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# **GENDER DYNAMICS IN KNOWLEDGE HIDING AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE SERVICE SECTOR**

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## **Abstract**

This study is novel to explore the concept of competing variables, considering knowledge hiding (KH), occupational stress (OS) and employee performance (EP) from the lens of gender, which has not been previously studied. It enhances empirical knowledge through offering mathematical objectivity and establishes numerical significance between variables of interest. This study aims to investigate the male and female employees' performance affected by occupational stress and knowledge hiding in the Service sector. Cross sectional research design

was used because data was gathered in less than one year while comparing two contrasting genders. PLS-SEM was used for quantitative analysis to gain mathematical objectivity, and the data was gathered through semi-structured matrix-based questionnaire. Purposive, quota and networking sampling techniques were employed. Findings revealed that occupational stress and Knowledge hiding negatively affect the performance of the male and female employees, irrespective of the type of service sector. Funnel approach revealed that females showed higher knowledge hiding (KH) in comparison to male. Moreover, the comparison also revealed that in contrast to occupational stress, knowledge hiding is more affecting the employees' performance. Lastly, an unfriendly environment is the result of knowledge hiding which leads to the development of higher depression and anxiety, those also affect performance negatively.

**Key words:** Knowledge hiding, occupational stress, gender, performance

## **Introduction**

Demirkasımoğlu (2015) defines knowledge hiding as an individual's inability to disclose knowledge either deliberately, by a mistake or misunderstanding. Since early 1990s, practitioners and scholars have been exploring knowledge management consistently, focusing mostly on sharing and transferring knowledge or information, although it took some time to shift to the opposing paradigm (Haque, 2024). Several studies (Connelly and Zweig, 2015; Demirkasımoğlu, 2015; Zhao and Xia, 2019; Abdullah et al., 2019) have investigated knowledge hiding as a variable of interest. However, these studies investigated leadership style, knowledge management, institutional performance, and so on, while disregarding to a greater extent the causes and effects of knowledge hiding. Moreover, earlier researchers did not consider the competing variables/confounding variables. Interestingly, the only student to consider competing variable is by Haque (2024), this is the extension of the same study but building on it to gain new insightful knowledge from gender's perspective. In other words, past research has not explicitly addressed the functionality of occupational stress as a distinct (competing variable) while investigating the influence of knowledge hiding on performance of males and females. This study broadens the scope of the investigation through gender specificity.

Occupational health and safety management are essential for the organizations (Trishch et al., 2024). The psychological well-being of the individuals plays vital role in improving performance and ability to embrace changes (Velinov et al., 2024). Occupational stress is a stressor that is typically observed in organizational contexts (Haque et al. 2018). In simpler context, it is the disruption of the body's natural balance (Faizan and Haque, 2019). Unlike knowledge hiding, stress is not necessarily detrimental. This study addresses a gap by

considering conflicting variables while assessing the effect on the performance of male and female.

This is the new scientific knowledge from gender perspective. The research literature suggests that studies are quantitative, with a greater emphasis on factual truth, whereas qualitative perspectives, focused on useful truth, which was largely ignored by previous empirical studies. Thus, this study contributes to robust research methodology by using the qualitative study as a follow-up tool along with the funnel approach. This will pave the way for future studies to use confidently in-depth qualitative methods for finding the hidden embedded truth in depth. According to Kaur & Haque (2024), research is more about depth rather than width. Interestingly, we gained mathematical objectivity along with the exploration of hidden embedded truth. Furthermore, this study is extension of the work of Haque (2024) that competing variables could be used. However, the use of gender lens was recommended in that study, which was limitation of that study and served a foundation for our research article. If the two have a comparable negative impact, it is unclear if they have a similar magnitude or if one has a greater impact than the other on the contrasting gender (i.e., male and female). As a result, the scope is examining the relationship between variables from the lens of genders. Hence, the aim is “to investigate the impact of competing variables (knowledge hiding and occupational stress) on the performance of male and female employees.”

