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Exploring the psychological contract breach of nurses in healthcare: an exploratory study

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Abstract

Purpose - Recent advancements in the field of organizational psychology have transformed the employees' perceptions related to the reactions of the employment relationship. The main aim of the study is to explore the consequences of psychological contracts among the nursing staff and how to provide better patient care and quality service in the health-care system as nurses play a pivotal role in the context of Pakistan. Significantly, this study attempts to bridge the research gap by exploring consequences of psychological contracts. Drawing on the social exchange theory, this study examined the psychological contracts of nurses and their reactions to the perceived violation.

Design/methodology/approach - This research adopted a qualitative method and was based on an exploratory approach. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews from 21 nurses working in public, private and charity hospitals in Karachi, Pakistan. The thematic content analysis is employed for the analysis of data by using NVivo software.

Findings - The study identified the relational and transactional elements related to the psychological contract of nurses who predominantly consisted of supervisor support, autonomy, tangible/intangible rewards and trust. The intrinsic motivation which relates to their devotion to work was found as an additional element to balance their psychological contract. This research also establishes that the psychological contract of nurses is being violated in their work settings.

Practical implications - By highlighting the importance of psychological contract breach, the findings demonstrate that health-care institutions should take measures to cope with psychological contract breach issues at the workplace.

Originality/value - This study contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring psychological contract breach. Substantially, there are rare studies conducted on psychological contract breach among nurses in developing country context (Pakistan). However, this study adds to the previous studies related to the psychological contract of nurses in the context of Pakistan by using social exchange theories.

Finally, this study enables the management of healthcare to balance the psychological contract issues effectively.

Keywords: Psychological contract breach, healthcare, benefits, motivation, autonomy, Pakistan

Introduction

The improvement in the health-care sector requires an increase in the quantity and quality of health-care providers (**Zhang et al., 2016**). It has been observed by **Nardi and Gyurko (2013)** that the shortage of nurses is the main obstacle to achieving improved health-care outcomes. According to the statistics provided by the World Health Organization (**WHO, 2006**), there is a shortage of 4.3 million nurses across the globe which would become worse in 2020. In the health-care scenario organizational behaviour theories propose that psychological contracts are an imperative phenomenon for management practitioners because they are present in several human resource management practices. The concept of psychological contract is described as the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between an employer and an employee (**Rousseau, 1989**). The psychological contract involves an unspoken and unwritten agreement between supervisors and employees.

For instance, the psychological contract may comprehend understanding derived from both explicit and implicit promises among employees and employers (**Van Gilst et al, 2020**). An explicit promise may refer to a written or verbal communication such as pay and an implicit promise is one that has been inferred by the employee. Employees within the health-care setting may have perceptions regarding their responsibility when it comes to occupational health and safety (**Walker, 2013**). According to **Roman-Calderon et al (2019)** and **Anggraeni et al (2017)** researchers, breach of psychological contract is continuously evolving especially in the context of developing countries (**Krishnan, 2011; Ahmed et al, 2016; Peng et al, 2016**).

Specifically, in relation to the psychological contract, there has been sufficient literature available in the context of developing countries (**Duran, 2019; Lamboglia, 2017; Rodwell and Ellershaw, 2015**). However, very limited attention has been given to psychological contract breaches among nurses in the context of developing countries, especially in Pakistan. The health-care industry is based upon the mix of public, private, civil and philanthropic units in Pakistan. In this study, we have considered the public, private and charity hospitals of the nursing staff.

There is a steady stream of human resource management (*HRM*) researchers who argue that psychological contract theory is subjective and thus could vary culturally in developed countries having predominantly individualist societies (**Agarwal and Gupta, 2018; Rousseau, 1989**). Conversely, workplace culture in Pakistani organizations is based on collectivism and their findings may have no similar implications in collectivist societies like Pakistan. Another essential point is that most of the previous studies conducted are in the context of western countries under the psychological contract breach (**Atkinson and Cuthbert, 2006; Clinton and Guest, 2014**). However, there are rare studies which focused on developing country contexts such as Pakistan (**Ali, 2021; Ali et al., 2019; Bashir and Nasir, 2013**). Our study argues that in Pakistan power distance exists, their employees face diverse hurdles like job-insecurity, lack of resources and breach of contract from employers. For this reason, being high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance also suggests that society is both highly rule-oriented and supportive of high inequalities of power and wealth (**Hofstede, 2003; Blau, 2017**). Importantly, these factors contribute to breach of contract and turnover intention among nurses in the workplace (**Birdseye and Hill, 1995**). Our study responds to a recent call (**Agarwal et al., 2021**), to explore different contexts and cultures under the psychological contract phenomenon.

There is a significant amount of literature on exploring the psychological contracts of employees all over the world, including UK (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000), the Netherlands (Smith et al., 2011), the USA (McCabe and Sambrook, 2014; Linden, 2015), South Africa (Corder and Ronnie, 2017) and many more (Corder and Ronnie, 2018). Nonetheless, previous research has not addressed the psychological contract of nurses in depth (Caron et al., 2019; Ming et al., 2019; Punjani et al., 2014). Many aspects of the concept were left unexplored (Duran, 2019; Malik and Khalid, 2016). As a result, the purpose of this study is to explore the impact and significance of antecedents of psychological contract breach among nurses working in hospitals in Pakistan.

Nursing in Pakistani context

Pakistan is ranked number 5th as the most populated country in the world with a population of 212.2 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Pakistan being a developing country is struggling hard in many areas due to which the health-care system has suffered a lot and stands among 122nd out of 190 countries in the World Health Organization performance report. There is a severe deficit of health-care workforce. Today, the nurse-to-patient ratio is 1:20 (Rafiq et al., 2019). There is a significant growth seen in the health-care industry and the demand for paramedical personnel has also increased. Consequently, the shortage of nursing staff can create problems as fewer individuals are interested to join this profession due to a lack of growth. The reason behind the lack of growth are different factors, among them, one factor is that the nurses in the health-care industry feel that they have not been provided with appropriate facilities to survive and take care of their families. Nurses are an integral part of the health-care system and face daily challenges. As mentioned by the researchers, the nurses are dealing with the obstacles related to a good working environment in Pakistan (Hafeez et al., 2010).

Literature review

Underpinning through social exchange theory (SET)

After reviewing the literature during the past few years, it has been observed that the reasons for employees' diverse modes are when they recognize that their management failed to meet their expectations with respect to social exchange theory (SET). Therefore, this theory needs to be further explored (Colquitt et al., 2013). According to SET, the social sciences disciplines deal with the study of multiple disciplines including management, social psychology and anthropology (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2017). It helps to understand the social context of multiple disciplines. In relation to this, the theories which are based upon social context involve a series of sequential transactions between multiple parties (Mitchell et al., 2012).

