

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MITIGATING KNOWLEDGE HIDING UNDER ABUSIVE LEADERSHIP: A STUDY OF PAKISTAN'S BANKING SECTOR

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Abstract

Knowledge sharing is critical for the learning, innovation, and performance of organizations, yet employees engage in deliberate knowledge hiding where they face hostile leadership. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, the study examines the effect of abusive leadership on knowledge hiding behaviour with emotional intelligence as a moderating variable in Pakistan's private banking sector. Knowledge hiding was conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, the study analysed data from 372 bank employees. Data were analysed using SPSS and Hayes' PROCESS Macro. Results indicate that abusive leadership significantly and positively predicts knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.464, p < .001$), with the strongest effect on evasive hiding ($\beta = 0.223, p < .001$). Emotional intelligence significantly and negatively predicts knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.296, p < .001$). Moderation analysis confirms that EI weakens the relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding (interaction $\beta = -0.1070, p < .001$), demonstrating a protective buffering effect. The model explained 70% of variance in knowledge hiding. This study contributes by examining the effect of abusive leadership on all three aspects of knowledge hiding, incorporating two theories, understanding the double nature of emotional intelligence in the banking sector of Pakistan. Practically, organizations should implement leadership development programs promoting ethical leadership, incorporate emotional intelligence during managerial recruitment and training, establish anonymous reporting systems, and enforce zero-tolerance policies for abusive leadership to reduce knowledge hiding and enhance employee well-being.

Keywords: abusive leadership, banking sector, emotional intelligence, knowledge hiding, Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has become an important strategic asset in the contemporary knowledge economy that allows organizations to realize their long-term goals and innovate to attain competitive advantage (Anand et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Effective utilization of available knowledge is essential for organizational performance, particularly in industries where information technology and rapid change shape market dynamics (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025). However, knowledge does not automatically flow within organizations. Employees often hide knowledge when requested by co-workers, a behaviour defined as knowledge hiding (Andreeva & Zappa, 2023; Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge hiding (KH) impedes the movement of information, delays innovation, and undermines organizational learning and innovation (Usman et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). It is noted that the Fortune 500 corporations lost about \$31.5 billion annually as a result of KH (Zhang et al., 2023). Recent studies further highlight that KH continues to be prevalent and expensive regardless of industry or country of operation, especially in sales and B2C settings (Wang & Chen, 2026).

Leadership is a central determinant of employee behaviour and organizational outcomes. Among various leadership styles, abusive leadership (AL), which involves constant hostility on the part of supervisors through verbal and non-verbal communication excluding any kind of physical action (Marchant-Pérez et al., 2024; Tepper, 2000), has been recognized as the most dangerous form of leadership. Employees working under abusive leaders

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are subjected to humiliation, breach of privacy, silent treatment and reminding about their mistakes committed in the past repeatedly (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2024; Cai et al., 2024). Research indicates that negative leadership behaviours have a higher impact on employee outcomes than the positive ones (Emmerling et al., 2023). Abusive leadership is linked to dark leadership phenomena and is widespread across contexts; prevalence and impacts vary by cultural and institutional settings (Chaudhry et al., 2023; Hoang & Hunsaker, 2026; Tepper, 2000).

Recent research has clarified the approaches linking abusive leadership to knowledge hiding. Abusive leadership encourages peer social dejection, leading to knowledge hiding, and increases employees' fear of being exploited (Liu et al., 2025). This path demonstrates how a toxic leader not only affects employees but also destroys relationships among peers, thus generating an atmosphere where knowledge is kept hidden. Dehumanization perception and psychological capital reduction have also been associated with AL, fuelling knowledge-hiding behaviour.

The practice of KH leads to deterioration of interpersonal relationships, reduces trust and risks organizational learning and innovation (Usman et al., 2024). Knowledge hiding can be caused by psychological ownership of expertise, power motivations and concerns about losing the unique value of information (Bratianu et al., 2023). According to Connelly et al. (2012), KH can take one of the three distinct forms: evasive knowledge hiding (conveying incomplete and false information under the pretence of being helpful); playing dumb (pretending to know nothing about the requested information) and rationalized knowledge hiding (using justified reasons like confidentiality policies for concealing information).

Previous research proves that AL contributes to the emergence of such negative consequences as lower job satisfaction, higher turnover intention, psychological distress, and counterproductive work behaviour (Cai et al., 2024; Tepper, 2000; Udin & Dananjoyo, 2025). There are several pieces of evidence for an association between abusive leadership and KH, meaning that employees repay their supervisors' hostility through withholding knowledge (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2026; Connelly et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2023). Still, the results differ significantly: while some researchers revealed a positive correlation, others did not find any connection or reported a negative one, and there is no clear opinion among scholars (Ain et al., 2024; Gul et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2022). Such inconclusiveness shows that there must be other moderators that may attenuate the impact of abusive leadership on knowledge hiding. Indeed, meta-analysis reveals that such contextual and individual factors as leadership style act as moderators for knowledge hiding predictors (Hong et al., 2026).

