothesis_2 is supported.

Table 4

Multiple Comparisons in Work Alienation Across Age and Experience of Knowledge Workers

Groups	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval		Adjusted p
		Lower bound	Upper bound	
Age				
21-33 vs. 34-46	-6.393*	-15.72	-14.31	.000
21-33 vs. 47-60	-15.018*	5.74	7.05	.000
34-46 vs. 47-60	-8.626*	14.31	15.72	.000
Experience				
1-10 vs. 11-20	-4.959*	-5.86	-4.06	.000
1-10 vs. 21-30	-8.742*	-9.63	-7.85	.000
1-10 vs. 31-40	-16.273*	-17.16	-15.39	.000
11-20 vs. 21-30	-3.783*	-4.73	-2.84	.000
11-20 vs. 31-40	-11.315*	-12.25	-10.38	.000
21-30 vs. 31-40	-7.531*	-8.46	-6.60	.000

Note: * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
The adjusted p values are based on the Bonferroni correction method.

Additionally, significant differences were found across experience groups. Novice Knowledge Workers (1–10 years) reported significantly lower work alienation scores compared to Emerging Knowledge Workers (11–20 years), Seasoned Knowledge Workers (21–30 years), and Veteran Knowledge Workers (31–40 years), with mean differences of -4.959 (95% CI: -5.86, -4.06, $p < .001$), -8.742 (95% CI: -9.63, -7.85, $p < .001$), and -16.273 (95% CI: -17.16, -15.39, $p < .001$), respectively. Emerging Knowledge Workers (11–20 years) also demonstrated significantly lower work alienation compared to Seasoned Knowledge Workers (21–30 years) and Veteran Knowledge Workers (31–40 years), with mean differences of -3.783 (95% CI: -4.73, -2.84, $p < .001$) and -11.315 (95% CI: -12.25, -10.38, $p < .001$), respectively. Finally, Seasoned Knowledge Workers (21–30 years) reported lower work alienation than Veteran Knowledge Workers (31–40 years), with a mean difference of -7.531 (95% CI: -8.46, -6.60, $p < .001$).

The findings indicate a statistically significant upward trend in work alienation across both age and experience groups. Younger and less experienced workers reported lower levels of alienation, likely due to optimism (Zohourparvaz, 2023; You et al., 2022; Yurdakul & Öneren, 2021) and a focus on skill acquisition (Lagios et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Mahmoud Mohamed et al., 2024; ÖZTÜRK ÇİFTCİ, 2021) in early career stages. However, alienation appears to increase with age and experience, potentially as a result of greater exposure to organizational challenges (Vinokurov & Kozhina, 2020; Yurdakul & Öneren, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022), role stagnation (Shahid et al., 2024), or unmet professional expectations (Alfuqaha et al., 2023; Semiz & Söyük, 2023).

Conclusion

The study examined the differences in work alienation among agricultural knowledge workers of various age groups and having different levels of work experience. The study results demonstrated statistically significant differences based on the age and work experience of agricultural knowledge workers. It was

found in the study that work alienation, age, and work experience are positively associated. Younger and less experienced knowledge workers reported lower levels of work alienation than their older and seasoned counterparts. The study findings suggest that age and work experience are significant sociodemographic factors that contribute to work alienation in knowledge-producing organizations.

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Appendix

1	I do not enjoy my wor
2	Facing my daily tasks is a painful and boring experience
3	Work to me is more like a chore or burden
4	I feel estranged/disconnected from myself
5	I often wish I were doing something else
6	Over the years I have become disillusioned about my work
7	I do not feel like putting in my best effort at work
8	I do not feel connected to the events in my workplace