In SET, resources are shared as goodwill to enhance mutual relationships (Gergen, 1969; Gouldner, 1960). The intensity of these good exchanges depends upon the mutual relationship (Blau, 2017). Social exchange tends to be more focused on trust and flexibility. Importantly, we found that most studies have employed a single theoretical perspective to understand employee-employer relationships with psychological contract breach and the majority of the studies adopt the SET perspective (Agarwal and Gupta, 2018; Liu et al., 2012; Restubog and Bordia, 2006; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998). SET is based on the norms of reciprocity, positing that employees will be more willing to participate and display desirable work-related behaviours if they perceive a beneficial exchange relationship with their organization.

An approach to *SET* is one of the most important theoretical perspectives to understand the psychological contract because, in employment relationships, both economic and social expectations are relevant for an employee to understand and anticipate (**Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002; Shore and Tetrick, 1994**). Theorizing work exchanges, **Gouldner (1960)** proposed that they are based on being fully responsive; for example, “people help those who have been helpful to them, and people should not injure those who have been helpful to them”. People also feel obliged to respond to the benefits they receive under the psychological contract framework; for example, employees might pledge loyalty, hard work and effort in exchange for an organizational incentive such as fringe benefits (**Conway and Briner, 2005; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002**). People strive for balance in their interactions, according to **Blau (2017)**, a perceived imbalance in their fulfilment of obligations may have negative consequences for the individual. For example, if an employee believes that his or her employer is treating him or her unfairly, the employee’s commitment may be low.

Psychological contract

It has been observed that a psychological contract is now considered to be thoroughly studied in order to gain a better understanding of one’s employment relationship. It will be extremely ne the growth of the main trends and expansions that have been crucial for stimulating the attention of researchers towards psychological contract over the past five decades, given the significant interest that has been shown in this field (**Shaheen and Bari, 2019**). According to **Gulzar (2020)**, employees’ performance is influenced by their breached psychological relationship with their bosses. Other issues include high turnover rates and low employee engagement (**Malik and Khalid, 2016**).

The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the techniques that explain how individual perspectives have an impact on one another, as well as the methods that help us to specify its influential role. It is extremely important to learn more about the psychological contract’s development phase in order to better understand how it not only shapes existing literature but also provides research directions for the upcoming era of psychological contract research.

In the field of psychology, previous research by **Roehling (1997)** is widely regarded as the first article that was cited in order to comprehend the fundamentals and early development of the construct of the psychological contract. According to him, he also clarified how psychological contract studies emerged and were shaped after various stages of development.

Rousseau (1989) reorganized the concept of the psychological contract. It was his first work that re-energized workers’ interest in their relationships with institutions, whereas the investigation of psychological contracts began at the beginning of the 1960s. According to him, it is a psychological contract that captures “a person’s passion concerning the provisions and conditions of a mutual trade contract between the individual and another entity”; these viewpoints are intended to provide a way to tie people together and institutions together and control their conduct, making it easier to achieve the objectives of the organization.

When employees believe that their employer has met their obligations, such as supporting them or keeping promises, the psychological contract has been fulfilled, and the employee will behave well as a result (**Azim et al., 2020**). This is in line with the psychological contract theory, which states that there are reciprocal relationships between employees and employers who have a common interest (**Morrison and Robins, 1997**). It is, however, a breach of the psychological contract if one party assumes that the other party will not fulfil its obligations or promises. As a result, employees may feel betrayed, which can lead to feelings of frustration and anger (**Eckerd et al., 2013**), as well as negative

or unusual behaviour (**Ahmed et al., 2013**). However, only a few empirical studies on the psychological contract and workplace aberrant behaviour have been conducted (**Li and Chen, 2018**).

Trust on employees

The profession of nursing dealt with intense pressure and stress due to the emotional demanding work requirement (**Van der Colff and Rothmann, 2014**). Nurses face anxiety, grief and suffering in their routine work. To enhance the performance of nursing staff, they should be motivated which will ultimately affect their well-being. The nursing supervisor and relevant managers have to play pivotal roles to make nurses determinate and persistent performance-related outcomes and this is all because of the trust given by the supervisor. The nurse supervisors' responsibilities include providing guidance, direction, motivation, availability of resources, support, motivation and benefits to their staff (**Armstrong and Taylor, 2015**). To manage these above-mentioned responsibilities, supervisors face many challenges that can be exacerbated by lacking of the role of the psychological contract (**McCabe and Sambrook, 2013**). Keeping the expected role of leaders, the scarce resource managers need to shape the employee-employer relationship. If the psychological contract which underpins this relationship is well managed, this is likely to have encouraging implications for both nurses and nurse managers. Effective management of the psychological contract has been shown to positively influence motivation, performance and commitment (**Conway et al., 2014; Rousseau, 2004; Walker, 2013**).

A significant development in the understanding and management of the relationship between employees and organizations has been deemed to have occurred with the introduction of psychological contracts. For example, psychological contracts can be used to establish relationships between individuals and their institutions or authoritative representatives (**Rousseau, 1995**). It has the potential to influence employee perceptions and practices, as well as the relationship between employees and their supervisors and other authoritative bodies. It is estimated that 15 significant advances have been made in this field of psychological contract research since the early 1990s. The topic of the psychological contract has been the subject of extensive research, on the basis of social and ideological agreements on development and the consequences of psychological contract violations or fulfilment on workers, as well as the consequences of the institutional result (**Conway and Briner, 2009; Zhao et al., 2007**).

Previous research has focused on the indirect impact of organizational trust on psychological contracts. Psychological contracts mediate the relationship between organizational trust and contextual performance (**Cheung and To, 2017**). Meanwhile, in the hotel industry, **Liu et al. (2013)** examined the relationship between psychological contracts, organizational trust and organizational citizenship behaviour. They discovered that psychological contract breaches had a negative and significant impact on organizational trust and citizenship behaviour. **Golparvar and Azarmonabadi (2014)** investigated the relationship between organizational trust and the psychological contract between many workers of an organization, especially in Esfahan, Iran, and discovered that organizational trust has an impact on psychological contract (**Hauwa'u Sani, 2018**).