Emotional Intelligence (EI), which involves perceiving, understanding, managing, and regulating one's own and others' emotions, is a vital personal resource that influences how employees react in adverse work environments (Mayer et al., 2004; Nasir et al., 2023). The dimensions of EI includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023; Rechberg, 2020). Employees with high EI are better equipped to handle stress, regulate negative emotions, and maintain constructive interpersonal behaviours even under hostile leadership (Saxena et al., 2023). Top performers tend to exhibit higher EI, with research suggesting that approximately 60% of professional success is attributable to emotional competencies (Saxena et al., 2023). EI thus acts as a psychological resource that may alleviate the detrimental effects of abusive leadership on knowledge-related behaviours, consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2011).

Crucially, EI serves a dual role in this study: as a direct predictor, EI reduces knowledge hiding by enabling better emotion regulation, stress management, and constructive interpersonal behaviour. Moreover, EI acts as a moderator that buffers employees from resource depletion caused by AL, enable them to regulate emotions and maintain knowledge-sharing behaviours despite negative treatment. The research studies have begun to uncover EI's moderating role in knowledge-related processes (Ali et al., 2026).

Despite growing attention to abusive leadership and knowledge hiding, the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the AL–KH relationship remains underexplored, particularly in developing-country contexts such as Pakistan's banking sector. Moreover, empirical evidence on the associations between AL and the dimensions of KH (evasive hiding, playing dumb, rationalized hiding) under emotional intelligence is scarce. This study addresses these gaps by: (1) examining abusive leadership's effects on all three knowledge hiding dimensions within an integrated model; (2) integrating Social Exchange Theory (SET) and COR theory to explain motivational and resource-based mechanisms; (3) clarifying EI's dual role as both a direct predictor and a protective moderator; and (4) providing empirical evidence from Pakistan's underexplored banking sector in a developing-country, high-power-distance context.

1.1. Significance

Practically, this study focuses the negative effects of abusive leadership on knowledge hiding while highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence. The current research has theoretical significance, as this study contributes to leadership and knowledge management literature by relating abusive leadership to the three types of knowledge hiding, proving the effectiveness of emotional intelligence in buffering such relationship, and incorporating Conservation of Resources Theory and Social Exchange Theory in a developing country banking environment (Blau, 2017; Hobfoll, 2011; Connelly et al., 2012; Tepper, 2000). Policymakers will benefit from

this study because it justifies the need for mandatory EI training and awareness campaigns about knowledge sharing in organizations (Ali et al., 2026; de Geofroy & Evans, 2017; Mayer et al., 2004). Societies will benefit from this study as well because it calls for the establishment of positive work environments and the discouragement of abusive leadership practices.

1.2. Objectives

The study's objectives are twofold: to examine the effect of abusive leadership on overall knowledge hiding and its three dimensions, and the moderating role of EI in the relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Abusive Leadership

The term abusive leadership refers to behaviours that can be characterized by hostile verbal and non-verbal interactions, without touching involved (Marchant-Pérez et al., 2024; Tepper, 2000). Common examples of abuse include humiliating an employee publicly or privately, intruding into the employee's private space, giving the cold shoulder to the employees, and always reminding employees of their past mistakes (Bhattacharjee & Sarkar, 2024; Cai et al., 2024). Various studies examine how AL affects employee well-being and behaviour (Shih et al., 2023). This stress-related harm subsequently reduces organizational citizenship behaviour (AlZgool et al., 2023) and undermines employee creativity, as employees feel insecure about their jobs (Syamsidah et al., 2023). Male employees appear to be more adversely affected by abusive leadership than female employees in terms of creativity loss (Syamsidah et al., 2023).

Gender and leader characteristics also play a role. Employees working under female leaders are more likely to engage in insubordination (Huang et al., 2023; Jun & Lee, 2024; Yun & Shum, 2023). When there is perceived similarity between the employees and their leader, there would be increased negative reaction toward the leader's abuse (Bayhan Karapinar et al., 2024).

The association between abusive leadership and performance is not uniformly negative (Liu et al., 2024). While the literature on abusive leadership and knowledge-related behaviours has gained some progress, inconsistencies have been noticed when it comes to one aspect of knowledge behaviour - knowledge hiding. Inconsistencies arise in terms of positive, negative, or neutral relationships with abusive leadership.

2.2. Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding involves the process of withholding knowledge sought after from co-employees and encompasses any form of information, experiences, ideas, or advice (Andreeva & Zappa, 2023; Connelly et al., 2012.). Three types of KH are identified, including evasive hiding: giving incomplete information under the guise of being cooperative (Jun & Lee, 2024; Gupta et al., 2026), pretending not to know about the sought-after information (playing dumb) (Chaudhry et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023) and rationalized hiding: using logical excuses to justify the act (Al Hawamdeh, 2023; Wu & Liu, 2025).

