ISSN (Print): 2788-8320 ISSN (Online): 2788-8339

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT
www.jsrd.org.pk editor@jsd.org.pk

TOXIC LEADERSHIP AND THE MUM EFFECT: PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AS A MEDIATING MECHANISM IN UPWARD COMMUNICATION SUPPRESSION

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KEYWORDS

Toxic leadership, Psychological safety, Mum effect, Upward communication suppression, Organizational silence, Pakistan

ARTICLE HISTORY

Date of Submission: 12-10-2026
Date of Acceptance: 09-11-2026
Date of Publication: 10-11-2026

ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is making a swift impact on the processes of teaching Toxic leadership is one of the most pervasive but understudied threats to organizational communication effectiveness and psychological well-being of the employee. This study investigated the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between toxic leadership and the mum effect – the tendency of employees to retain negative or potential unwanted information from their supervisors. Based on (1999) psychological safety frameworks of Affective Events Theory, Social Learning Theory and Edmondson, a theoretically derived mediation model was tested using a cross-section survey design of purposive sample with 300 employees of (54.7% male; M age range: 31–40 years) from public organizations, private companies and non-governmental organizations located in large Pakistani cities. Three psychometrically validated instruments were administered: the Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS; Schmidt, 2008; $\alpha = .91$), the Psychological Safety Climate scale (PSC; Edmondson, 1999; $\alpha = .88$), and the Mum Effect Scale (MES; adapted from Milliken et al., 2003; $\alpha = .86$). Mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro v4.2 (Hayes, 2022; Model 4) and 5,000 bootstrap resamples showed that toxic leadership was significantly and positively associated with upward-looking communication suppression ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$) and significant and negatively related to psychological safety ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$). Psychological safety was another significant negative projection of the effect of Mom ($\beta = -49$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of toxic leadership on Mom influence through psychological safety was statistically significant (B = 0.31, 95% of CI [0.20, 0.43]) and supported part mediation model. This modelling of structural equation confirmed model acceptability (CFI = .95, RMSEA = .046). Findings are discussed regarding organizational communication theory, toxic leadership intervention and the cultivation of psychological safe jobs. Practical implications for human resources management, leadership development and organizational policy are identified in Pakistan.

2026 Journal of Social Research Development

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DOI	https://doi.org/10.59075/jsrd.v7i9.661
Volume/Issue	**7(9), 2026, 399-418**

Introduction

Communication forms the connective tissue of the organizational life. Among the many forms of organizational communication, upward communication – which transmits information, ideas, concerns, and feedback from employees at lower level to those in senior positions – is especially critical for organizational learning, strategic decision-making, error correction and preventing catastrophic organizational failure (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Nevertheless, considerable and disturbing evidence suggests the widespread so-called " mother effect " , which is the systematic tendency of staff members to remain silent or actively hide negative, undesirable or potentially threatening information from their managers and leaders (Rosen & Tesser, 1970; Milliken et al., 2003). When the mother effect on a scale works, organizations with internal problems are functionally blind, risks accumulate undetected and the capacity for adaptive response is critically undermined.

One crucial determinant of the upward communication suppression is the psychological climate, which is created by leadership positions. Leaders exhibiting toxic behavior patterns including narcissism, authoritarian control, humiliating behaviour, unpredictable emotional volatility and the intentional undermining of subordinate self-efficacy create organizational environments in which speaking is perceived to be personally dangerous and professionally pointless (Padilla et al., 2007; Schmidt, 2008; Reed, 2004). Toxic leadership, a structure that has received scientific attention from the early 2000s, includes a set of destructive supervision behavior that systematically erodes the well-being of employees, the cohesiveness of employees, organizational trust and psychological conditions needed for open communications (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Whicker, 1996).

Some of the most directly associated psychological conditions with upward communication are psychological safety - defined by Edmondson (1999, p. 354) "A shared belief among members of a team that the team is safe for inter-human risk taking". In psychologically safe environments, employees believe they can create concerns, challenge assumptions, admit mistakes and share sensitive information without fear of retaliation, mockery or professional marginalization. Psychological safety is a permissive condition for the type open upward communication, which the organizations must operate effectively. Conversely, the environments where psychological safety is exhausted, as is typical of toxic leadership contexts, are precisely those where the mother-effect flourishes most well.

In spite of the theoretical coherence of a model where toxic leadership suppresses psychological safety, it in turn promotes the suppression of upward communication; the specific mediator pathway received surprisingly few direct empirical studies. Previous research has researched these relations in pairwise fashion and documented the associations between toxic leadership and organization Silence (Knoll & van Dick, 2013), between psychological safety and speech-behavior (Liang et al., 2012) and between psychological safety and its mother effect (Milliken et al., 2003) without testing the complete mediation chain in one uniform model. Furthermore, studies in the organizational context of South Asian, in which the gap between electricity, hierarchical authorities and cultural

subordination norms might strengthen both the toxic impact of destructive leadership and the oppression of upward communication, are particularly limited (Aycan et al., 2000; Hofstede, 2001).