Workplace ergonomics

Workplace ergonomics is the science of designing a place of work while preserving the worker's abilities in mind. Workers become fatigued, frustrated and injured as a result of poor workplace design. This rarely results in the most productive employee (**Gulzar and Hussaini, 2012**). Because of its

significant contribution to performance in various industries, such as manufacturing and service organizations, research findings on the ergonomics structure of workplaces have captivated the interest of many researchers in various countries over the past several decades (**Heller-One, 2020**). That was because workplace ergonomics has indeed been identified as one of the most important factors in improving employee productivity. The quality of an employee's work environment has a significant impact on their motivation and, as a result, their performance (**Kingsley and Onuoha, 2019**).

People and work are known to be linked by ergonomics. The ergonomic approach necessitates the removal of impediments to production, quality and safety. To assess the communications between people and work, ergonomics considers staff, work and work design (**Heller-One, 2020**). Ergonomics is great research that deals with various working conditions that can cause workers to become irritated. Illumination, sound, temp, vibration, massive use, cyclic mobility, workshop layout, tool design, mechanical design, chair design and footwear design, among other things, all contribute to comfort and health (**Bhatt et al., 2020**).

The relationship at the workplace was introduced and investigated the impact it has on the behaviour and relationship between employees and managers was introduced by **Argyris (1960)** but the psychological contract's content was relatively limited in his study. Personal non-material benefits such as achieving personal ideals, for example, were overlooked (**O'Donohue et al., 2007**). The work of **Levinson et al. (1962)**, in which the psychological contract was defined as the mutual expectations that really are mainly unstated but insinuated and are often linked to the employee's knowledge and credentials before joining the company, would be the next big step in psychological contract development.

Job autonomy

Today's workers have more freedom to choose their own effort and work schedule, autonomy is expected to be linked to higher job satisfaction. Previous research in this field has been limited to psychology and sociology and has been either qualitative or relied on small, unrepresentative samples of respondents (**Anderson, 1992; Bhuian et al., 1996; Birdseys and Hill, 1995; Taylor et al., 2003; Schienman, 2002**). Much of this research also overlooks the question of how much job autonomy boosts job satisfaction. Furthermore, very few studies have looked at the impact of job autonomy on job satisfaction and have not considered other factors that influence job satisfaction, such as personal characteristics (**Bhuian et al., 1996**). The job satisfaction literature in economics has also overlooked the multi-dimensional nature of job satisfaction, focusing instead on overall job satisfaction.

According to a previous study, job autonomy can encourage employees to be more creative in their work. Employee creativity was boosted by job autonomy, which was also linked to innovative work behaviour (**De Spiegelaere et al., 2014**). Another study discovered the more autonomy provided to an individual, the more innovative behaviour they will exhibit (**Orth and Volmer, 2017**). Employee autonomy offered by the organization at work is also predicted to increase employee commitment to the organization. Employees will be more committed to the company if they have the freedom to choose the procedure or method for achieving the company's goals (**Siregar et al., 2021**). According to previous research, workplace autonomy and employee commitment are highly correlated (**Sisodia and Das, 2008**).

Expectations of rewards

Performance and rewards are, in essence, inextricably linked with job satisfaction. Employees put in their best effort every day in the hopes of being compensated financially or non-financially. According to performance and reward strategies (**Gungor, 2011**). Reward can be financial or non-financial and can take the form of salary increases, bonuses, promotions, responsibility, a pleasant work environment, recognition and so on. The primary goals of rewards are to attract and retain employees, encourage them to achieve outstanding results and reinforce positive behaviour of the employees. The presence of a monetary reward, such as money, will not be a strong motivator, but its absence will be (**Ranjan and Mishra, 2017; Ibrar and Khan, 2015**). In this study, compensation is determined by timely salary, a fair package, benefits, allowances and a consistent policy, i.e. a pleasant working environment.

Although some researchers believe that using achievement extrinsic rewards (i.e. incentives based on outcomes) can stifle the intrinsic motivation needed for creativity (**Deci et al., 1999**), others (**Cerasoli et al., 2014; Eisenberger et al., 1999**) have found that using performance-contingent extrinsic rewards can help with (Sarin and Mahajan, 2001). How do we reconcile these disparate results? Result rewards, according to cognitive evaluation theory (CET), reduce intrinsic motivation for creative tasks by shifting the focus away from the task and towards the outcome (Deci, 1975). From a behavioural standpoint, rewards assist in the regulation of behaviours that lead to improved task performance (**Eisenberger and Shanock, 2003**).

Negative consequences

In contrast, other changes in the employment relationship have more negatively affected employees. For example, widespread mergers, layoffs and reorganizations have reduced job security and increased uncertainty among employees (**De Meuse et al., 1997**). As a result of the increasingly dynamic business environment, many organizations have been forced to rethink - and modify - the nature of the psychological contract they have with their employees. The most highlighted consequences by the researchers are poor job performance, counterproductive behaviour, work ethics, uncomfortable working with female bosses, lacking of punctuality, disengagement **Azeem et al. (2020)** and lacking of professionalism. It also involves factors such as loyalty, perception, politics, grooming and commitment.

People feel threatened and experience psychological stress and strain when resources are lost or threatened with loss, or when no resources are gained after resource investment. Because employees value employment in and of itself (**Jahoda, 1981; Janiri et al., 2018**), and because employment brings salary, social status and respect, stable employment is a valuable resource. As a result, job insecurity poses a threat to employee resources in terms of lost employment, as well as the income and status that comes with it. Employees may be threatened with job loss in a disruptive organizational setting with the required frequency of budget cuts, resulting in more negative attitudes towards their superintendent, the work itself and the organization (**Jiang and Probst, 2019**).

Lower employee performance, poor work attitudes, more withdrawal behaviours, increased turnover intention (**Khowaja et al., 2019**) and lower organizational trust are some of the negative consequences of a breach (**Van den Heuvel, 2012; Zhao et al., 2007**). According to **Bankins (2012)**, an organization can mitigate the negative effects of a psychological contract breach by facilitating positive workplace social relationships and providing challenging and meaningful work, both of which are components of the psychological contract. Remedies, in the form of other obligations fulfilled, can help to repair the

negative effects of a psychological contract breach (**Bankins, 2012**). However, it is unknown which specific enticement can compensate for a psychological contract breach. Although **Foa and Foa (1974)** provide a basic guide for resource substitution, more empirical studies are needed to test these ideas.