Knowledge hiding adversely affects interpersonal relationships and organizational learning and innovation. Various demographic and environmental factors affect knowledge hiding practices. Women have a higher tendency to hide knowledge through evasive hiding and playing dumb, while men tend to use rationalized hiding practices (Andreeva & Zappa, 2023). Knowledge hiding becomes more prevalent in virtual organizations because of easier knowledge hiding, lack of control, and digital fatigue, mainly rationalized hiding (Choudhary & Mishra, 2023).

Leadership style significantly affects knowledge hiding. Spiritual leadership increases employee commitment and reduces knowledge hiding (Junaidi, 2026). In contrast, transformational leadership alone is insufficient to mitigate knowledge hiding's negative effects (Kurniawanti et al., 2023). However, humble leadership minimizes evasion by avoiding hiding and being ignorant and encourages rationalization of hiding (Al Hawamdeh, 2023). Similarly, servant leadership decreases evasive hiding and playing dumb while increasing rationalized hiding (Usman et al., 2024). These findings indicate that leadership affects different kinds of knowledge hiding in distinct ways, reinforcing the need to examine abusive leadership's effects on each dimension separately.

2.3. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and control emotions of both oneself and others (Mayer et al., 2004; Nasir et al., 2023). Four aspects of EI include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Asmamaw & Semela, 2023; Rechberg, 2020). In increasingly complex and evolving work environments, promoting EI among employees is critical (Matta & Alam, 2023).

Employees with high EI perform better overall (Sujila et al., 2023) and especially during crises (Maalouf et al., 2023). Aspects such as customer satisfaction, stress management, leadership skills, and conflict

resolution can be significantly improved by EI (Radha & S, 2023). Emotionally intelligent leaders also excel in decision-making, conflict resolution, employee motivation, and management (Harahap et al., 2023).

EI increases innovation through increased creativity and risky behaviours (Binsaeed et al., 2023). It significantly impacts employee retention and performance (Latief & Asniwati, 2023; Saxena et al., 2023) and amplifies the positive influence of leadership, hours worked, pay, and work environment on employee satisfaction and organizational success (Deb et al., 2023). Furthermore, employees with EI are more immune to ostracism in the workplace and are less prone to cynicism (Sahoo et al., 2023).

Recent research has begun to uncover EI's moderating role in knowledge-related processes. Although EI's moderating role in abusive leadership–knowledge hiding relationships remains underexplored, evidence suggests that EI can protect employees from the corrosive effects of toxic leadership on knowledge behaviors (Ali et al., 2026).

2.4. Research Gap

There is increasing interest in abusive leadership and knowledge hiding; however, the body of literature on the topic continues to be fragmented. The existing studies either consider KH to be a single construct or analyse only a limited facet of it, which hampers an investigation of how AL impact evasive knowledge hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012; de Geofroy & Evans, 2017). Moreover, the role of EI as a dual construct which may help reduce the negative effect of AL and decrease the extent of knowledge hiding has not been adequately analysed yet (Ali et al., 2026). While previous studies established the positive correlation between AL and defensive employee behaviours, it is still largely unknown how this process occurs in contexts such as the banking sector in Pakistan, where employees' high power distance from their supervisors increases the negative impact on them (Ayub et al., 2021; Tepper, 2000).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The study's theoretical model is grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2011) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 2017). The basic assumptions of the COR theory include that people attempt to retain and safeguard their resources to avoid losing them further. In cases of AL, employees view knowledge as an important resource. Therefore, by concealing knowledge, employees can preserve their other available resources and feel more secure (Nguyen et al., 2022). From the standpoint of the COR theory, it is understandable why people who have high emotional intelligence will be less inclined to hide knowledge when being supervised abusively. EI acts as a psychological buffer that help employees from resource depletion, enabling them to regulate emotions and maintain constructive behaviors despite stress (Ali et al., 2026; Hobfoll, 2011).

However, SET posits that human relationships are founded on reciprocity, where good behavior results in positive reciprocity, which involves knowledge sharing, whereas bad behavior leads to negative reciprocity, such as knowledge hiding (Nadeem et al., 2020). In the case of AL, the behavior of the leader is perceived as bad behavior by their subordinates, leading them to respond to such treatment through KH (Gul et al., 2021). The SET also gives reasons for the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship, as emotionally intelligent individuals do not necessarily engage in negative reciprocity even under abusive situations (Jain et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Based on these theories, the present research hypothesizes that abusive leadership leads to negative reciprocity and resource conservation motives resulting in knowledge hiding. Emotional intelligence, which is considered a personal resource, moderates this effect by helping employees to control their emotions and exhibit appropriate behaviour despite the abusive environment.