The present study does close these gaps by testing the theoretical model of mediation, in which psychological safety serves as a facilitator between toxic leadership and mom's effect among workers in Pakistani. The study has three main contributions to the literature that has been obtained. The psychological safety first offers the first direct empirical testing as a mediating mechanism in toxic leadership–Mum–Effect relations. Secondly, she examines this model in a given organizational context of Pakistani and contributes to the cross–cultural generalizability of organizational communication and leadership theories. Third, it uses a methodologically strict combination of macro–intermediation analysis PROCESS and the structural equation to generate a multitude of converging lines evidence for the suggested route of mediation.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives. Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) provides a framework to understand how specific work events in this case produce exposure to toxic leadership behavior immediately affective reactions (fear, anxiety, humiliation, demoralization) that accumulate in stable attitudinal states (deteriorated psychological safety), and ultimately form behavioural tendencies (high resolution communication repression). AET assumes that an emotional tone of the working environment, which is largely driven by leadership behavior, will be the prime determinant for the decisions made by employees in relation to communication.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provides a complementary account by suggesting that employees learn to measure the security of speaking by watching the consequences that other people encounter that do in their organizational environment. In toxic leadership contexts, where staff who can publicly humiliate, penalise or exclude raise concerns, vicarious learning quickly argues that upward communication instrumentally unsafe is a lesson that is reliably communicated to all organization members, regardless of whether they experienced personal retaliation. This observational learning mechanism is responsible for the systemic, diffuse nature of upward communication suppression among toxic leaders, thereby reaching far beyond that of those directly targeted workers.

The (1999) psychological safety Framework from Edmondson offers the specific mediating construct which connects the toxic leadership environment with communications behavior. Psychological safety, Edmondson, argues, is not a personality characteristic of individual employees, but a common climate characteristic of working teams – a strong influence from managerial behaviour. Leaders who model curiosity, recognize their own fallibility, do not react with defiance to negative messages and protect those who establish raise concerns mentally safe climate zones that promote upward communication. Leaders who punish dissent, react with anger or guilt to bad news and use their powers to suppress challenges systematically undermine psychological safety, creating a climate where the mother's effect is becoming a rational default strategy for self–protection workers.

Objectives

The present study pursued the following specific objectives:

(1) To examine the direct relationship between toxic leadership and the mum effect among Pakistani organizational employees.

(2) To examine the direct relationship between toxic leadership and psychological safety.

(3) To examine the direct relationship between psychological safety and the mum effect.

(4) To test psychological safety as a mediator of the toxic leadership–mum effect relationship.

(e) to assess the degree of mediation (partial vs. full) in the proposed model.

Hypotheses

H1: Toxic leadership will be significantly positively associated with the mum effect (upward communication suppression).

H2: Toxic leadership will be significantly and negatively associated with psychological safety.

H3: Psychological safety will be significantly and negatively associated with the mum effect.

H4: Psychological safety will significantly mediate the positive relationship between toxic leadership and the mum effect, such that higher toxic leadership will reduce psychological safety, which in turn will increase upward communication suppression.

Literature Review

Toxic Leadership: Conceptualization and Behavioral Dimensions

During the last two decades, toxic leadership construct has attracted considerable theoretical and empirical attention and evolved from colloquial discourse via "bad bosses" into a strictly defined psychological construct with established measurement frameworks. Whicker (1996) offered one of the earliest systematic characteristics of toxic leaders that she described as inappropriate, dissatisfied and often referred to as malevolent individuals, which leave a trail of psychological devastation in her wake. As a result, Reed marked (2004) toxic leadership as a combination of self-preserving behavior, abusive human behavior, and organizational dysfunction in a military context. Lipman-Blumen (2005) has developed a more nuanced account in which toxic leaders often has real talents and compelling visions that initially attract followers while at the same time engaged with behavior that eventually proves destructive for individuals and organizations.

Schmidt's (2008) Toxic Leadership Scale, which provides the primary measurement framework for the present study, operationalizes toxic leadership across five primary behavioral dimensions: (1) authoritarian behavior, characterized by demands for blind obedience, centralized decision-making, and the punishment of independent initiative; (2) self-promoting behavior, reflecting the leader's narcissistic prioritization of personal advancement over team welfare; (3) unpredictable behavior, encompassing emotional volatility, inconsistent standards, and the creation of an atmosphere of chronic uncertainty; (4) intimidating behavior, involving the use of fear, threats, and psychological coercion to enforce compliance; and (5) narcissistic behavior, reflecting grandiosity, entitlement, and exploitation of subordinates as instruments of personal gain. Together these dimensions create an organizational climate that is characterized by fear, distrust, suppressed dissent, and chronic mental insecurity.