Supervisory support

Masterson's (2001) research on social exchange in companies tends to focus on the responsibility of employees to pay back favourable treatment received from the organization. He proposed with the context of service employees, their supervisors' positive attitude will have a trickle-down effect on their customer relationship management (Shanock and Eisenberger 2006). They claim, that it should elicit a desire to assist supervisors in achieving their objectives (**Eisenberger et al., 2002; Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003**). An increase in productivity of normal job actions, as well as helping behaviours which go beyond assigned responsibilities, would be examples of such efforts (**Malatesta, 1995; Becker and Kernan, 2003**). Recently, **Karami and Ismail (2013)**, address research by various scholars, states that supervisory support is linked to affective and organizational support, as well as employee performance among professionals.

Employees who receive proper feedback, fair treatment and adequate assistance in developing individual skills in order to achieve work goals will have a psychological effect (**Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011**). Employees' trust in the organization, a sense of confidence and the belief that the boss will support them in an unbiased manner (**Gilbert and Tang, 1998**), fair in satisfying the responsibility to care for the employee's welfare, are all factors that can affect their psychological well-being. Both these factors, supervisory support and perceived organizational trust, can also have psychological consequences. Employees who believe their responsibilities have been met by the organization indicate that the psychological contract has been met by the employer (**Bhatnagar, 2014**). Employees' beliefs about reciprocity are referred to as psychological contracts. In psychological contract obligations between the worker and his or her employer, in which these obligations are predicated on the employee's performance (**Azim et al., 2020**). "Perceived promises that aren't always recognized by organization agents" (**Morrison and Robinson, 1997**).

Work-family life balance

According to **Gulzar et al. (2021)**, employees want to work after their value resources by creating conditions, impulses, personality attributes and things (**Kaya and Karatepe, 2020**). This theory goes on to say that if employees are under stress at work, their value resources may be lost (**Halbesleben, 2006**). Individuals encounter increased confrontation between work and life as they wish to maintain the level of life they desire (**Kurup and Raj, 2022**). As a result, one of the major challenges faced by today's employees is balancing work and family life (**Tayal and Mehta, 2022**). Another stream of research has examined the influence of work-life balance benefits, employee recommendation and job attractiveness on job pursuit intentions (**Ahamad et al., 2022**).

Work-life balance is characterised as a person's ability to balance work and family obligations, and other non-work obligations and activities (**Koon, 2022**). Work-life balance encompasses not only the relationships between work and family functions, but also other aspects of life. The concept of work-life balance is generally preferred in this study due to its much more extensive associations. Scholars have defined work-life balance in a variety of ways (**Haar and Brougham, 2022**). Work-life balance is

also emphasized in literature as an experience that varies from person to person (**Munyeka and Maharaj, 2022**).

Consequences of COVID pandemic on work-life balance

Despite the global pandemic outbreak, people's work, study, travel and general lifestyles have experienced a major shift (**Lopez and Fuiks, 2021**). According to recent research, the current COVID-19 pandemic has affected academic mothers in developing countries such as Nigeria with diverse issues such as role conflicts, health problems and sociocultural pressures in a high-power distance society (**Akanji et al., 2022**). Similarly, health professionals and nurses faced personal and professional problems and had to deal with stress and psychological effects during the Covid-19 pandemic (**Yayla and Eskici Ilgin, 2021; Babore et al., 2020**).

The COVID-19 pandemic disturbed the maintenance of a healthy balance between one's career and personal life have attracted considerable awareness from researchers in various societies. This is primarily due to rapid shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic that have taken place in the roles played by both families, many individuals were obliged to stay at home and restructure their life, with the house serving as a workplace, schools, park, family refuge and entertainment centre (**Anderson and Kelliher, 2020**). As a result of these difficulties, the responsibilities of job and family become more blurred. Researchers in the past proposed a concept in which the job and family environments were interwoven with apparent impact on one another and could not operate as separate entities (**Imam et al., 2021**). Furthermore, workers look to their employers for help managing their work and non-work responsibilities (**Ceri and Cicek, 2021**). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the work-life balance of the nurses was disrupted, which had a negative impact on their psychological well-being (**Yayla and Ilgin, 2021**).

Research methodology

This is an exploratory study which explores the psychological contract breach of nurses. Grounded theory is used as a research design (**Denzin, 1994**). This study enables the healthcare officials to understand the expectations of nurses from their hospital supervisors and management and how this knowledge can strengthen their relationships (**Babbie, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2017**). An exploratory (personal interview) research technique is used mainly for two major reasons. Firstly, considering the dearth of research exploring the consequences and components of psychological contract breach among nurses, especially in the context of a developing country (Pakistan), the qualitative research approach is useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the field. Secondly, previous studies (**Quratulain et al., 2018; Conway and Briner, 2009**) suggest using qualitative research design in studies relating to the psychological contract breach phenomenon. Some authors have used similar qualitative research methods to collect primary data, for example, organizational socialization through psychological contract breach (e.g **Woodrow and Guest, 2020**) and expatriates' perceptions of and process of responses to psychological contract breach (**Perera et al., 2018**). In all these studies, the authors drew attention to the importance of psychological contract breaches using the qualitative approach in the organizational psychology field. For this study, the interpretivism philosophical paradigm is used which is based on the principle that the researcher performs an explicit role in perceiving the social world. This study used "how" and "why" questions (**Baxter and Jack, 2008**).

Sample and data collection procedure

The administration of the three hospitals was contacted, and their permission was obtained which helped researchers to contact and interview the nurses through the purposive sampling technique (Saunders et al., 2009). Necessary efforts were made to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents, including the use of pseudonyms. Explicit consent was collected from each individual who participated in this research via a signed consent form. Each participant was also sent “a privacy notice for research subjects” to review and keep. This privacy notice explained in detail the nature, duration, background and purpose of the research and that participation in the research was voluntary. It also explained how their personal data was processed and other relevant details. The staff that willingly signed the informed consent and volunteered themselves for the study were enlisted for the study. A sample of 21 nurses was selected. The sample consisted of nurses working in private, public and charity hospitals in Karachi, Pakistan. Face-to-face interview was conducted.

Data saturation

The sampling aim of qualitative research is to gather information, which is beneficial for understanding the difficulty, complexity, difference or context within a phenomenon, instead of representing numbers as in quantitative research, it works with small sampling sizes. The generally suggested standard for qualitative research is collecting data until reaching saturation points (Merriam and Grenier, 2019; Charmaz, 2008). In the homogeneous group, saturation occurs in about 12 respondents (Guest et al., 2006). Sandelowski (1995), narrated that among homogeneous people, sample sizes of 10 might be adequate for a qualitative study. In this way, our study considered 21 nurses sufficient for this research due to their homogenous nature as per suggested by the aforementioned scholars. Our study closed the data collection phase at 21 interviews after meeting the criteria of data saturation. These interviews were taken from the nurses of three hospitals in Karachi, i.e. one Public, one Private and one Charity.