3.1. Abusive Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Mixed evidence exists for the link between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding. Some studies report a negative correlation, suggesting that employees who are under abusive leaders do not tend to withhold work-related information. (Anand et al., 2024). Other researchers using dehumanization and psychological capital as mediators or moderators have found that abusive leadership positively influences knowledge hiding in a direct as well as indirect way. (Ahmed & Mohamed Makhbul, 2024).

However, most of the recent research supports a positive and significant relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding. Studies by Guo et al. (2024), Jasim et al. (2024), Kaur and Mittal (2024), Moin et al. (2024), Samdani et al. (2023), Tufail et al. (2023), and all report positive associations.

According to SET, abusive leadership represents unfavorable treatment, prompting employees to reciprocate with knowledge hiding (negative reciprocity). According to COR, employees under abusive leadership hide knowledge to conserve resources and feel safer. Abusive leaders in Pakistan are associated with evasive hiding and playing dumb but are not linked to rationalized hiding (Ayub et al., 2021). Political skillful employees are less affected by their supervisors' abusive behavior (Offergelt & Venz, 2023), suggesting additional moderating mechanisms.

Hence following hypotheses are postulated:

H₁: Abusive leadership is positively related to knowledge hiding behaviour.

H_{1a}: Abusive leadership is positively related to evasive knowledge hiding.

H_{1b}: Abusive leadership is positively related to rationalized knowledge hiding.

H_{1c}: Abusive leadership is positively related to playing dumb.

3.2. Emotional Intelligence and Knowledge Hiding

There is evidence showing that continuous exposure to knowledge hiding reduces employee performance due to emotional exhaustion, although this is not significant among employees with high emotional intelligence (Abdullah & Ahmed, 2026). Employees with young age are less prone to knowledge hiding. The employees with high education and experience and high emotional intelligence are more inclined to rationalization of knowledge hiding and less likely to evasive knowledge hiding (Zhang et al., 2023).

As per the COR theory, EI acts as a psychological resource, which minimizes the need to protect oneself through knowledge conservation. High EI employees are more effective at emotion regulation, stress management, and maintaining constructive interpersonal behavior, reducing their propensity to hide knowledge.

Research shows that individuals with high social and emotional self-efficacy are involved in all three forms of knowledge hiding (Jneid, 2023), suggesting that self-efficacy dimensions may operate differently than broader EI. However, organizational cynicism mediates this relationship: employees with lower cynicism are less likely to hide knowledge (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024).

Overall, EI is expected to reduce knowledge hiding by enabling better emotion regulation, stress management, and constructive interpersonal behaviour.

H₂: Emotional intelligence is negatively related to knowledge hiding behaviour.

3.3. Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator

Linking emotional intelligence and abusive leadership has been studied by different scholars. Employees who constantly think about negative treatment are less likely to help others; those with high psychological flexibility reduce the negative effects of abusive leadership on helping behaviour (Asim et al., 2023). Abusive leadership is negatively associated with self-emotional appraisal but positively associated with other emotional appraisal which means that people can understand emotions of other people better while having difficulties understanding their own emotions (Jain et al., 2023). Employees that regulate emotions are less impacted by abusive leadership (Wang et al., 2023).

EI's moderating role has been studied in related contexts. Employees who have high EI minimize the detrimental influence of workplace ostracism on knowledge sharing and organizational effectiveness (Bilal et al., 2025). In Pakistan, workplace ostracism is more pronounced under abusive leadership, reducing job performance; EI moderates and mitigates these effects (Anjum et al., 2023). EI also acts as a moderator in the association between knowledge hiding by peers and employees' creative performance (Ali et al., 2026).

Based on COR theory, EI functions as a psychological resource that buffers employees from the resource depletion caused by AL, enabling them to regulate emotions and maintain knowledge-sharing behaviours. Based on SET, high-EI employees may engage in less negative reciprocity despite abusive treatment.

H₃: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding.

Based on the above discussion following theoretical model is delineated.

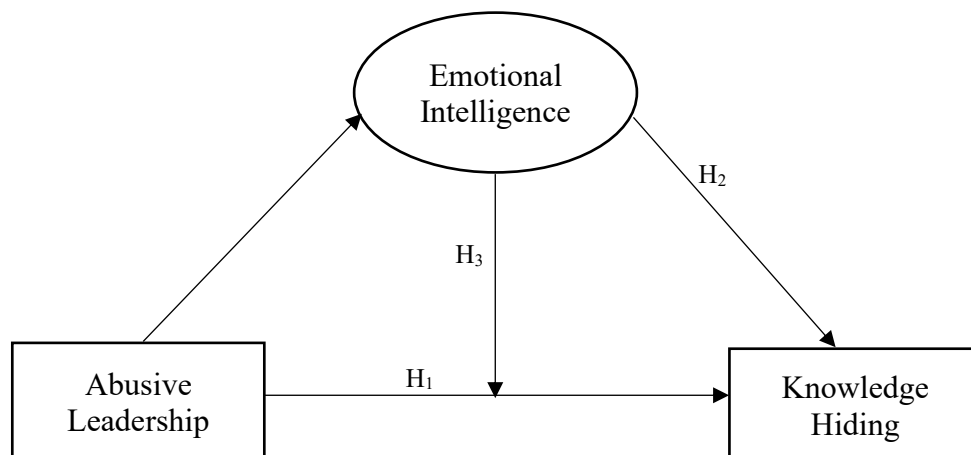


Figure 3.1: Theoretical Model

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1. Research Design

This study uses quantitative research methodology that is correlational in nature and utilizes cross-sectional data collection method. Quantitative data were obtained through self-administered online questionnaires.

