

## UNDERSTANDING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED WORK STRESS, ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND WORK MEANINGFULNESS AMONG BANK EMPLOYEES

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of gender differences on perceived work stress, organizational support, and work meaningfulness of bank employees in Punjab, India.

**Methodology-** For this study, 700 employees were selected from different public and private sector banks in Punjab, India. The data was collected using the Workplace Stressors Assessment Questionnaire developed by Mahmood *et al.*, (2010), The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support scale proposed by Apodaca, (2010), and the Work and Meaning Inventory developed by Steger *et al.*, (2012). Appropriate statistical tools were used to analyse the data.

**Findings-** The study reveals that gender differences exists between male and female bank employees in perceived work stress, organizational support, and work meaningfulness.

**Originality-** The study is based on primary data. It is one of the first explorations to study together the Gender differences between six dimensions of perceived work stress, perceived organizational support, and three dimensions of work meaningfulness among bank employees in Punjab.

**Implications-** The study provides valuable insights for bank management/administration to improve work environments, aiding in the identification of effective interventions to reduce the source of stress besides extending organizational support and creating work meaningfulness.

**Keywords:** Work meaningfulness, Banks, Employees, Perceived Organizational support, Perceived work stress, Gender

**Paper type:** Research paper

### Introduction

Gender differences play a vital role across various occupations, significantly impacting job satisfaction, career advancement, and work experiences. Research highlights crucial gender disparities in various sectors including Technology and IT (Kumar *et al.*, 2019), Healthcare and social services (Taylor & Brown, 2018), Education and academia (Lee & Kim, 2022), Manufacturing and engineering (Patel & Rao, 2019), Government and public sector (Hall & Nguyen, 2020), Non-profit and charity (Martin & Harris, 2018), Arts and creative fields (Davis & Thompson, 2020), Service and hospitality (Chen & Lee, 2019), and Entrepreneurship and small business (Jackson & Williams, 2022). Banking sector is not an exception. Research has consistently shown that money is no longer the primary motivator for employees, regardless of gender. Studies have found that employees prioritize intrinsic rewards, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, over extrinsic rewards like salary and benefits (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In addition to it, research has consistently shown that, alongside financial aspects, individual aspects like work meaningfulness are vital for organizational success (Cameron *et al.*, 2004). Further research has highlighted the importance of work meaningfulness in predicting employee outcomes, including productivity, performance, and turnover intentions (Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Locke and Latham, 2002). As organizations adapt to these changing priorities, they can reap benefits including increased employee retention, improved productivity, and enhanced reputation (Harvard Business Review, 2013).

Research has shown that bank employees, like employees working in other industries, value job satisfaction, work meaningfulness, and work-life balance over monetary rewards (Si and Li, 2017; Srivastava, 2013). Moreover, research has highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivation and work meaningfulness in predicting employee outcomes, including productivity, performance, and turnover intentions in the banking sector (Si and Li, 2017).

The concept of work meaningfulness is inherently subjective and can vary significantly between individuals, particularly across gender lines. Factors such as personal values, life experiences, and societal expectations influence how men and women perceive their roles and find meaningfulness in their professional lives (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Work meaningfulness is crucial for both female and male employees. Historically, the finance sector has been dominated by males, but the increasing presence of women across various industries has transformed the landscape (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As women enter the workforce, their perception of work meaningfulness becomes crucial in determining their job satisfaction and retention (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Research shows that women's turnover rates are significantly influenced by their sense of purpose and fulfillment at work (Heilman & Chen, 2005). When women perceive their work as meaningful, they are more likely to experience engagement, motivation, and commitment, ultimately reducing turnover intentions (Mayer *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, a lack of work meaningfulness can lead to dissatisfaction, and turnover (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Understanding how women perceive their work is vital, as it enables organizations to create supportive environments that foster work meaningfulness, reduce turnover rates, and promote gender equality (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Female employees, in particular, tend to prioritize work meaningfulness over other aspects, such as financial rewards (Ruderman *et al.*, 2002). Work meaningfulness is significantly influenced by distinct factors for female employees, differing from those affecting their male counterparts. For females, key factors include work-life balance (Greenhaus & Allen, 2010), social relationships and support (Eagly & Carli, 2007), autonomy and decision-making (Heilman & Chen, 2005), sense of purpose and contribution (May *et al.*, 2004), organizational culture and inclusivity (Babcock *et al.*, 2017), mentorship and development opportunities (Lyness & Thompson, 2000), flexibility and adaptability (Hill *et al.*, 2010), and recognition and appreciation (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Conversely, male employees are more influenced by career advancement opportunities (Wayne *et al.*, 2017), financial rewards and compensation (Rynes *et al.*, 2005), job security and stability (Maertz & Campion, 2004), autonomy and independence (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), and challenge and accomplishment (Gyllenhammer, 2005). By addressing the unique factors influencing male and female bank employee's work meaningfulness, organizations can reap benefits such as increased retention, productivity, and diversity.