Data handling

The interviews were taken with the nurses. The total duration of an interview is approx. half an hour which includes the debriefing of the topic, consent form signing and discussion on the information leaflet provided to the interviewee. These interviews were taken during office timings and the majority of them were busy with their work. Interviews schedule lasted for more than a month from 18 November 2019 to 30 December 2019. Interviews were conducted in Urdu according to the respondent's preference and were transcribed in English later on. As mentioned earlier, written consent was acquired before each interview. A topic guide was used during the interview sessions. Related documents (e.g. policy papers, economic surveys and reports of NGOs) were identified through Google searches.

Data generation and analysis

Interviews were recorded digitally and field notes were hand written which were later transcribed along with the recorded interviews. For data analysis, QSR NVivo was used, we transcribed interviews, grouped responses, found themes and identified connections between those themes and got analytical insights for the final themes. The thematic content analysis was used for the analysis of data

(Braun and Clarke, 2012). Considering the responses, coding was performed and nodes were identified in NVivo. However, only those themes were retained that have strong linkages in previous literature (Tables 1 and 2).

Research results and analysis

Theme 1: autonomy of work

Work autonomy is related to the freedom and discretion given to employees to execute their job responsibilities (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). When employees are provided with autonomy in their work, they have a feeling of psychological empowerment leading to creative ideas and are more risk-oriented to implement them (Evans et al., 1992). Autonomy has been defined by the researcher as making the right choice and independence of work given to employees (Clausen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2003). Beneath the theme of autonomy, researchers found that nurses are not given authority to take decisions as per their own choice; however, almost every nurse reported a lack of autonomy given at their workplace.

We are not being able to work alone in a ward without the supervisor was due to the sensitive nature of the procedures. If anything got missed that may harm the health of patients. Mostly we advised to take care of the procedures when we are giving them treatment. While I'm treating patients, I constantly check with my supervisor, and she keeps track of everything I do. It is critical, in her view, to pay attention to all of the initial precautions in providing treatment to patients. CMN-01

Table 1. Details of respondents

Pseudonyms for interviewees	Domain	Gender	Tenure	Position
CNM-01	CNM Private	Female	<17	Staff
CNM-02	CNM Private	Female	<13	Staff
CNM-03	CNM Private	Female	<12	Staff
CNM-04	CNM Private	Female	<8	Staff
CNM-05	CNM Private	Female	<7	Staff
CNM-06	CNM Private	Female	<30	Supervisor
CNM-07	CNM Private	Female	<5	Staff
CNM-08	CNM Private	Male	<15	Staff
CNM-09	CNM Private	Male	<5	Staff
CJMP-01	CJMP Public	Female	<3	Staff
CJMP-02	CJMP Public	Female	<17	Supervisor
CJMP-03	CJMP Public	Female	<11	Supervisor
CJMP-04	CJMP Public	Female	<7	Staff
CJMP-05	CJMP Public	Female	<8	Staff
CJMP-06	CJMP	Male	<32	Supervisor
HI-01	HI Charity	Female	<33	Supervisor
HI-02	HI Charity	Female	<2	Staff
HI-03	HI Charity	Female	<10	Staff
HI-04	HI Charity	Female	<6	Staff
HI-05	HI Charity	Male	<9	Staff
HI-06	HI Charity	Male	<18	Supervisor

Table 2. Themes evolved

Themes	Emphases	Illustrative extracts	Codes
Autonomy of work	This theme deals with the autonomy nurses are not giving authority to take decisions as per their own choice however almost every nurse reported the lack of autonomy at their workplace	... <i>We are not being able to work alone in a ward without the supervisor was due to the sensitive nature of the procedures</i>	Give opportunity to make decisions, Need support, No Authority to make work-related decisions, No choice to make the decision, Permission needed doctors
Expectation of reward	This theme highlights the employee expectation of attaining rewards for the job they are performed well and also includes psychological contracts which in return motivate them	... <i>Once a team visited my ward and give good remarks to my supervisor regarding cleanliness, my supervisor become happy and give a treat to the whole staff of the ward. " I feel happy and it's motivated me a lot"</i>	Concern about performance, equal benefits for all, job satisfaction, need recognitions, no appreciation from management
Negative consequences	This theme demonstrates that nurses' also experiencing negative consequences namely unacceptable shift patterns, unethical behavior, unfair rewards, disturbed sleep, politics, biasness, no flexibility of work which leads to psychological contract breach	... <i>My family gets affected with my routine, I frequently missed family dinners, birthdays, and social occasions and I think I should leave this profession</i>	Desire for absenteeism, desire to leave job, dissatisfaction with salary, no fault but punished, no trust on coworkers, politics at work, supervisor not forgive for mistakes, supervisor support me emotionally, threatening behaviour of supervisor, unacceptable shift patterns
Supervisory support in work	This theme focuses on the behaviour of supervisor to facilitate their employees in demonstrating their skills, knowledge, and expertise and manage their work life. (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002)	... <i>Our supervisor is a shining star, she always favors and help us out of the way. Once I need the money for my father's operation I was very upset, she told me not to worry and she asked other colleagues to help and she generated the required amount of money</i>	Give support to juniors, guidance from supervisor, motivation from supervisor, relationship with supervisor, support from supervisor when required
Trust on employees	This theme defined as the willingness to an individual's valuable behaviour related to the expectations with others (Genin <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	... <i>We have trust on each other, some employee dose to us, we do share personal problems with our colleagues</i>	Accepts mistakes, biased dealing, justified punishment, management appraised fairly, respect each other, supervisor is honest, sympathy for supervisor, team work, trust on co-workers
Work-family life balance opportunity	This theme focuses on work-life balance which is integral for the personal satisfaction of employees of any industry	... <i>I feel demotivated when my personal life gets affected due to work I don't give time to my kids, I sometimes face difficulties to house chores</i>	Imbalance work life

(continued)

Table 2.