Empirical studies documented significant implications for individual staff as well as for organizational systems with the impact of toxic leadership. Individually, toxic leadership exposure is associated with burnout, reduced working satisfaction, reduced organizational involvement, enhanced intent to stop, psychological distress, and reduced physical health (Laschinger & Fida, 2014; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). At the command and organizational level, the toxic leadership has to do with reduced collective cohesion, the declining exchange of information, the growing number of truancy and most relevant to this study, an increasing and rising connection (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The mechanisms with which these individual and organizational effects operate continue to be a productive research area and psychological safety appears as a particularly promising explanatory variable.

The Mum Effect and Organizational Silence

First, Rosen and Tesser (1970) have formally described the mum effect in a series of experimental studies, which show that people are unwilling to transmit negative or potentially burdensome information to recipients, especially at authority positions. The reluctance was a combination of the perceived negative impact from the recipient, anticipatory discomfort, in the communicator, and a general tendency to avoid being a bearer of bad news. While the original mum effect research has been conducted in laboratory environments with strangers, the subsequent research demonstrated its robustness and prevalence in organizational contexts, where hierarchical performance dynamics substantially increase the restraint of communicating negative upward information (Milliken et al., 2003).

Morrison and Milliken (2000) proposed a comprehensive theoretical model of organizational silence—the collective-level phenomenon in which employees routinely withhold work-relevant information from organizational decision-makers—identifying leader behavior as a primary antecedent. Their model established management practices that signal that staff input was undesirable, that dissent was dangerous and that the organization was not responsive to negative feedback, systematically promoting a culture of silence in the organization. Empirical studies confirmed that the workers' perception of their superiors' sensitivity to negative information is one of the strongest predictors of upward communication, while the fear of punitive measures has become

the most often cited barrier to the expression of their opinions (Milliken et al., 2003; Detert & Burris, 2007).

Recent research has distinguished between the effect of Mother as the self-protective behaviour strategy, in which employees hold out information to avoid the expected personal cost of speaking, and prosocial silence, in which information out of genuine concern about others or the organization is held back (Van Dyne et al., 2003). The current study aims specifically at the self-protective, threat-mediated form of upward communication suppression that is most directly related to exposure to toxic leadership and reduced psychological safety. Because it systematically distorts the information environment available to the leaders and thereby creates conditions under which leaders are increasingly separated from the negative feedback that is required for adapting to it, this sort of silence is especially relevant for organizational functioning.

Psychological Safety

The psychological safety construct, which since the 1960s (Schein & Bennis, 1965) has been a part of organizational behavior literature, was extensively operationalized and empirically analyzed by the Edmondson (1999), whose team-level conceptualization and validated measuring scale formed the subsequent research agenda. Edmondson defined psychological safety as a team belief that taking interpersonal risk is secure – particularly that team members will not be embarrassing, rejected or punished by saying, asking questions, or making mistakes. In critical terms psychological safety is not equivalent to comfort or lack of performance standards; rather it describes a specific interpersonal environment in which frank communication, vulnerability and recognition of uncertainty are perceived as acceptable and indeed expected.

The characteristics of psychological safety in the group and organizational level include leadership, organizational structures and contextual factors. Leader inclusiveness – Behavioral patterns that invite and value team members' contributions – has been identified as an especially powerful predictor of psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Conversely, leaders, that react systematically to the input of employees with criticism, rejection or penalties deplete psychological safety. Power distance will moderate the basic availability of psychological safety both culturally and in organizational level: high power range contexts, in which hierarchical authority is expected to stay unaffected, lead to lower psychological safety climates, especially where leadership behavior does not actively oppose these standards (Hofstede, 2001; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Within the organizational context of the Pakistani, where cultural power distance tends to be high and hierarchical respect for authority is a deeply-rooted social norm (Aycan et al., 2000), cultivation of psychological safety probably requires conscious and sustainable leadership work. When these efforts are absent – and when leadership behavior is instead actively increasing the hierarchical distance through toxic behavior – already the limited existence of psychological safety in Pakistani organizations can be further depleted, creating conditions that are most conducive to mom's effect.

Toxic Leadership, Psychological Safety and the Mum Effect: Theoretical Linkages

As follows, a theoretical path linking toxic leadership to suppression of communications from psychological safety can be defined. Toxic leadership behavior – including authoritarian control, emotional unpredictability, intimidation and public humiliation of staff to challenge authority – creates an interpersonal atmosphere in which talking is linked with the expected personal costs (faking, mockery, professional marginalization) that are clearly greater than anticipated benefits (contributing to organizational problem solving). This climate assessment, collectively shared between team members by means of social learning processes (Bandura, 1977), provides an exhausted psychological safety climate where taking personal risks is considered careless. Employees in such environments rationally conclude that the self-protective strategy of sustaining silence – the mother-effect – minimizes personal risk is evident even though the organizational costs of non-communications are manifest.