4.2. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The sample of this study comprised of the bankers employed in the private banking institutions in Pakistan. Purposive sampling technique has been applied in order to select the respondents according to the following criteria: (a) they should be currently employed by a private bank in Pakistan, (b) they should have experience in the field of supervisory leadership, and (c) they should volunteer to participate in the study.

Data collection was done using LinkedIn. Links to the online questionnaires were sent to prospective participants directly via LinkedIn messages and professional banking groups. This method enabled access to a sample that is both relevant and professional. Sample size determination was done using the G Power calculator (version 3.1) based on the following parameters: Medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), $\alpha = 0.05$, Power = 0.95, and the three Predictors (abusive leadership, emotional intelligence, and interaction).

The estimated sample size was 118; 373 responses were collected, above the threshold, thus enabling sufficient power for conducting the moderation analysis. Among the 373 responses obtained, 372 valid responses remained after discarding incomplete responses, outliers, and inconsistencies. The 372 responses obtained were used throughout all further analysis.

4.3. Instrumentation and Measures

All variables were evaluated using multi-item scales derived from existing literature. Respondents were requested to respond to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree.

The abusive leadership construct was assessed with the help of 15-item Abusive Leadership Scale developed by Tepper (2000). It consists of repeated acts of hostile behaviour (verbal and non-verbal) exhibited by superiors. The scale has been shown to be reliable with $\alpha = 0.88$ in earlier research works (Marchant-Pérez et al., 2024; Tepper, 2000). For knowledge hiding assessment, we used the 12-item measure developed by Connelly et al. (2012). There are three types of hiding included in it: evasive hiding (4 items), playing dumb (4 items) and rationalizing hiding (4 items). The overall scale has shown strong reliability with $\alpha = 0.84$ (Ain et al., 2024; Connelly et al., 2012).

The emotional intelligence of the participants was assessed based on the 16 items Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002). There were four dimensions used in this scale that include self-emotion appraisal, other-emotion appraisal, emotion regulation, and emotion utilization. The WLEIS has been found to be highly reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$) and valid across diverse settings (Nasir et al., 2023; Wong & Law, 2002).

4.4. Measurement Validation

Along with Cronbach's alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to determine construct validity. The results of the test included KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, factor loadings, and variance explained. All variables were retained based on factor loadings > 0.50 , with no cross-loading issues, except an item in emotional intelligence whose factor loading was below 0.50.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly followed during the study. The participation in the research was on the voluntary basis, and all participants were made aware of the nature of the study before participating in it. All the participants signed an informed consent form before taking part in the study. They were informed about the nature of the research and risks associated with it. It should be mentioned that confidentiality was ensured as personal information was not gathered at any point.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Data Screening

Outliers, missing values, and non-consistent respondents were eliminated during screening of the dataset after data collection. In the end, after getting rid of outliers and non-response issues, a total of 372 responses remained for analysis.

5.2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 372)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	286	76.9
	Female	86	23.1
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	146	39.2
	Master's Degree	202	54.3
	Other	24	6.5
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	44	11.8
	1–5 years	171	46.0
	5–10 years	89	23.9
	11–15 years	32	8.6
	More than 15 years	36	9.7

The sample consists mainly of males (76.9%), a pattern that matches the composition of gender in the private banking sector of Pakistan. Most of the respondents have master's degrees (54.3%), demonstrating that there are well-educated individuals within the sample group. The greatest percentage of experience falls in the 1–5-year category (46.0%), while 23.9% have 5-10 years of experience. Very few people have under 1 year of experience (11.8%).

5.3 Data Analysis

5.3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The descriptive statistics of all variables used in this study can be found in Table 5.2 below. As shown, EI had the highest mean value of $M=62.08$, $SD=14.58$, implying that the participants perceived themselves to be emotionally intelligent. On the other hand, abusive leadership ($M=29.85$, $SD=13.90$) and knowledge hiding ($M=28.36$, $SD=9.58$) scored moderately well.