### **Literature review**

“Knowledge risk” is the term used to describe knowledge hiding (Labafi, 2017). However, Connelly et al. (2015) choose to differ from earlier research in that as they stated knowledge hiding as “a purposeful attempt by an individual to hide knowledge that has been asked or demanded by another person”, setting it apart from other forms of workplace deviant behavior. Thus, there are three different ways to hide knowledge: “acting dumb,” “evasive hiding,” and “rationalized hiding.” Connelly et al. (2015) highlighted that dishonesty is not always a feature of knowledge hiding because it is possible that the individual exhibiting such activity has no intention of harming others and is just pursuing beneficial results. Aljwarneh and Atan (2018) discovered that knowledge hiding predicts undesirable behavior. According to Malik et al. (2019), knowledge hiding is positively correlated with perception of politics in organizations. However, there is no evidence that it varies between male and female employees. As a result, we propose Hypothesis 1.

*H1: Knowledge hiding does not impact differently on the male and female employees' performance.*

According to Haque (2024), stress at work is a regular occurrence in organizational settings. It relates to the many forms of stresses associated with work such as task demand, leadership, personality clashes, job role and so on (Kaur, 2023). It is part of the professional lives of those working in organizational settings (Haque; 2024; Kaur, 2023). According to Kaur (2023), stress is the natural and common reaction in response to attacks. This means that when a person does not feel the environment to be natural setting or person-and-environment fit is imbalanced, then it causes stress among individuals (Kaur, 2023). The investigation of Haque et al. (2018) found that occupational stress had different causes and consequences for men and women. The detailed analysis revealed that personal stressors such as personality clash, family problems, and financial problems cause stress among females while environmental factors and workplace related factors cause stress in male employees (Haque et al., 2016). Interestingly, the physical and behavioral consequences are common for male while emotional and cognitive symptoms are evident among females experiencing stress at workplace. Comparative research of Kumasey et al. (2014) and Haque (2024) also found that the stressors varied for men and women. However, earlier studies focused on the IT industry, however there are several other areas such as banking, healthcare, consultancy, financial and public service sectors are unstudied (Androniceanu, 2024; Androniceanu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, no clear study has been conducted to determine if the level of occupational stress's influence on productivity stays consistent or varies among industries. Thus, we develop Hypothesis 2:

*H2: Occupational does not impact differently on the male and female employees' performance in different sectors.*

Studies have shown that workers' productivity, attitude, behavior, and performance are negatively affected by stress at the workplace (Ofoegbu and Nwadiani, 2006; Kumasey et al., 2014). However, these studies mentioned above do not examine variation in the causes and consequences. On the other hand, the recent quantitative work by Haque (2024) and Haque et al. (2018) examined different types of stressors affecting the performance, productivity, efficiency and behavior of employees. They find that causes vary for males and females. Males are more likely to be stressed because of 'organizational factors', while females are negatively affected by 'personal factors' (Haque et al., 2018; Haque and Faizan, 2019). Interestingly, the same studies showed that employees' organizational commitment at the operational level is negatively affected by stressors, while the commitment of managerial level employees is

positively influenced by stress (ibid). The consequences of stress are thus found to differ between males and females in the UK and Pakistan (Haque et al., 2016), disconfirming Haque (2024), Kaur and Haque (2024), and Haque et al. (2018), which suggested that the consequences of stress do not vary for males and females. Interestingly, for females, personal factors (personality, family, and financial problems) are common stressors while organizational factors (leadership, role demand, and organizational structure) cause high stress to males (Haque et al., 2016). Males show high physiological symptoms while females demonstrate high behavioral symptoms. Social support at workplace is reason for high organizational commitment among females in contrast to male employees (Haque et al., 2016; Haque et al., 2018). It is important to note that gender psychological responses are like AI stimuli (Lyulyov et al. 2024), however, it does not mean that for other concepts like knowledge hiding and occupational stress would also be similar. Although there are studies confirming that the causes and consequences vary for male and female but how it impacts the performance is still not explored. In organizational settings, positive experiences foster loyalty and recommendations (Vanickova, 2024). Moreover, there is no conclusive evidence whether knowledge hiding leads to occupational stress or occupational stress leads to knowledge hiding. Yet, there is no study that has examined the magnitude and nature of the competing variables. Thus, we develop Hypothesis 3:

*H3: Occupational and Knowledge Hiding does not vary in its magnitude and nature in relation to the male and female employees' performance in different sectors.*