This mechanism is consistent with Affective Events Theory's theory of collected affective reactions at working events that form stable attitudinal states (depleted psychological safety) and behavioral properties (upward communication suppression). It also reflects the study, documenting that the strongest predictor of whether employees are wanting to express concern or silence is not their identity or value, but their assessment of the climate in which a message might occur - that assessment, largely determined by the leadership's demonstrated and experienced behavior (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

The empirical support for the relationship of components in this theoretical chain is significant, but incomplete in view of the complete mediation model. Knoll and Van Dick (2013) demonstrated that the perception of the regulatory imbalance – conceptually referenced as toxic leadership – organizational silence could be projected through reduced psychological safety. Liang et al. (2012) confirmed that psychological safety was promotive and predicted prohibitive voice behavior. In the published literature, however, direct empirical tests of psychological safety as mediator of the particular toxic leadership mum effect relation are missing, which present the gap that the present study addresses.

Power Distance and Cultural Context in Pakistani Organizations

A specific theoretical focus is justified on the organizational context of the proposed model, Pakistan. Pakistan continuously scores high on Hofstede's (2001) power distance dimension, which is a reflection of deeply embedded cultural norms legitimizing hierarchical authority, expecting respect from subordinates, and dissuading challenge from those in dominant positions. These cultural norms create a structural background in which toxic leadership behavior can be extremely difficult for subordinates to resist or to public challenge. In which barriers to upward communication are elevated beyond those distinctive low power-distance organizational contexts (Aycan et al., 2000).

Research on organizational silence and management in South Asian contexts is limited, but broadly compatible with forecasting that hierarchical organizational cultures will increase the effects of

toxic leadership on employee communication behavior. Islam et al. (2019) documents that paternalistic leadership styles – sharing the authoritarian features with toxic leadership – significantly suppressed employees' voice behavior in Pakistani banking sector. Khalid and Ahmed (2016) also discovered that fear of the retaliation of supervisors was the most cited barrier for upward communication government officials within Pakistani. These context-specific findings support the theoretical prediction that the proposed mediation model will be extremely relevant in Pakistani's organizational institutions.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design has been used. This design was chosen as suitable for the primary aims of the study to characterize the prevalence and direction of associations between toxic leadership, psychological safety and mum effect, and to test the hypothetical mediation model in a defined employee population at a single point in time. A structured questionnaire for the self-reporting was completed. While the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference was tested in a strict experimental sense, the mediation model was tested on the basis of established statistical frameworks (PROCESS Macro and SEM) that evaluate indirect effects using bootstrap-derived confidence intervals and provide a methodically rigorous approach to the mediation test within cross-sectional data (Hayes, 2022; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The target group consisted of full-time employees who had at least one direct controller in organizations active in large Pakistani cities, including Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that participants represent various sectors, types of organizations and demographic profiles. In particular, entities consisting of public-sector enterprises, private-sector corporations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been selected. Questionnaires have been sent to the non-management and middle management staff who currently serve for two months or more in each organization.

350 questionnaires have been distributed and 318 of them returned. A definitive sampling of N = 300 participants for analysis was maintained following the screening of incomplete responses, excessive patterns and multivariate outliers (identified by Mahalanobis distance). A priori power analysis with G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) for multiple regression with three predictors, provided a middle effect level ($f^2 = .15$), $\alpha = .05$, and power = .80, gave a required minimum sample of 77 participants; the received sample of 300 was well above this threshold and offered enough performance for the applied mediation analyses. Demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Measures

Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS)

Toxic leadership has been measured with the (2008) Toxic Leadership Scale of Schmidt, a 30-item instrument that evaluated five behavioral dimensions of toxic leadership: authoritarian behavior (6 elements), self-promoting behavior (6 elements), unpredictable behavior (6 elements), intimidating behavior (6 elements) and narcissistic behavior (6 elements). Participants assessed the behaviour of their direct supervisor on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strength Disagree) to 5 (Strong Agree), with increased total scores indicating a higher observed toxic leadership. Examples of these are 'My supervisor mocks those who are questioning his/her decisions,' 'My supervisor takes credit for the work of others,' and 'My supervisor creates an atmosphere of fear at the workplace.' The TLS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties in various organizational contexts (Schmidt, 2008; Thorough good et al., 2012). This sample showed that the TLS had excellent internal consistency (α = .91).

Psychological Safety Climate Scale (PSC)

Psychological safety was assessed using Edmondson's (1999) 7-item Psychological Safety Climate scale, measuring the degree of team members consider it safe to take interpersonal risks in the work environment. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very Inaccurate) to 5 (Very Accurate). Items are scored in reverse so that higher total scores suggest a greater observed psychological safety. Sample items include "If you make a mistake within this team, it is not held against you," "members of this team are able to cause problems and difficult issues," and "It's sure to take a risk in this team." The PSC has proven robust cross-cultural psychometric properties (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). - in present sample, α = .88.