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of Scales (N = 372)

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	N of Items
Abusive Leadership	29.8548	13.90187	1.042	0.534	15
Knowledge Hiding	28.3629	9.57591	0.617	0.162	12
Emotional Intelligence	62.0833	14.57987	-1.249	1.463	16

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

All variables showed acceptable values for skewness and kurtosis within the normal limits (skewness = -1.25 to 1.04, kurtosis = 0.16 to 1.46), which implies that the dataset satisfied the assumptions of normality for regression analysis.

Table 5.3: Intercorrelations and Reliability of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
AL	29.85	13.90	0.950		
KH	28.36	9.575	0.784**	0.875	
EI	62.08	14.58	-0.667**	-0.715**	0.970

*Internal consistency reliabilities appear along the diagonal and bold and ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The reliability analysis result in Table 5.3 found that all the scales achieved excellent levels of internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha was above the required level of 0.70 for all measures; Knowledge Hiding ($\alpha=0.875$); Abusive Leadership ($\alpha=0.950$); Emotional Intelligence ($\alpha=0.970$). Pearson correlation analysis shows strong and significant relationships among variables, providing initial support for the hypothesized relationships. Emotional intelligence correlated with KH ($r = -0.715$, $p < .01$), with abusive leadership ($r = -0.667$, $p < .01$). Abusive leadership was strongly positively correlated with knowledge hiding ($r = 0.784$, $p < .01$).

5.3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Component Analysis was conducted to assess construct validity and sampling adequacy. Emotional Intelligence demonstrated excellent sampling adequacy with a KMO value of 0.935. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5143.991$, $df = 45$, $p < .001$), confirming strong inter-item correlations suitable for factor extraction. A single-factor solution emerged,

explaining 80.39% of the total variance, indicating a strong unidimensional structure. All items loaded strongly on this factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.698 to 0.899.

Knowledge Hiding exhibited outstanding sampling adequacy ($KMO = 0.967$), with highly significant Bartlett's Test ($\chi^2 = 8840.864$, $df = 91$, $p < .001$). A single-factor structure explained 84.85% of total variance, with loadings ranging from 0.822 to 0.940. Abusive Leadership showed excellent sampling adequacy ($KMO = 0.958$), with significant Bartlett's Test ($\chi^2 = 6928.084$, $df = 105$, $p < .001$). The single factor explained 74.67% of total variance, with loadings ranging from 0.897 to 0.949. All constructs exhibited strong convergent validity, high factor loadings (> 0.50), and no cross-loading issues, confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

5.3.3. Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct effects of abusive leadership and emotional intelligence on knowledge hiding (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Effect of Abusive Leadership and Emotional Intelligence on Knowledge Hiding

Variable	β	SE	t	P	95% CI
Constant	1.8808	0.034	55.788	< .001	[1.8145 1.9471]
Abusive Leadership	0.4639	0.038	12.086	< .001	[0.3885 0.5394]
Emotional Intelligence	-0.296	0.045	-6.533	< .001	[-0.386, -0.207]

Note. β = Unstandardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval

The H_1 was that AL is positively related to KH was supported ($\beta = 0.464$, $p < .001$). The H_2 postulating the relationship between EI and KH was also accepted ($\beta = -0.296$, $p < .001$).

5.3.4. Dimension-Specific Regression Analysis

Regression tests were conducted on the three dimensions of knowledge hiding to examine sub-hypotheses H1a–H1c (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Effect of Abusive Leadership on Knowledge Hiding Dimensions

Dimension	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	Hypothesis	Result
Playing Dumb	0.147	0.008	18.66	< .001	[0.131, 0.162]	H1c	Supported
Evasive Hiding	0.223	0.009	24.26	< .001	[0.205, 0.241]	H1a	Supported*
Rationalized Hiding	0.158	0.007	21.49	< .001	[0.143, 0.172]	H1b	Supported

*Strongest effect

All three sub-hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H1c) were supported, indicating that abusive leadership positively influences all dimensions of knowledge hiding, with the strongest effect on evasive hiding ($\beta = 0.223$).

5.3.5. Moderation Analysis

Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) was used to test the moderating role of emotional intelligence in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.6: Moderation Analysis: Interaction Effect of Abusive Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

Effect	β	SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	p
Constant	1.8808	0.0337	1.8145	1.9471	< .001
AL $\times$ EI (Interaction)	-.1070	0.0222	-0.1506	-0.063	< .001

Note. β = Unstandardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit

The moderation model demonstrated strong fit, with $R^2 = 0.7001$, $F = 286.35$, $p < .001$, indicating that 70% of the variance in KH was explained by abusive leadership, emotional intelligence, and their interaction term. H_3 , which posits that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between AL and KH, was supported by the results. The interaction term was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.1070$, $p < .001$), indicating that emotional intelligence weakens the positive relationship between abusive leadership and KH. Specifically, as emotional intelligence increases, the detrimental effect of abusive leadership on knowledge hiding behaviour decreases, demonstrating EI's protective buffering role.