Themes	Emphases	Illustrative extracts	Codes
Workplace ergonomics	This theme highlighted some difficulties of nurses during their work hours	<i>... I love to work here, we have a cooperative working environment but sometimes we feel the nasty smell of medicines so we should be provided air fresheners</i>	Relationship with supervisor, support from co-workers, supportive working environment, celebrate achievements, good place to work, need room for relaxation, need salary increment, safe working environment
Job-related benefits	This theme is based on benefits which employees expect to receive in terms of pay, cash, and funds are called financial benefits, and all benefits that relate the appreciation, recognition, and non-cash are called non-financial benefits	<i>... We don't have conveyance allowance. We need money, certificate or employee of the month title</i>	Dissatisfied with job benefits, equal benefits for all, expectation of job benefits, medical benefits for dependant, need day-care facility, need medical facilities, received salary compensation

I always consult with my supervisor while I'm treating patients and she also monitor the every task that I performed. In her opinion it is very important to take care all the necessary steps of giving treatment to the patients. Whenever something is overlooked, patients' health may be jeopardized. When giving them treatment, we usually advise them to pay attention to the procedures. CMN-07

Sometimes we work independently when tasks are not sensitive and for critical situations our supervisor always initiates but in difficult situation we are restricted to contact with our seniors. I have remembered an experience that a patient had been given the over dose of pain killer and she got allergy that time the whole team was reprimanded and given warning. CJMP_01

We always confirm the medicines with the supervisor before giving it to the patient. Once I didn't stitch a patient he got infected badly. I was scolded badly by my supervisor the stitching patient wasn't my responsibility and even I don't have right to do that. These kind of dependence made us demotivated. CmN-06

Sometimes we make decisions. [The supervisor isn't] here every day, and make a decision out of my own and use my own commonsense but very consciously because Patients' health can be compromised whenever something is not done with care. When administering treatment to them, we usually advise them to pay close attention to the instructions. HI-05

Theme 2: expectations of rewards

This theme highlights the employee expectation of attaining rewards at the job based on their performance they are performed well and also includes psychological contracts which in return motivate them.

Once a team visited my ward and give good remarks to my supervisor regarding cleanliness I worked very hard to train the staff, my supervisor become happy and give a treat to the whole staff of the ward that day was a valuable part of my life I was happy and that motivated me a lot. In my view these kind of appreciation made people more productive and performance oriented. CJMP-02

I'm conscious about my performance because my increment depends on my performance.it is imperative that if person is doing job fairly and sometimes put some extra efforts to do work 100 percent accurately it results in good rewards.so I always expect the more rewards according to my performance and inputs. CMN-04

I always targets the high achievement and balanced performance because it help me to boost my energy level while I perform my job. I always focus to improve myself and learn new things especially dealing with people regular basis. My supervisor tells me that it will also impact my performance. CMN-06

I would appreciate if I will receive the title of "employee of the month" because I know the efforts of a health care employees. I will be motivated if I appreciated by a senior. According to me few words of support and encouragement always give you strength and you put more efforts to achieve your goals. IH-03

It is obvious and gives motivation if someone praises me. It helps to improve my performance. If people always discourage and use negative tactics for reprimand I got demotivated and sometimes I thought to leave the hospital. CMN-08

We as a health care professional work hard and sometimes we got restless but we don't appreciated by management that hurts and sometimes I feel very disappointed felt bad for my organization also but next day I come to job with new motivation as my profession required. IH-06

Theme 3: negative consequences

Nurses also reported experiencing negative significance, namely, unacceptable shift patterns, unethical behaviour, unfair rewards, disturbed sleep, politics, biasness and no flexibility of work which leads to psychological contract breach.

Mostly when we work a lot or we have pressure to manage the department we do night shifts. Night shifts are very tiring and disturbs my sleep. It also affect my mood and I remain aggressive. Continuous night shifts affect my health badly. CMN-03

In our profession we saw tons of patient died sometimes we feel very sad and depressed few of them got closer to us because of their longer stay at hospital. Once I handle a patient and taking care of him he was suffering from cancer and later on he was expired, that hurts me badly and at last leads to depression. CMN-05

Most of the time we have to sacrifice our social life for the sack of our profession and its requirement. My family gets affected and offensive with my routine, I frequently missed family dinners, birthdays, and social occasions and I think I should leave this profession. CMN-07

As in my organization people have job security but we don't get rewards on the basis of our efforts. There is a culture of bribe while receiving rewards people got permitted and earn compensation by giving the bribe to concerned persons. I avoid this kind of bribe, buttering and flattering, it's unethical and I don't want to grow like this way. CJMP-03

Sometimes we have given punishments and we scolded by the senior for the responsibilities which doesn't belongs to us. Once I didn't give first aid to a patient who was bleeding I was scolded badly it wasn't my responsibility but doctor was expecting I will do that. That incident made me crazy and I was about to leave this profession. CMN-07

Theme 4: supervisory support in work

It refers to the supportive behaviour of supervisor to facilitate their employees in demonstrating their skills, knowledge, expertise and manage their work-life (**Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002**). In relation to the theme of supervisory support the nurse provided the information that

We need supervisory support to accomplish our task successful as we need help and we have to consult our boss. My supervisor gives moral support to me which means a lot to me. Once my brother was ill and I don't have money for his treatment my supervisor help me in medical and monetary support for my brother's treatment, CMN-01

We need supervisory support to accomplish our task successful as we need help and we have to consult our boss. My supervisor gives moral support to me which means a lot to me. Once my brother was ill and I don't have money for his treatment my supervisor help me in medical and monetary support for my brother's treatment, CMN-01

We require assistance in order to complete job, as we require help and must consult with our supervisor. My supervisor supports me and most of the time she exceeds my expectations. She guides me for my work. CMN-02

Our supervisor is a shining star, she always favors and help us out of the way. Once I need the money for my father's operation I was very upset, she told me not to worry and she asked other colleagues to help and she generated the required amount of money. CJMP-03

My supervisor is supportive and kind. We have very good relation each other; she guides me whenever I needed. My supervisor provides me with moral support, which is extremely valuable to me. When my husband was sick and I didn't have the financial means to pay for his medication, my supervisor facilitated me in obtaining medical and monetary assistance for my husband's medical treatment. CJMP-07

Theme 5: trust on employees

The term trust is defined as the willingness to an individual's valuable behaviour related to the expectations of others (**Rousseau and Gunia, 2016; Lamboglia, 2017; Mehdad et al., 2012**). In this theme, the researcher found the following insights from participants:

Inside a high-trust environment, people find increased productivity, increased energy, and increased collaboration with colleagues. When there is a lack of trust, individuals are more provisional and guarded, they tend to separate themselves from their colleagues, and they feel stressed and fearful. Companies are experiencing high turnover rates as well as poor performance. We have trust on each other, some employee close to us, we do share personal problems with our colleagues. CMN-02