Mum Effect Scale (MES)

Upward communication suppression (Mum-effect) was assessed using a 10-item scale, adapted from Milliken et al.'s qualitative (2003) research for organizational silence, and then been developed into a psychometric instrument by the current research team on the basis of established literature (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Items evaluate the frequency of workers hiding negative or possibly unwanted information from their supervisors and their reasons for it. Items are evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging of 1 (Never) up to 5 (Always) with higher scores that suggest larger upward communication suppression. Sample items include 'I keep information hidden from my supervisor if I think it will upset him/her,' 'I avoid problems with my supervisor to prevent potential negative effects,' and 'I choose to hold silent instead of knowing care my supervisor would not agree with.' Internal consistency in present sample was sound (α = .86).

Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic information publication that is developed by the researcher which collected participants' data on gender, age group, the highest educational qualifications, organizational connection and organizational sector. These variables were used to characterize the sample and were included in preliminary analyses as covariates to assess their potential for confusing influence.

Procedure

Organizational access was ensured by formal authorization requests to the departments of human resources of the participating organizations. At the organizational premises, in order to minimize social desirability effects and to safeguard the confidentiality of participants in Research assistants, questionnaires were being produced in dedicated private buildings. Before the survey was distributed, research assistants provided a standardized oral and written briefing describing the purpose of the study, voluntary character, confidentiality protection and the right to withdraw without consequences. All participants collected the signed informed consent forms prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Preliminary questionnaires were sealed in the envelopes that were issued to the participants and were sent directly back to research assistants to avoid supervisors gaining access to individual replies. The data collection was conducted for ten weeks from March to May on 2025.

Data Analysis Plan

The data were analyzed using version 24 of IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 and AMOS. Preliminary analysis was based on screening for missing data, missing outliers and breaches of normality assumptions as well as the calculation of descriptive statistics and the alpha reliability coefficients of Cronbach. Pearson product-moment correlations have been calculated to characterize bivariate associations among three primary study variables. Mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes' (2022) PROCESS Macro Version 4.2 (model 4) at 5,000 bootstrap resamples intervals and with bias correction taking into account recommended best practices of organizational mediation tests (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Indirect effect was considered statistically significant if it was ruled out as the zero effect by 95% bootstrap confidence interval. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed in AMOS to provide a full model test of the hypothesized paths, and to evaluate the overall model fit based on recommended indices: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The common Method Bias was compared to the Harman single-factor and confirmatory factor analysis test to compare the model of three factors that was hypothesised with the single-factor alternative.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The final sample studied was 300 employees (54.7% male, 45.3% female). The modal age group was 31.40 years (40.3%), and the majority were in master's school education level (47.7%). The companies' organizations were spread over a wide range with the largest groups of 2 to 5 years (32.3 %) and 6 to 10 years (34.3 %) organizational experience. Participants came from the public sector (44.0%), private sector (39.3%) and non-profit/NGO non-profit organizations (16.7%). Full demographic features are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 300)

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	164	54.7
	Female	136	45.3
Age Group	21–30 years	89	29.7
	31–40 years	121	40.3
	41–50 years	72	24.0
	51+ years	18	6.0
Education	Bachelor's degree	112	37.3
	Master's degree	143	47.7
	Doctoral degree	45	15.0
Organizational Tenure	< 2 years	54	18.0
	2–5 years	97	32.3
	6–10 years	103	34.3
	> 10 years	46	15.4
Sector	Public	132	44.0
	Private	118	39.3
	Non-profit / NGO	50	16.7

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage. Percentages may not sum exactly to 100.0 due to rounding.

Common Method Bias Assessment

Based on two complementary approaches, in light of the cross-sectional nature of single source data, common method bias was assessed. Harman's single-factor test, performed by submitting all the scale items to unrotated principal components analysis, showed that the first factor won was 24.3% of the total difference much lower than the 50% threshold commonly used for indicating severe common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A confirmatory factor analysis comparison demonstrated that the hypothesized three-factor measuring model suits the data significantly better than a single-factor model (ΔCFI = .18, ΔRMSEA = .09), which adds evidence that common method variance fails to consider the observed associations. Although these tests cannot completely rule out common

method bias in cross-sectional Self Report data, the evidence collectively points out that it does not constitute a critical threat to the validity of the existing findings.