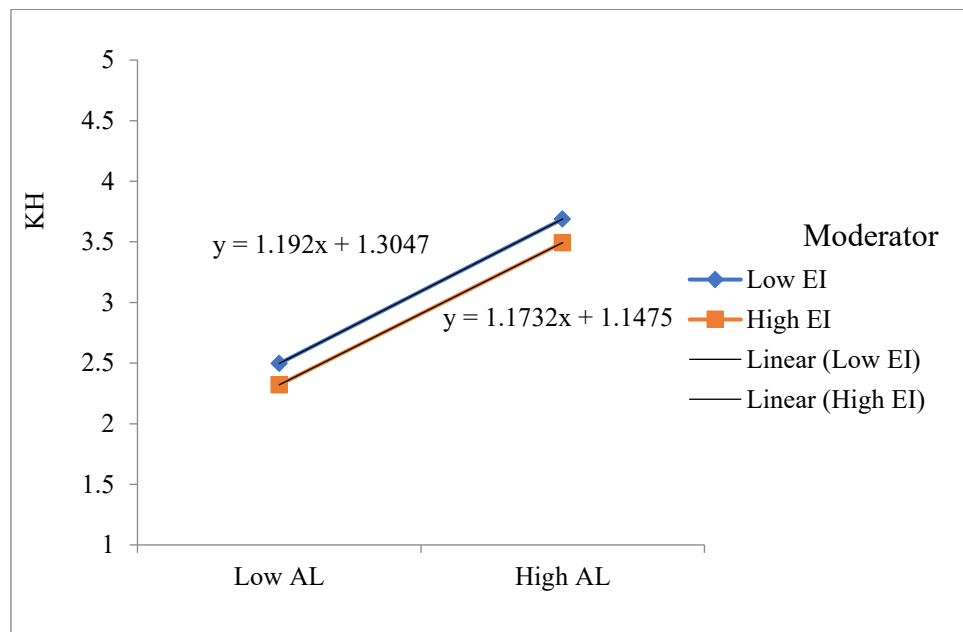


Figure 5.1: Moderation Effect of Emotional Intelligence

Figure 5.1 indicates that EI moderates the relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding. Although KH increases as AL rises, the increase is weaker among employees with high emotional intelligence, suggesting a buffering effect of EI against abusive supervisory behaviour. The effect of abusive leadership on knowledge hiding decreases as EI increases, confirming a buffering (protective) moderation effect.

This study confirms that employees with higher EI are less sensitive to abusive supervisory behaviour and are less likely to respond with knowledge hiding. In contrast, employees with lower EI are more likely to reciprocate abusive leadership through knowledge hiding behaviours. EI functions as a psychological resource (COR theory) that safeguards employees from resource loss due to abusive leadership behaviours, enabling them to regulate emotions and maintain constructive knowledge-sharing behaviours despite negative treatment (SET: reduced negative reciprocity).

6. DISCUSSION

The current research examined the relationship between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding behaviour in Pakistan's private banking sector, with emotional intelligence serving as both a direct predictor and a moderating variable. Furthermore, the results strongly empirically support all suggested hypotheses under Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources theory.

Abusive leadership showed significant and positive relationships with knowledge hiding behavior ($\beta = 0.464, p < .001$). This empirical finding supports the SET as it posits that employees respond to unpleasantness at their workplace with unpleasant behavioral manifestations (Blau, 2017; Nadeem et al., 2020). Employees who have experienced negative supervisor behavior will be more inclined to withdraw support from their colleagues in the form of knowledge hiding.

The current findings resonate with the results obtained in a series of recent research (Ahmed & Mohamed Makhbul, 2024; Guo et al., 2024; Kaur & Mittal, 2024; Liu et al., 2025;), which also observed a significant positive association between AL and KH. The latest meta-analysis conducted by Hong et al. (2026) has shown that abusive leadership is one of the most powerful predictors of knowledge hiding.

The effect was also analysed concerning the three types of knowledge hiding: evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rational hiding. While Offergelt & Venz (2023) and Ayub et al. (2021) discovered that AL is associated with evasive hiding and playing dumb but not with rational hiding, this research discovered a significant effect on all three types of knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.223, 0.147, \text{ and } 0.158; p < .001$). It means that in the context of the banking industry in Pakistan, an abusive leadership style causes knowledge hiding via different ways of hiding knowledge, such as lying, claiming ignorance, or rationalizing KH.

Contrarily, the present study finds a positive correlation between AL-KH compared to a study done by Anand et al. (2024) and Liu et al. (2025). Such findings could be explained by variations in culture in terms of power distance, employees' resilience, or corporate culture. Employees in the high-power distance setting in Pakistan are bound to be vulnerable and, therefore, more susceptible to knowledge withholding for their own protection, hence a strong argument for H₁, H1a, H1b, and H1c.