### **Research methodology**

This study used the conceptual methodological framework of Haque (2024) to analyze the variables of interest in a cross-sectional comparative way. The data was gathered from October 2023 to March 2024. As part of the comparison, two common genders were used: male and female from various industries. The basis for selecting these genders is based on respondents' convenience and strong networking. The choice of the preferred industries (banking, education, healthcare, and consultancy) is based on an axiological perspective, which means that the researchers focused primarily on the comparison group since the investigator believed that distributing the cases across different industries with focus on two distinct genders would generate better conclusions from science. The information would have been easily available because of the excellent connectivity in these sectors. Although this introduces personal bias, Harman's single-factor test reduces typical technique bias. The focus remains on dynamic service sectors commonly found in all types of economies to enable more concentrated and in-

depth study. Perhaps this is due to the researcher's axiological position rather than their scientific technique. This is the study's flaw, and future researchers should pursue a more scientific method.

Good research emphasizes depth over wide (Kaur & Haque, 2024; Haque, 2024). In the same spirit, we restricted our focus and only selected service companies with at least 10 employees (excluding management and administrative people). There is just one time interval because the data was collected within five months, reflecting cross-sectional study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Despite variances and growing discrepancies in the sample framework, we used Haque's (2024) approach of mixing several sampling strategies to ensure fair representation. It is also an effective approach for minimizing dependency on a single technique. Furthermore, quality questions were asked at the appropriate moment, while responders were given no time restriction. Moreover, the common technique bias was avoided using Harman's single-factor test (Hu and Bentler, 1999). As a technique, the items of all variables included in the study were confined to a single factor explaining 32.44% of the total variance, which was considerably below the 50% cut-off mark (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, all respondents held an undergraduate or postgraduate degree; the questionnaire was written in English; including pilot testing was conducted prior to data collection with three academics randomly selected.

**Table 1: Sample representation from distinct gender**

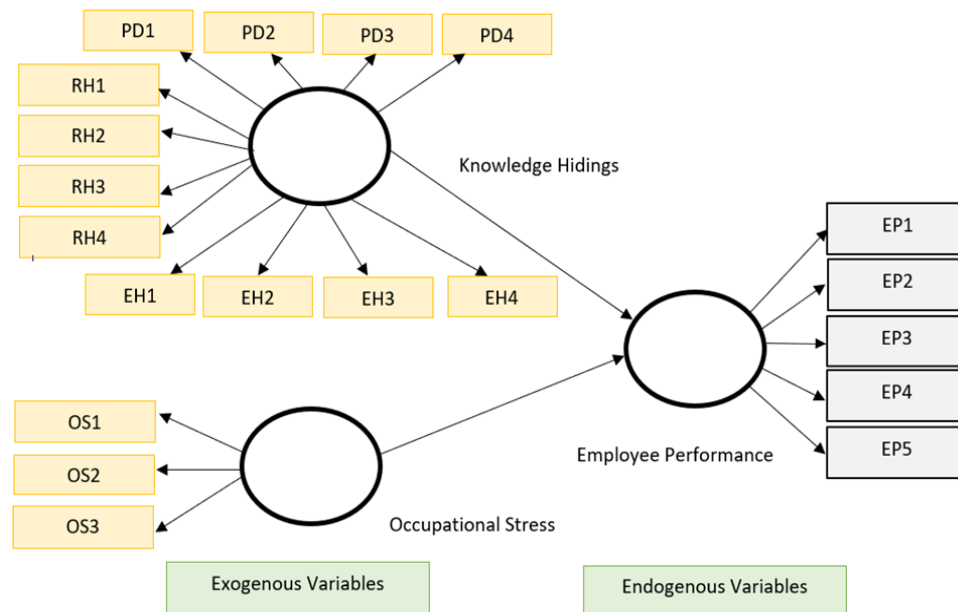
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Sampling technique (in order of usage for data collection)</b>
Male	62	Networking, purposive sampling, disproportionate quota, convenience sampling
Female	62	Networking, purposive, convenience sampling, Purposive, convenience sampling, disproportionate quota
Total sample size:	124	

To achieve gender parity in representation, purposive sampling, disproportionate quota, and networking were used. Saunders and Lewis (2015) used the Microsoft Excel 2013 (RAND) feature to ensure that only enterprises with at least 10 employees were targeted, and a total of 104 surveys were distributed. After 62 male respondents responded, it was agreed that a purposive strategy would be utilized to ensure equal representation (Table 1). Even though it delayed research gathering, equal representation was achieved in just over 5 months. A total of

124 replies were collected (Table 1), and according to Haque (2024), between 100 and 200 responses are required to reach a reasonable conclusion.