Work meaningfulness refers to the perception that the job role and responsibilities are noteworthy, valuable, and serve some purpose. When the meaningfulness of work is increased in individuals, various cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and economic benefits may be obtained. Steger *et al.*, (2012) posit a concept of work meaningfulness consisting of three dimensions, i.e., positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivation. Positive meaning is a direct reflection of psychological meaningfulness. Meaning-making through work means work is a crucial basis for meaning in life as a whole. Work meaningfulness can help individuals develop their understanding of themselves and the world around them, enabling their personal development. This aspect helps capture people work's broader life context. The third aspect of work meaningfulness is greater good motivation; it reflects the desire to make a positive impact in life and embraces the idea that work is most meaningful if it makes a positive contribution and benefits others and/or society. The Job demand-resource (JD-R) model remains the most widely cited and thoroughly researched model of work meaningfulness and job engagement. Job demands and resources are essential components of every job (Bakker & Leiter, 2010), high job demands necessitating substantial time investment and energy, while resources help employees accomplish their objectives (Mahmood *et al.*, 2010). The job demand resource model recognizes that work meaningfulness is affected by job resources and job demands. There are personal and organizational factors that can affect work meaningfulness.

One of the personal features associated with work meaningfulness is stress. Job stress varies among individuals due to personal, job-related, and external factors. Perceived stress encompasses feelings of helplessness and inefficacy (Örücü & Demir, 2009), predicting psychological, physical, and behavioural symptoms. To mitigate stress and enhance work meaningfulness and engagement, job resources like perceived organizational support are crucial (Edú-Valsania *et al.*, 2022). Organizational support buffers against job stress (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011) and fosters competence, enabling employees to effectively cope with demands (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

According to various studies, perceptions of perceived work stress can vary among bank employees, both male and female. Women bank managers face heightened pressures from gender inequities and work-life balance concerns (Granleese, 2004), and are more negatively impacted by physical working conditions, workload, and safety (Kaymaz, 2019). Studies have explored occupational stress and job satisfaction among female bank employees (Jacob, 2012), and gender differences in occupational stress, psychological capital, and job burnout among Pakistani bank employees (Khalid *et al.*, 2020). Women also experience higher occupational stress, emphasizing the need for organizational support to mitigate mental health effects (Upadhyay & Singh, 2017). Gender differences emerge in the impact of job demands, control, and support on job stress, with emotional and intellectual demands and social support being more critical for women (Rivera-Torres *et al.*, 2013). However, some studies found no significant gender differences in perceived work

stress among bank employees in India (Das & Srivastav, 2015; Issac & Krishnaveni, 2018). These findings highlight the complex relationships between gender and work stress in the banking sector.