The variable EI displayed a significantly negative association with knowledge hiding behaviour ($\beta = -0.296$, $p < .001$). These findings support H₂ and fit within the context of the social-exchange theory. Individuals with high levels of EI would be more effective at regulating their emotions and maintaining positive behaviours despite any form of maltreatment.

These results match those presented in the work of Islam & Chaudhary (2024), where they state that individuals with lower organizational cynicism tend not to practice knowledge hiding behaviours, and EI reduces cynicism. In the work of (Ali et al., 2026), it is confirmed that emotional intelligence acts as a buffer for peer knowledge hiding on knowledge manipulation and creativity.

Employees who have higher levels of EI are in a position to self-regulate their emotions, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and develop adaptive coping styles (Mayer et al., 2004; Nasir et al., 2023). Therefore, it becomes unlikely for such employees to hide knowledge, even in times of stress (Maalouf et al., 2023). In other words, EI operates as a psychological buffer that saves individuals from depletion of their resources, as per COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011).

Emotional intelligence had a strong moderating effect on the association between abusive leadership and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.1070$, $p < .001$), which proved H₃. That is, the positive association between AL and KH attenuated as emotional intelligence increased (Conditional effects: Low EI $\beta = 0.5663$, Mean EI $\beta = 0.4639$, High EI $\beta = 0.3616$).

This result aligns with the Conservation of Resources theory that argues psychologically richer people are more capable of coping with occupational stress (Hobfoll, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2022). Employees with high EI can control their emotions, remain self-aware, and show empathy and interpersonal skills to react to abusive leaders in an effective way instead of resorting to knowledge hiding.

While there have been previous empirical studies analysing EI with other factors (Jain et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023), the current study stands out because it shows EI's double effect as both a predictor and as a moderating variable in relation to abusive leadership and knowledge hiding. According to Bilal et al. (2025), EI acts as a protector against the negative impacts of abusive leadership and workplace ostracism in Pakistan when considering their influence on employees' poor job performance. The moderating effect, although slight, holds theoretical significance as expected in moderation studies within leadership literature (Hong et al., 2026; Liu et al., 2025).

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

There are several significant contributions made by this study to the literature. Firstly, it is noteworthy that whereas most studies on AL have examined the effects of AL on only one construct of knowledge hiding, this study attempts to examine the effect of abusive leadership on the three dimensions of KH. Secondly, unlike prior research that has examined the issue using only COR Theory or SET, the current study incorporates Conservation of Resources Theory and Social Exchange Theory into a unified theory, thus giving a fuller picture of the issue. Thirdly, the contribution lies in demonstrating how EI acts not only as a predictor of knowledge hiding behaviour but also as a moderator between the constructs in question. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature in the context of knowledge hiding in Pakistani banking organizations by adding another dimension to research in behavioural management. Lastly, this study addresses gaps identified in the literature recently by testing the influence of emotional intelligence as a moderator in AL-KH association.

6.2. Practical Implications

This research provides some critical implications for banking institutions and their administrators. The banks need to enhance their development of leadership competencies, which will involve encouraging respectful communication, self-regulation of emotions, ethical leadership, and psychological safety instead of concentrating only on performance improvement. The human resource practices within organizations must incorporate EI training aimed at improving the ability to cope with stress, interact with others, and communicate effectively. Additionally, EI should be considered when making decisions concerning recruiting and promotion of managerial positions. It is essential to introduce a procedure based on 360-degree feedback for detecting AL in the early stages and allow employees to report such situations without fear of retribution.

7. CONCLUSION

The current research concluded that abusive leadership causes considerable knowledge hiding among employees in the Pakistan's banking industry. Employees exposed to the abusive practices of their leaders exhibit negative job behaviour in terms of knowledge hiding such as evading, pretending ignorance, and justified hiding.

Moreover, emotional intelligence has two functions: on one hand, it helps mitigate knowledge hiding, while on the other hand, it prevents its detrimental impacts from becoming more pronounced by providing resistance against negative job behaviour. Employees who have high levels of emotional intelligence do not indulge in knowledge hiding despite abusive leadership since EI offers them some sort of protection from engaging in such behaviour.

7.1. Limitations and Future Research

Though several contributions have been made by this study, there are many limitations associated with it which can pave way for further research in the field. Firstly, the study followed a cross-sectional approach whereby the causal relationship could not be established. This calls for future researchers to conduct longitudinal or experimental studies in order to test the causation in the phenomenon. Self-reported data collection could have led to common method variance in the research findings, and therefore future research may employ a multi-source approach whereby supervisor data and colleague data among others can be incorporated into the study. The sample used in this study comes from banking industry of Pakistan and hence limiting generalizability of the results. Future studies however will need to generalize the findings of this study across other industries and other cultures. Emotional intelligence is used as a moderating variable in this study, it would be worth carrying out further research on the moderating variables such as organizational justice, workplace cynicism, psychological safety, co-worker support, future orientation, and Islamic work ethics in knowledge hiding. Future research will also need to conduct qualitative studies.

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