We shared respect and trust. We invite each other in our family function and enjoy together. Building a culture of trust, I've discovered, is the most effective way to make a significant difference. High trust organizations produce more productive employees who also have greater energy at jobs, shared a similar with their coworkers, and remain with their employers for a longer period of time than employees in low-trust organizations. People also have lower levels of psychological stress and are more satisfied with their lives, both of which contribute to higher levels of performance. I am happy here. CMN-07

A lack of confidence causes people to be less sure of themselves and more cautious, as well as to isolate themselves from their coworkers and to feel stressed or fearful. There is no political environment, we work peacefully. We trust each other, we do favors for the one who is required. CJMP-04

Many people may not respond with the word "trusted" as their first response. We work in pleasant environments with friendly people who we immediately interact with, the organizational culture created by leaders is most often mentioned in a very different way. I am very thankful to my supervisor for her trust. We have very good relation each other and easily trust, we can talk hours if got the chance. CJMP-05

Theme 6: work-family life balance

According to **Potgieter and Barnard (2010)**, the disturbance between work and family life is termed as work-life balance. It is the perspective of integration of work and family, conflict between work and family and interaction of job requirements and family needs (**Mostert and Oosthuizen, 2010**). The work-life balance is an integral part of an employee to manage, personal satisfaction of employees of any industry in relation to his/her family and work is very important (**Imtiaz and Hameed, 2017**). In this theme, the underpinning issues reported are as stated,

I feel demotivated when my personal life gets affected due to work, my work life affects the job. The idea of finding time for both work and other aspects of life, of if they are related to someone's relatives or self-interests it always gives motivation to live. CJMP-02

My family gets effected by my routine, I got upset and sometimes it also affects my job. Even at home sometimes we need to connect hospital. When we become interconnected through digital technology, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a clear separation between our professional and personal lives. CJMP-04

I feel guilty when I ignore my parents. They need my attention as I'm the only child. I don't do house chores and my mom gets irritated. We all experience stress from time to time. It is an unavoidable fact of life. Job exhaustion, on the other hand, is preventable, and you should take steps to ensure that this does not happen to your employees. Burnout occurs when we feel overwhelmed and unable to meet the demands of our jobs on a consistent basis. Emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on every aspect of our lives and can be extremely detrimental. HI-05

Theme 7: workplace ergonomics

Workplace resources play a vital role in the performance of an individual and lead to the wellbeing of an employee. The employee assumes the organization as the best place to work (**Demerouti and Bakker, 2011; Demerouti et al., 2001**). In the final theme of workplace, ergonomics researcher reported some difficulties faced by nurses during their work hours, few of these difficulties are as follows:

My organization is very beautiful and we have a sound and pleasant environment here. We have many facilities related to our work. We provided all the necessities of job. I am happy to work here but we need daycare for our kids and a room to relax because we work for longer hours. CNM-02

This hospital is a great place to work. We don't take leave friendly environment lead me to stay here. But I need a refreshing place. I believe an institution can go a long way toward protecting its employees from work-related injury or illness if it takes the following steps. At the same time, incorporating engineering controls into a business performance can help it to perform better and be more productive overall. CNM-06

Our environment is very good, we have given all the work facilities. We feel comfortable, relaxed and secured. I love to work here, we have a cooperative working environment but sometimes we feel the nasty smell of medicines so we should be provided air fresheners. CJMP-04

We have a supportive working environment; we don't have facilities at the workplace. We need a chill room in summers. I think methods of modifying the workplace and practices to avoid health injuries as well as mental stress in order to ensure that the company's profitability is not adversely affected by providing such kind of benefits. Management should invest for the employees. HI -03

Theme 8: job-related benefits

Benefits that employees expect to receive in terms of pay, cash and funds are called financial benefits, and all benefits that relate the appreciation, recognition and non-cash are called nonfinancial benefits. All employees expect these financial and non-financial benefits against their input (**Shields and North-Samardzic, 2015**).

In my organization we have proper compensation policy according to the level of job. We have given gratuity, EOBI and leave bonus and leave encashment. But we also need money, certificate or employee of the month title. The world is changing rapidly and we have to improve our standard of living accordingly. CNM-02 Our HR policy says we have so many

benefits but we got some from them. In our work we don't take leave because it's the demand of our job to be punctual. According to policy we have provided leaves, short leaves, etc. CNM-03

We have proper policy in our organization but we don't have conveyance allowance. We need monetary benefits, certificate or employee of the month title. I believe these kind of tokens always boost the employees' motivation for work and also increase moral and loyalty with the organization. CJMP-01

Our management gives us several benefits other than salary. They have provided the residential in mess whoever needed I will more satisfy if we provide the conveyance. We can take a loan from the bank. I think more facilities effects the living standard that ultimately satisfy us. CJMP-02

My organization no give medical benefit. Medical facilitation needed for dependents. We need a medical facility, medical facilities should be provided not only in the hospital but if required it should give outside also. Our salaries are not up to the mark to facilitate our family. CJMP-05

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore the notion of psychological contract related to nurses and develop an understanding of their commitments to their work and supervisor and also perceptions of their supervisor's commitments to them. A total of 21 nurses in the study had composed psychological contracts comprising both transactional and relational elements. Besides the entire situation, relational aspects were reflected in their job including serving patients and showing willingness for them without considering other circumstances. Also, transactional elements were found related to the psychological contracts of nurses. The nurses wanted recognitions, tangible rewards, appreciation and acknowledgment in return for the efforts put into their job performance.

The interviews provided some evidence that psychological contract breach was affecting the nurses' mental and physical well-being and their job satisfaction, with some suggestions of negative outcomes for the organization (i.e. intention to leave the organization). From the interviews, it was evident that some nurses experienced breaches of their psychological contract. Nurses mainly suggested that they want their supervisors to be more supportive, flexible and give them importance. This will, in turn, build a trusting relationship. However, some nurses reported that some of the commitments were not met and they feel disappointed. Nurses also reported that they are less authorized to take decisions and most of the time they need permission from their supervisor, it is likely that they have less autonomy and experience demotivation and in return impact their performance. After the interviews and transcription of responses, it is suggested that the construct of the psychological contract of nurses is equally important as required in other occupations. The employee-employer relationship helps to create well-being and minimize the work stressor. Therefore, the findings of this research support the consistency and validity of developed psychological contract measures (**Walker et al., 2018; Bunderson, 2001**).