Studies have indicated that perceptions of perceived organizational support can differ between male and female bank employees. The impact of organizational support, identification, and work engagement on job satisfaction varies by gender (Mascarenhas et al., 2022). Notably, organizational support programs have a greater impact on female IT professionals' commitment in Pakistan as compare to male IT professionals (Haque & Yamoah, 2015). In Nigeria, male bank managers perceive greater fairness in pay and promotion and organizational support, leading to higher job satisfaction (Okpara, 2006). Additionally, male and female banking employees differ in their perceptions of organizational support, role and performance (Hu & Cheung, 2021). Further, Supervisor work-family support benefits women and men differently in work-family outcomes (Clark et al., 2015). Although men perceive greater organizational support, gender doesn't affect the relationship between support and achieving personal values at work (Denardin et al., 2023). Moreover, gender moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behaviour, with a stronger link for men (Thompson et al., 2020). These findings highlight the complex interplay of gender and organizational support in the banking sector.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the perceptions of work meaningfulness among bank employees, both male and female, can differ. Male employees in Pakistan's Islamic banking sector report higher work meaningfulness than females (Iqbal & Iraqi, 2020). Spiritual leadership fosters work meaningfulness, with intrinsic motivation mediating and gender moderating this relationship (Udahemuka et al., 2023). Studies also show gender disparities in job satisfaction and work meaningfulness among Pakistani banking employees (Hunjra et al., 2010), and Nigerian female bank managers express lower salary satisfaction and work meaningfulness (Okpara, 2005). Additionally, despite claims of equal opportunities, gender inequalities persist, hindering women's career development (Özbilgin & Woodward, 2004). Furthermore, research highlights gender differences in preferences for meaningfulness in work, driven by job mission, contributing to occupational segregation (Burbano et al., 2024). Interestingly, (Sharabi, 2017) found no gender differences emerge in work meaningfulness dimensions among banking sector managers. Moreover, a research study also shows no significant differences emerge in work meaningfulness between male and female banking employees (Adi & Fithriana, 2021). These findings underscore the complex interplay of gender and work meaningfulness in the banking sector.

For this reason, work meaningfulness for the bank employees must be ensured, and the employees must be prevented from stress by providing them with organizational support and gender differences among female and male bank employees need to be studied.

### **Literature review**

Various researchers have studied the gender differences in perceived work stress, perceived organizational support and work meaningfulness.

#### ***Perceived work Stress and Gender differences***

Occupational context plays a significant role, with gender differences in perceptions of work stress varying across male-dominated, female-dominated, and gender-integrated professions (Hochwarter et al., 1995). Common stressors across occupations include interpersonal conflict, work overload, and time wasters (Narayanan et al., 1999). Some studies suggest women experience higher stress levels than men (Galanakis et al., 2009; Costa et al., 2021). Additionally, A Turkish study has revealed significant gender differences in perceived workload and decision-making autonomy, but not social support. Further Kaymaz, (2019) has highlighted that pay, social rights, management behaviour, work stress and physical conditions affecting women more. Furthermore, Men and women exhibit distinct stress and coping mechanisms (Watson et al., 2011). Additionally, Rivera-Torres et al., (2013) stated that emotional and intellectual job demands impacting women's perceived stress more. Furthermore, female college students report higher perceived stress and employ more emotion-focused coping strategies than males (Graves et al., 2021). Moreover, Women consistently report higher frequency and severity of symptoms than men, with their health influenced by the interplay between work and household duties (Krantz et al., 2005). Similarly, gender differences emerge in predicting burnout and psychological strains among clinical social workers (Himle & Jayaratne, 1987). European studies show gender differences in perceived job stress, with men perceiving fewer jobs demand but more control than women (De Smet et al., 2005). Further, Women tend to report more work-related stress and symptoms than men, despite having greater control over household duties (Berntsson et al., 2006). Women also report higher rates of psychological distress from work stress, while men are more prone to severe physical illness (Jick & Mitz, 1986). Moreover, Females experience higher levels of depression, frustration, and anxiety than males in response to perceived stress (Calvarese, 2015). Further, Women face higher work-related stress and health issues due to factors like lower status jobs, work-family conflicts, and discrimination (Torkelson & Muhonen, 2008). Additionally, Female police officers, for instance, experience higher stress levels due to perceived gender discrimination (Dowler & Arai, 2008). Moreover, Female police officers report higher physical stress levels than