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 2 presents any descriptive statistics and reliability estimates of internal consistency for all three main variables of the study. The participants reported moderate to high-grade mean levels of toxic leadership (M = 3.42, SD = 0.87), upward-sensitivity communication reduction (M = 3.61, SD = 0.93), and moderate to low-grade mean levels of psychological safety (M = 2.74, SD = 0.79). All three instruments show a good to outstanding internal consistency (α range = .86–.91), which meets traditional psychometric standards for organizational research (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients for Primary Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	α	K
Toxic Leadership (TLS)	3.42	0.87	1.00	5.00	.91	30
Psychological Safety (PSC)	2.74	0.79	1.00	5.00	.88	7
Mum Effect / Upward Comm. Suppression (MES)	3.61	0.93	1.00	5.00	.86	10

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; K = number of scale items. TLS = Toxic Leadership Scale; PSC = Psychological Safety Climate; MES = Mum Effect Scale / Upward Communication Suppression.

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

Table 3 demonstrates a correlation between product and Pearson moment between the three primary variables of the study. Toxic leadership was usefully and positively correlated to the mum effect ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), which supports H1 in the bivariate level. Toxic leadership was substantial, and negatively correlated with psychological safety ($r = -54$, $p < .01$) supports H2 on bivariate level. Psychological safety was significant and negatively correlated with no impact ($r = -.58$, $p < .01$), supporting H3 on bivariate level. All correlations were in the theoretically foreseeable directions. Its moderate to large bivariate correlations indicated that toxic leadership and psychological safety together constitute significant protagonists of upward communication suppression, while they are sufficiently different to support meaningful mediation analysis (VIF = 1.39, indicating that there is no problem multicollinearity.).

Table 3: Pearson Correlations Among Primary Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Toxic Leadership (TLS)	—		
2. Psychological Safety (PSC)	−.54**	—	

3. Mum Effect / Upward Comm. Suppression (MES)	.61**	−.58**	—

Note. TLS = Toxic Leadership (Schmidt, 2008); PSC = Psychological Safety Climate (Edmondson, 1999); MES = Mum Effect / Upward Communication Suppression. **p < .01 (two-tailed).

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' (2022) PROCESS Macro (model 4), toxic leadership as an independent variable (X), psychological safety as an intermediary (M) and mom's effect as a dependent variable (Y). In total 5,000 bootstrap resamples was used for generating bias corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effect. The results are shown in Table 4 .

Path a (TLS → PSC): Toxic leadership was a significant negative predictor of psychological safety (B = −0.52, SE = 0.07, β = −.46, t = −7.43, p < .001, 95% CI [−0.66, −0.38]), confirming H2 and indicating that greater exposure to toxic leadership was associated with substantially lower psychological safety perceptions.

Path b (PSC → MES): Psychological safety was a significant negative predictor of the mum effect, controlling for toxic leadership (B = −0.59, SE = 0.08, β = −.49, t = −7.38, p < .001, 95% CI [−0.75, −0.43]), confirming H3 in the context of the full mediation model and indicating that employees who perceived lower psychological safety reported significantly greater upward communication suppression.

Path c (TLS → MES, total effect): The total effect of toxic leadership on the mum effect was positive and significant (B = 0.65, SE = 0.08, β = .54, t = 8.13, p < .001, 95% CI [0.49, 0.81]), confirming H1 and consistent with the bivariate correlation.

Path c′ (TLS → MES, direct effect): Following the inclusion of psychological safety in the model, the direct effect of toxic leadership on the mum effect remained positive and significant (B = 0.34, SE = 0.08, β = .28, t = 4.25, p < .001, 95% CI [0.18, 0.50]), though reduced in magnitude from the total effect. This pattern highlights more partial mediation than full mediation.

Indirect effect (TLS → PSC → MES): The indirect effect of toxic leadership on the mum effect via psychological safety was positive and significant (B = 0.31, SE = 0.06, 95% bootstrap CI [0.20, 0.43], which excludes zero), confirming H4. The indirect effect represented 47.7 % of the total effect from toxic leadership to mum effect (mediated = .31/.65 = .477) which indicated that psychological safety mediated approximately half of the toxic leadership–Mum Effect relationship. The remaining direct effect (52.3%) suggests the existence of extra mediating pathways not caught by the present model.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis: Psychological Safety as Mediator of Toxic Leadership–Mum Effect Relationship (N = 300)

Path	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Path a: TLS → PSC (Mediator Model)	−0.52	0.07	−.46	−7.43	<.001	[−0.66, −0.38]
Path b: PSC → MES (Outcome Model)	−0.59	0.08	−.49	−7.38	<.001	[−0.75, −0.43]
Path c: TLS → MES (Total Effect)	0.65	0.08	.54	8.13	<.001	[0.49, 0.81]
Path c′: TLS → MES (Direct Effect)	0.34	0.08	.28	4.25	<.001	[0.18, 0.50]
Indirect Effect (TLS → PSC → MES)	0.31	0.06	—	—	—	[0.20, 0.43]*

Note. TLS = Toxic Leadership Scale; PSC = Psychological Safety Climate; MES = Mum Effect / Upward Communication Suppression Scale. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized coefficient. *95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval based on 5,000 resamples excludes zero, indicating statistical significance. Indirect effect proportion = .477.