The nurses provided good performance and in exchange for appreciation and acknowledgment. However, there was very little loyalty to the organization. This supports **Trybou and Gemmel's (2016)**, findings which indicate that the psychological contract of professionals is more complex than normal. The interaction of the individuals with the organization can be either professionals or employees. The

professional psychological contract is characterized by relational elements while the employee-type psychological contract carries predominantly transactional elements. The mutual interdependence of supervisors and nurses ensures greater fulfilment of the psychological contract.

Whenever there is an agreement on the terms, the likelihood of mutuality and fulfilment increases significantly (**Ye et al, 2012**). The expectations of the nursing staff towards the manager are significantly high and so it is the responsibility of the manager to create a platform where the nursing staff is at ease. This type of expectation also alludes to the relational nature of the psychological contract (**Chaudhary et al, 2011**). The word “listening” came up repeatedly, once again illustrating the importance of communication and understanding in the relationship. The term “counsel” was also used to describe the Nursing managers’ (NM) responsibilities, indicative of the nurturing role nurses expected them to play. Flexibility alluded to the need for understanding and tolerance in dealing with the personal issues of employees (**Rao, 2017**). This has also been linked to trust in the supervisor (**McCabe and Sambrook, 2014**). The need for flexibility was also linked to the need for respect, as understanding the nurses’ circumstances implied respect for them as individuals and perhaps as professionals as well.

Care for well-being is particularly important within the hospital environment due to the stressful and emotional nature of the work. The well-being of nurses has been related to patient care and should, therefore, be prioritized (**Chana et al., 2015; Pope-Davis and Ottavi, 1994**). The relationship of the manager with the nursing staff could be improved by encouraging open communication. The trust of the employees increases drastically if the manager is readily accessible and approachable. Managers can attribute the tasks and distribute responsibilities that could foster trust and self-direction among the nursing staff. When information and resources are readily available, this facilitates the development of more autonomous behaviour (**Tanaka et al., 2016; Purdy et al., 2010**). Confidentiality is also considered a key aspect of leadership and professionalism. Respecting the nurse’s need for discretion forms a key part of the ethical responsibilities associated with being a professional (**Laukkanen et al., 2016**). Previous research suggests that Pakistani organizations are often beset with problems of corruption, nepotism and career models based on seniority rather than performance, competencies or ability/talent (**Arain et al., 2012**).

Theoretical implications

This study contributes in several ways to the discourse of knowledge. Firstly, this study extends the SET through our interesting findings suggest that negative consequences impact the employee behaviour at the workplace which leads to psychological contract breach. Secondly, this study demonstrates that job-related benefits such as monetary and nonmonetary benefits improve employee performance and accomplish organizational objectives to mitigate psychological contract breach. Thirdly, this study sheds light on employee-employer relationship which is novel in this sense. Finally, this study attempts to address a contextual gap in the existing literature in the context of the developing country (Pakistan), as rare studies of this kind have taken place.

Practical implications

The findings in light of this study suggest that the composition of the psychological contract of the nurses and its components affects the motivation and performance of nurses in healthcare settings. An effective two-way communication channel is needed that supports nurses and attends to their

voices and communicates their voices so that management cares for them and provides support in order to fulfil their transactional expectations. It also allows to reduce the possibility of violation of the psychological contract. Therefore, supervisors should focus on team building and team-focused policies, paving the way for psychological contract fulfilment and employee loyalty. Hence, understanding the ways in which culture can facilitate employee attitudes and behaviours related to their workplace and their reactions to the psychological contract could help employers address perceived anomalies in training, performance and the employment relationship, as perceived by the employees (Thomas et al., 2016). It is also suggested that the nurses should be reprimanded in private, and mistakes be highlighted and communicated on an individual basis and in private. If done so, they will display commitment and motivation. They should be provided with a good working environment so that they feel relaxed, which ultimately leads to effective performance. If both tangible and intangible benefits will be provided to them that will enhance their well-being and satisfaction. Furthermore, it is important to understand that in most Asian societies, which are predominantly collectivist, the psychological contract is most likely to have a relational character (Cooke, 2018). For example, family ties and informal relationships are an integral part of society. Therefore, managers could socialize with their team members outside their working hours and socialize with each other families.

Conclusion

This study explored the literature on psychological contracts related to the nursing profession and their related impact on their motivation level and performance. The themes identified in the interviews consist of the contracts of relational and transactional elements of the psychological contract. Nurses show very positive commitment related to patient care and their job and also intended to have support and respect in return. Also, transactional elements were found related to psychological contracts of nurses, desire for recognitions, tangible rewards, and more appreciation and acknowledgement are expected as a return for their job performance. The most significant reason for psychological breach is found when expectations are not fulfilled from an organization is reflected in their low job performance and intention to leave. Nurses recall the incidents where they felt demotivated, for instance, the rude behaviours of doctors which lead to violation of their psychological contract and also displayed a significant impact on their performance. Irrespective of these interfaces with supervisors, they still prove that the overall working environment influences their motivation level. However, some examples also highlighted that support from their immediate supervisor helps them to maintain their interactions and prevent them to hurt the situation.

Limitations, significance and future recommendations

This study has several limitations. The strength of our research is that we have conducted the research in public, private and charity hospitals and the response rate was 85% as the respondent were willing to share their experiences. We have applied an iterative approach to analyse the data that involved both inductive and deductive analysis, interviewing was conducted till saturation and validation was not achieved. Moreover, no matter that the response rate was 85% but the nurses of the private hospital were reluctant to answer the questions and they were very careful while their answers because they were on duty. On the other hand, the nurses from the government and charity hospitals want to give their views on other issues as well but that was not included in this research considering the scope of the study. Due to time constraints, researchers were unable to consider more options to widen the study. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews validated that nurses are facing

psychological contract breach in their work settings. The significance of psychological contracts can be seen in the fact that the dynamics of the employment relationship between employees and employers determine a great deal of organizational outcomes as well as individual attitudes and behaviours. Future research in the field of psychological contract has a plethora of avenues where the nature and dynamics of the construct need to be highlighted and examined. The “when” and “how” of psychological contract violation/breach recovery processes can also be investigated further. Managers and researchers must pay close attention to contract research in order to survive and thrive, as it contains answers to critical questions. Future scholars should look into a variety of industries, including oil and gas, tourism, education and the automotive industry. As a result, the current study’s model can be replicated by using the time-lag method to investigate the causal relationship between employee breach and abusive supervision. This research suggests that future researchers may examine the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychological contract breach and work-life balance at the workplace. Finally, this research was carried out in a developing country context. Future researchers may look into the socio-cultural with respect to psychological contract breach in developed countries.

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