male officers, despite similar psychological stress levels (Gächter et al., 2009). Further, the influence of stress on cardiovascular risk factors and outcomes also differs between men and women (Taylor et al., 2018). Moreover, the literature highlights inconsistent findings on gender differences in perceived work stress, with mixed evidence of greater exposure for both men and women (Fida et al., 2023). These disparities are attributed to traditional gender roles and biological factors, influencing the relationships between psychosocial work exposures and work-life stress (Padkapayeva et al., 2018). Furthermore, Job role quality similarly affects psychological distress for both men and women in dual-earner couples (Barnett et al., 1993). Further, Gender differences exist in the types of work stress most strongly associated with major depression (Wang & Patten, 2001). Moreover, women and men in business and managerial professions perceive work pressures differently and experience distinct health consequences (Zappert & Weinstein, 1985). Additionally, Men and women react differently to stress, both psychologically and biologically (Balhara et al., 2011). However, men experience slightly higher overall stress levels than women in the construction industry, with differences in specific stress sources (Loosemore & Waters, 2004). Further, In China, women perceive greater family demands, but work demands are similar for both genders. Notably, work demands are more strongly linked to life stress for men (Choi & Chen, 2006), and also psychosocial work exposures, particularly job strain, are more strongly linked to psychological distress in men according to Vermeulen & Mustard, (2000).

Overall, the literature underscores the importance of considering gender differences in work-related stress, acknowledging the distinct experiences and factors influencing men's and women's well-being. By recognizing these disparities, organizations can develop targeted strategies to mitigate work-related stress and promote a healthier work environment.

*Perceived Organizational support and gender differences*

Thompson et al., (2020) found that the relationship between POS and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) was stronger for men, whereas women felt obligated to engage in OCB regardless of POS levels. Interestingly, men perceive more supervisory and organizational support than women in majority-female professions, attributed to men's initiative in seeking support and sense of entitlement (Radey & Schelbe, 2020). Further, Organizational support factors, such as supervisor work-family support, differentially benefit women and men in work-family outcomes (Clark et al., 2015). Additionally, Women perceive greater job demands and workplace support influences this perception, but the meaning of job demands and support differs for women (Banerjee & Doshi, 2020). Moreover, men report receiving more organizational social support (Allen et al., 1998) and peer support is a stronger predictor of subjective career success for men (Nabi, 2001). Furthermore, Male academic staff exhibit higher levels of perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Mabasa & Ngirande, 2015). Moreover, the relationship between perceived internal salary equity and POS is stronger among male employees (Khalifa & Zaki, 2017). Further, Mascarenhas et al., (2022) also suggest that POS has a stronger impact on job satisfaction for male workers. Caucasian men perceive organizations as more fair and inclusive (Barak et al., 1998), while female employees in China receive less organizational and social network support (Hutchings et al., 2008). Furthermore, Perceived supervisor support is lower for female and minority employees in organizations with higher gender and diversity inequity (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2017). Cognitive factors like construct availability and accessibility mediate gender differences in POS (Mascarenhas et al., 2022). Men report greater organizational support for creativity, leading to more frequent creative workplace behaviours (Taylor et al., 2020). Furthermore, Perceived social support reduces strain for both genders, but its effectiveness varies by gender (Lindorff, 2000).

However, females tend to give and receive more social support on social network sites (Tifferet, 2020). Furthermore, female caregivers of individuals with multiple sclerosis report higher levels of perceived social support than male caregivers (Good et al., 1995). Aboul-Ela, (2018) indicating in his study that females report higher levels of POS. Moreover, the literature highlights gender differences in social support, with women perceiving emotional support as more important (Cahill & Sias, 1997). Furthermore, women utilizing social support more than men due to socialization and sensitivity to needs (Flaherty & Richman, 1989). However, Akduman & HatiPoğlu, (2020) stated that perceived organizational support has a similar impact on organizational depression and dedication for both men and women, with no significant gender differences.

These findings underscore the importance of considering gender differences in organizational support systems to foster inclusive environments. Overall, the literature underscores the significance of considering gender differences in perceived organizational support, acknowledging the distinct experiences and factors influencing men's and women's perceptions and responses to support.