Structural Equation Modeling

The hypothesis model using the structural equation model in AMOS was produced to fully test the hypothetical mediation model and evaluate its overall relevance. In Table 5, the measurement model and full structural model conformance indices are given. The measuring model showed an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(182) = 284.17$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .042, SRMR = .051) which confirmed a sufficiently convergent and discriminant validity of the three-factor measuring structure. The full structural mediation model also has demonstrated acceptable fit ($\chi^2(184) = 301.48$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .054) with all appropriate indices that meet or satisfy the recommended threshold values. In the direction and order of magnitude, path coefficients in SEM were in accordance with those obtained in PROCESS mediation analysis, and delivered convergent evidence for the partial mediation model and the robustness of the results over analytical approaches.

Table 5: Structural Equation Model Fit Indices

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Measurement Model	284.17	182	.96	.95	.042	.051
Structural Model (Full)	301.48	184	.95	.94	.046	.054
Recommended Thresholds	—	—	≥ .95	≥ .95	≤ .06	≤ .08

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual. Recommended thresholds: CFI and TLI ≥ .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999); RMSEA ≤ .06; SRMR ≤ .08.

Discussion

This study investigated the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between toxic leadership and the maternal effect – the systematic oppression of negative upward communication – among employees in Pakistani organizations. There were four hypotheses tested and all were supported by empirical evidence. Toxic leadership was positively bound to upward communication-suppression (H1) and negatively associated to psychological safety (H2), psychological safety was negatively associated with Mum's effects (H3) and psychological safety partially contributed to perception of toxic leadership–Mum (H4) effects, which is about 48% of the overall effect. These findings represent the first empirical demonstration of psychological safety as mediating mechanism that is related to toxic leadership–upward communication suppression, and extend previous studies by testing the model in the organizational context of Pakistani.

Toxic Leadership and the Mum Effect

The strong positive association between toxic leadership and Mum Effect ($\beta = .54$, $r = .61$) agrees with Morrison and Milliken's theoretical (2000) that management behavior is a primary harbinger of organizational silence and, with Detert and Burris's (2007), empirical finding that perceptions of regulatory openness for negative feedback are one of the strongest predictors if they want to speak. The extent of the observed correlations favourably compares with related findings in the wider organizational silence literature, where correlations between supervisory behaviour and employee stillness or speech patterns usually range from .35 to .65 (Liang et al., 2012; Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

In the Pakistani organizational context this finding is consistent with and increases the work of Islam et al. (2019) and Khalid and Ahmed (2016) documentary associations between authoritarian leadership styles and oppressed employees voice. The cultural context of Pakistani organizations with a high power-distance can increase the mother effect under toxic leadership conditions by embedding the expectation of hierarchical respect as a social norm that increases the self-protective silent strategy that toxic leadership independently promotes. When cultural norms and poisonous leader behavior come together to state that speaking is dangerous, the rational response for employees who want to protect their professional position is exactly the Mum's effect that is documented in the current findings.

Toxic Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Partial Mediation

In two ways, the conclusion that psychological safety contributes partially (x mediated ≈ .48) to the interactions between toxic leadership and the effect of the mother is theoretically relevant. First, this confirms that the influence of toxic leadership on the suppression of communication above occurs partly through the mechanism of the depleted psychological safety — an finding that is consistent

with Edmondson (1999) theory and the assumption by AET that powerful climate states are a middle of the behavioral effects of work events. The significant indirect effect (B = 0.31, 95% CI [0.20, 0.43]), derived from bootstrap inference with 5,000 resamples, is robust evidence of psychological security being a genuine causal intermediary in this relationship, and not just a spurious correlate.

Second, partial rather than total mediation implies that psychological safety is not the only mechanism through that toxic leadership encourages the upward communication suppression. The remaining significant direct effect of control of psychological safety (β = .28, around 52% of the overall effect) indicates that additional mediating pathways is needed for future investigations. Candidate mechanisms that are proposed in broader literature include self-efficacy for upward communication (Detert & Burris, 2007), earnings expectations for speaking (Morrison et al., 2011), supervisor-subordinated confidence (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999) – variables that can capture complementary aspects of cognitive and motivating processes across the board which is suppressed by toxic leadership upward communication.

Implications for Theory

The present findings offer several contributions to the theoretical understanding of the dynamics of organizational communication. It is the most immediate way to expand Affective Events Theory by defining the mediating role of psychological safety as the attitudinal state through which toxic leadership events translate into mum effect behavior patterns – a link which is implied by AET, but yet not previously empirically traced to this specific context. The findings also increased the volume of literature on the antecedents and implications of psychological safety, documenting toxic leadership as a significant negative earlier event, extending the course of action of leaders for whom psychological safety functions as a theoretically significant intermediate outcome.