*Measures of Variables*

The questions about knowledge hiding (KH) have been taken from the study of Connelly et al. (2015), who considered three aspects of knowledge hiding (KH): acting dumb, evasive hiding, and rational hiding. Responses were collected using a 5-item scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). This scale had 12 things in three dimensions. The Wiedower (2001) scale was used to assess employee performance, which included four dimensions: timeliness, quantity of work, necessity for supervision, and interpersonal impact. The 5-item scale extended from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent). Faizan and Haque (2019) used a 5-point scale to assess occupational stress. Theoretical Framework is developed through previous scales (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Theoretical framework** - Knowledge hiding and occupational stress (independent variables) and employee performance (dependent variable)

The above theoretical framework reflects two competing independent variables (i.e., knowledge hiding and occupational stress) affecting dependent variable (employee performance). The varying factors of each variable are demonstrated through scale for knowledge hidings – PD stands for ‘playing dumb’ and there are four questions related to it. Another factor in knowledge hiding is ‘rationalized hiding’ (RH), which contains four questions. The last dimension of knowledge hiding is ‘evasive hiding’ (EH), which has four



questions. Occupational stress has three factors on the scale while employee performance has five items (factors) on the scale.

## Results and Discussion

Smart-PLS is a statistical software offering Structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis (Ringle, Wende and Becker, 2015), which is used in this study. In the recent times, it has been a popular choice among researchers because of the accuracy of results (Haque, 2024). Knowledge Hiding (KH) and Occupational Stress (OS) are the exogenous variables (an independent reflective) while endogenous variable is employee performance.

### Measurement Model Validation

Discriminant validity, reliability, and convergent validity are indicators of measurement model validation by using PLS (SEM). To accept reliability, items were loaded individually with a criterion of  $\alpha$  and CR to be 0.7 or greater while 0.5 or greater for AVE on all items for male and female respondents. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) reflects construct validity. As Table 2 shows that the items are acceptable in the context of the studied gender because the obtained values for  $\alpha$  and CR are greater than the benchmark value of 0.7, while AVE is only 0.5 (Hair et al. 2014).

**Table 2: Finding of the measurement model (first order, reflective)**

Constructs	Male			Female		
	( $\alpha$ )	CR	AVE	( $\alpha$ )	CR	AVE
Employee performance	0.88	0.87	0.66	0.79	0.76	0.57
Occupational Stress	0.81	0.80	0.64	0.84	0.75	0.62
Knowledge Hiding	0.83	0.81	0.57	0.80	0.73	0.64

Additionally, Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross loading were used to ensure the external consistency of the model determined through discriminant validity. The latent variable's AVE should be greater than the squared correlations between those considered latent variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; cited from Haque, 2024). The discriminant validity confirmed in this study are reflected through Table 3.

**Table 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)**

Constructs	Occupational stress	Employee performance	Knowledge hiding
<b>Male</b>			
Occupational stress	0.812		

Employee performance	0.711	0.841	
Knowledge hiding	0.703	0.711	0.763
<b>Female</b>			
Occupational stress	0.821		
Employee performance	0.775	0.818	
Knowledge hiding	0.741	0.746	0.721

The measurement of discriminant validity is measured through a new criterion known as heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Haque, 2024). Since the values obtained is less than 1, thus, we confirmed the acceptable (Table 4).

**Table 4: HTMT**

Constructs	Occupational stress	Employee performance	Knowledge hiding
<b>Male</b>			
Occupational stress	0.707		
Employee performance	0.631	0.702	
Knowledge hiding	0.532	0.623	0.625
<b>Female</b>			
Occupational stress	0.710		
Employee performance	0.669	0.672	
Knowledge hiding	0.601	0.642	0.521

### Structural Model Assessment

For drawing the conclusion, structural model assessment is carried out as the measurement model confirmed the reliability and validity of the model. The path coefficient is used for evaluating the structural model assessment.

In Table 5, the data analysis outcome is demonstrated through t-values  $\geq 1.96$  at 0.05 significance level as a threshold value. As evident the negative t-value reflects negative relationship.

**Table 5: Findings of structural model**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	SD	t-value	Decision	f2	R2
<b>Male</b>						
Knowledge hiding -> Employees' performance	-0.674	0.06	-7.32	0.000**	0.51	0.421
Occupational stress -> Employees' performance	-0.611	0.04	-3.67	0.000**	0.51	
<b>Female</b>						
Knowledge hiding -> Employees' performance	-.531	0.08	-3.47	0.000**	0.62	0.513
Occupational stress -> Employees' performance	-.508	0.09	-2.71	0.000**	0.56	

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , ns= nonsignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Two Tail)

In this study, ( $R^2$ ) brought moderate variation in gender: Female (0.521) whereas weak moderation in male (0.42), reflecting over 50% to employees' performance female and male (42.5%) explained through model (Table 5). The size effect of knowledge hiding for female is found to be large with moderate impact ( $f^2 = 0.622$ , male:  $f^2 = 0.511$ ; Table 5). Similarly, the impact of occupational stress is also evident to be moderate with large size effect, yet it is evident that female demonstrated higher knowledge hiding in comparison to male (Table 5).

The result of this study shows that knowledge hiding has a statistically significant adverse (negative) impact on the performance of male ( $\beta = -0.531$ ,  $t = -3.475$ ; Table 5) and female employees ( $\beta = -0.674$ ,  $t = -7.327$ ; Table 5). Since the greater frequency of knowledge hiding in female employees are evident in comparison to male, thus, female demonstrate higher knowledge hiding. Moreover, their performance is more negatively affected by knowledge hiding in contrast to male employees. Interestingly, findings showed that knowledge hiding significantly negatively impact both male and female employees' performance. Therefore, we reject hypothesis 1. In other words, both male and female employee's performance dip due to the atmosphere of knowledge hiding prevailing in the company. The results of this investigation are aligned with Fang's (2017) findings. The findings additionally demonstrated that occupational stress has a statistically significant adverse (negative) impact on the performance of male ( $\beta = -0.611$ ,  $t = -3.671$ ) and female ( $\beta = -0.508$ ,  $t = -2.714$ ) personnel in the firms (Table 5). It's interesting to note that individuals perform poor in terms of productivity in organizations with higher levels of occupational stress, regardless of the gender. Our findings partially support the work of Haque et al. (2016) and Haque et al. (2018). Given that the findings showed a statistically significant negative impact of occupational stress on employees' gender-specific performance in all types of considered service businesses. Thus, we reject hypothesis 2. The funnel approach surprisingly showed that women are more affected than men to hide knowledge. On the other hand, male is more likely to be under stress at work rather than hidden knowledge. Women, on the other hand, experience less stress at work than men do. Based on this, it appears that female employees do poor than male employees when it comes to knowledge hiding while male demonstrate higher occupational stress, irrespective of the type of service sector.

**Table 6: Correlation between variables of interest**

Correlation variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig Value	Results	Interpretation
<b>Male</b>				
Knowledge hiding & Employees' performance	-0.769	0.010	$P < \alpha$	**
Occupational stress & Employees' performance	-0.762	0.010	$P < \alpha$	***
<b>Female</b>				
Knowledge hiding & Employees' performance	-0.833	0.000	$P < \alpha$	****
Occupational stress & Employees' performance	-0.809	0.000	$P < \alpha$	****

Note: NS = No Significance, \*\* = significant, \*\*\* = highly significant, and \*\*\*\* = highly statistically significant

**Table 7. Path coefficients in the base line model**

<b>Structural Path</b>	<b>Path Coefficients</b>
Knowledge hiding → Employees' performance	0.71***
Occupational stress → Employees' performance	0.55***

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

The third hypothesis was to examine the strength (direction) and degree (magnitude) of the correlation between the variables of interest, in addition to the first two hypotheses. The link between knowledge hiding and employees' performance showed a statistically significant correlation for males and a highly statistically significant correlation for females ( $= 0.01 < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $= 0.000 < 0.05$ ; Table 6). Additionally, there is a statistically significant negative connection between male workers' performance and occupational stress, and a very highly significant negative correlation for female employees ( $= 0.010 < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $= 0.000 < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; Table 6). It's interesting to note that there is a significant correlation between knowledge hiding and worker performance for both genders, as well as between occupational stress and worker performance, but they do vary in terms of strength and magnitude. The present student is aligned with the previous work of Kumasey et al. (2014) to some extent. However, there was no details of distinct sectors. Therefore, we reject hypothesis 3 and developed a new knowledge from distinct sector.