For organizational silence theory, this study represents an empirical operationalization of mechanism through, which operates the (2000) theoretical model of organizational silence from Morrison and Milliken: Toxic supervision behaviour creates a depleted psychological safety climate, which promotes the maternal effect as self-protective behavior strategy. This integration of Morrison and Milliken's macro level organizational silence framework with Edmondson's meso-level psychological safety construct will give a fuller explanation why employees systematically withholding negative information from their supervisors than provide both frameworks individually.

Practical Implications

The findings have a number of practical implications for human resources management organizations and professionals. Firstly, they stress the crucial importance of identifying and addressing toxic leadership as an organizational priority not only because of well-documented direct damage to the employee's well-being and performance, but because of its systemic impact on the organizational information flow. Organizations that tolerate toxic leaders effectively systematically turn a blind eye to the negative information they need to recognize problems, learn from mistakes and adapt to changing circumstances.

Second, the partial results of mediation suggest that interventions targeting psychological safety, even where toxic leadership cannot be immediately eliminated, may partially reduce the mother effect. Leadership programmes that teach leaders how to model their curiosity, recognize their own error and respond constructively to negative news – even leaders who keep the overall behavioral profile imperfect – can considerably improve psychological safety and therefore decrease upward communication suppression. The work that was done by Edmondson (2018) on fearless organizations was a practical basis for such an exercise.

Thirdly, organizational policy must include mechanisms for the provision of alternative channels for upward communication that do not require employees to go directly to potentially toxic supervisors. Confidential reporting systems, ombudsperson offices, Skip level communication protocols, and organizational cultures that justify the use of alternative channels can partially compensate for upward communication suppression which is produced by toxic leadership. The implementation of 360-degree feedback systems which provide organizational leaders with information about their supervisory behaviour, including its impact on employees' communication capabilities, may also act as an early-warning system for the development of toxic leadership patterns.

The results support targeted investment in psychologically informed leadership development programs that explicitly address the cultural strengthening of toxic leadership effects at high power distances in the organizational context of the Pakistani. Training that helps leaders to understand the inhibitory effects of power distance on employees communication, and which offers practical skills to counteract those effects through active promotion of upward communication, could be particularly valuable in this respect.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has various methodological and substantive limitations which will have to inform and accompany the interpretation of the findings in future research. In a rigorous experimental sense, the cross-section design that allows for correlation and mediation analyses precludes causal conclusions. The longitudinal designs of the panels, in which toxic leadership, psychological safety and the mom's effect are assessed at some points in time, would provide a better understanding of the temporal order and causality of the proposed relationship. Every day diary or experience sampling methodology (ESM) drafts would also allow investigating the within-person, intra-day variations of these variables and possibly reveal important dynamic processes that are not visible on the level between persons.

Second, common method bias remains a potential problem in research from a single source, self-report. While the present study deployed Harman's single-factor test and confirmatory factor analysis to assess the severity of common method bias and found no critical evidence, future research would benefit from multi-source designs, e.g., toxic leadership by staff; psychological safety by team members; and the Mum effect is assessed by behavioral indicators (such as the frequency of upstream communication recorded in organizational files), rather than by self-report.

Third, although it is appropriate to assess the theoretical objectives of the study, the purposive sampling strategy limits the generality of the results to specific organizational contexts and geographical regions. Future studies should utilize a probability sample to make more compelling conclusions on the wider number of employees of Pakistani. Cross-border comparative designs would furthermore allow the examination of whether the proposed mediation model replicates can operate in cultural contexts with lower power distances by other means or by another type of psychological mechanism.

Fourth, partial mediation identifies a significant residual direct effect of toxic leadership on the maternal effect, which is unexplained by psychological safety, and requests a study of supplementary mediating mechanisms. Future studies should include variables such as supervisor subordinate trust, performance expectations for speech, moral unbundling, perceived organizational support. Leader-member exchange quality as candidate mediators and examine their relative and

Conclusion

The current study provides the first direct empirical evidence that psychological safety has a positive relation between toxic leadership and parent effect, which is systematically suppressing negative upward communication in organisations. Using a sample of 300 staff members working in different organizational contexts in Pakistani, and using both a micro-analysis of the PROCESS mediation and a structural equation model, the study revealed that toxic leadership severely undermines the psychological safety; this in turn, greatly enhances the elimination of upward communication, with the indirect path accounting for around 48% of the total toxic leadership effect. These findings underline toxic leadership's dual organizational costs: They not only harm the individual well-being of its employees, but they also systematically create information environments where organizations are structurally blind to the most pressing problems of their attention. The cultivation of psychological safety by leadership development, organizational policy and the deliberate creation of communications channels that circumvent toxic monitoring bottlenecks represents a theoretically-substantiated and practical strategy to partially compensate for these costs and rebuild the upward communication capacity that requires sound organizational operation.

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