The study found a statistically significant negative correlation between the variables of interest (knowledge hiding and employees' performance, for example, and stress at work and employees' performance) among contrasting gender. To put it another way, the path coefficient base model (CI values ranging from 0.55 to 0.71, Table 7) shows that knowledge hiding, when combined occupational with stress, significantly lowers employee performance. Thus, there is substantial evidence that reject hypothesis 3.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, eight experts participated the semi-structured, open-ended interviews via discussion forum (facilitated by ZOOM). LinkedIn was used to identify the experts, and personal networking was helpful in getting everyone on the same platform. It is discovered through analysis of the discussion that knowledge hiding has an impact on employees' performance irrespective of the type of gender. Moreover, the higher occupational stress reduces the performance of employees which is indicated by higher knowledge hiding. Interestingly, it is shown by the hidden embedded findings that unfriendly work environment contributes to the employees' increased level of anxiety and depression. Employee collaboration at work decreases because of knowledge hiding, which creates the tense

atmosphere at workplace. Depression and anxiety are the common contributing factors towards increased occupational stress which affects worker performance at service organizations. According to the experts, internal and departmental politics at workplace reduce performance appraisal chances, which leads to increased occupational stress and eventually employees start keeping knowledge to themselves rather than sharing it. These people also frequently exhibit poor performance. According to the experts, knowledge hiding has a far greater negative impact on employees' performance in comparison to the occupational stress.

### **Conclusion and managerial implications**

Based on study's findings, employees' performance is statistically significant negative impacted by knowledge hiding, especially for men. Furthermore, it is clear that 'knowledge hiding' and 'employee performance' have a negative correlation, and this linkage is statistically significant for both genders. Likewise, this study examined into how occupational stress affected the performance of both male and female employees. The statistical findings showed that, like knowledge hiding, occupational stress had a statistically significant negative impact on the performance of both genders. Strong negative connection between the variables of interest was found by using the correlation test. Additionally, the coefficient path model demonstrated that knowledge hiding, and occupational stress tend to lower employee performance. The subsequent qualitative interviews revealed that an unfriendly environment is a huge contributing factor towards declining performance of male and female employees. The climate of less or no trust further strengthen due to knowledge hiding phenomena. This further reduces the likely chances of sharing knowledge and collaboration at work. Anxiety and depression are typical contributing causes to occupational stress, which further impairs employees' performance at all organizational management levels. Finally, the interviews showed that departmental and internal politics within the company lower the chances of a performance review, which contributes to occupational stress among employees operating at the operational level. Politics inside and across departments cause employees to frequently keep their knowledge to themselves, which also explains why those who are under a lot of occupational stress put in less effort and perform worse. When knowledge hiding and occupational stress were compared, the findings showed that knowledge hiding significantly impairs the performance of female employees, while occupational stress has a greater impact on male employees' performance. However, knowledge hiding also has an impact on male employees' performance. It is possible to draw the conclusion that knowledge hiding has a significantly greater negative impact on the employees in contrast to occupational stress, when

comparing the competing variables. Instead of generalizing, this study adds gender specificity to the body of current evidence. This study adds a unique perspective to the body of research by examining the competing variable in the assessment of the influence on employees' performance through lens of gender. The knowledge hiding related causes and consequences among distinct genders give in-depth understanding to upcoming researchers, academics, practitioners, managers, and professionals.

By creating strategies to lessen the methods of knowledge hiding, upper management may comprehend the value of knowledge sharing. They shall consider the development of knowledge hub in the organizations and promote the training workshops to share knowledge. The management needs to ensure that seniors and supervisors are trained in creating a friendly workable environment. This reduces the phenomena of knowledge hiding by fostering acceptance and trust. Further, fair management techniques such as, impartial and fair treatment, openness in promotion and assessment, no favouritism or nepotism, fairness and equality in operations, improved communication, and transparent evaluation and advancement processes should be used to lessen departmental and internal politics. As a result, employees could be more willing to talk and share. To prevent needless occupational stress among employees, the performance appraisal method should also be clear. Occupational therapists may play a critical role in helping employees manage their anxiety and depression. Workshops on stress management and social support initiatives may be useful in addressing occupational stress in the workplace.

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