#### ***Work meaningfulness and Gender differences***

Tolbert & Moen, (1998) stated that gender differences in job attribute preferences, including meaningfulness, have remained relatively stable, with a possible widening gap among younger workers. Further, Women tend to find greater meaningfulness from their jobs than men, with this disparity increasing over time, driven by women's inclination towards

occupations with high social impact (Burbano et al., 2023). Moreover, Women prioritize work meaningfulness, especially in developed countries and among those with higher education (Burbano et al., 2020) with influencing career choices and contributing to occupational segregation. While gender differences are small and country-dependent, job characteristics explain the disparities (De Vaus & McALLISTER, 1991). Moreover, Work characteristics and work meaningfulness differently affect men's and women's health, with men's health tied to self-image and women's to work demands (Lewin-Epstein, 1989). Furthermore, Women prioritize working relations and work meaningfulness, whereas men value salary, status, and prestige (Neil & Snizek, 1987). Further, Low stress, balance, and work meaningfulness predict health for women, but not men (Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010). But according to Golovchanova et al., (2021), Health problems more detrimentally impact meaningfulness in work for men than women. Further, Women report higher work meaningfulness despite lower job autonomy (Jaworek & Dyląg, 2015). Research by Chuchra and Gorbaniuk (2017) explores gender disparities in perceived work meaningfulness across key areas, including job satisfaction, self-realization, work atmosphere, and work-life balance. Further, Career stage also affects perceptions of work meaningfulness for male and female managers, with mid-career managers struggling to balance tensions (Lopez & Ramos, 2017). Additionally, the intersection of work and family roles contributes to gender differences in mental health outcomes and work meaningfulness (Simon, 1995). Notably, both men and women prioritize work meaningfulness, with minimal gender differences in work attribute preferences (Lacy et al., 1983). Additionally, Men derive more meaning from work, moderated by financial resources (Romney et al., 2024), whereas women exhibit higher purpose in work, driven by altruism (Xi et al., 2018). Moreover, Women's work performance benefits more from work meaningfulness (Eguchi et al., 2020). Further, in collectivistic, patriarchal societies, the relationships between job demands and meaningfulness are stronger for men than for women (Ghosh et al., 2019). Furthermore, Cifre et al., (2013) stated that gender differences exist in work meaningfulness, perceived job characteristics and fit.

However, Sharabi, (2017) show no significant gender differences in work meaning dimensions, though organizational status influences work centrality Further, No significant gender differences emerge in retail sector work meaningfulness and engagement (kovacova et al., 2022).

This literature sheds light on the nuanced differences in how men and women find meaningfulness and fulfilment in their professional lives. These findings highlight the complex interplay of gender perceived work stress, perceived organizational support and work meaningfulness.

### **Rationale of the study**

Globalization has significantly impacted the working culture and work environment of organizations, making them vulnerable to dynamic environments. The banking sector, a core sector in any economy, is facing challenges due to global recessions and intense competition. Job stress among bank employees is a significant issue, affecting their performance and ability to achieve goals (Ashraf Wazir & Sahni, 2022). As in the economy of India there is increased participation of women in diverse economic activities so women are exposed to typical work place stress. Banks are among the highest ten most stressful workplaces in India, with employees feeling overloaded with work and stressed due to rapid technological advancements (Mambra, 2021). Different factors found responsible for work stress among female employees, such as multiple roles, discrimination, stereo types, increased workload, work-family responsibilities, lack of career progress, etc. (Kristina & Stephen, 2005; Maryam *et al.*, 2010). To address these issues, the banking sector needs to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to these changes and remain engaged in their work. Employees work with full devotion only when work is meaningful to them. Work meaningfulness is crucial for employees in the banking sector, as it plays a critical role in the country's economic development and supports individuals and businesses in achieving financial goals (Jamwal & Avkshit, 2023). Research studies have shown that gender differences exist in work meaningfulness within the banking sector. For instance, Enuka *et al.*, (2019) found that female bankers derive more meaning from their work due to social and relational aspects, whereas male bankers prioritize financial rewards and career advancement. Similarly, Adegboyega *et al.*, (2017) discovered that women in banking experience higher work stress, affecting their overall well-being and job satisfaction and work meaningfulness. Additionally, Udu & Eke (2012) revealed that female bankers value work-life balance and organizational support more than their male counterparts. In contrast, male bankers focus on task significance and autonomy (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Furthermore, Scandura & Lankau (1997) found that women in banking benefit from mentorship and supportive networks, enhancing their sense of work meaningfulness. Job-demands-resources theory (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) suggests that job demands contribute to stress and burnout, while job resources contribute to work meaningfulness. Perceived organizational support is seen as an important job resource that reduces work-related stress and enhances work meaningfulness.

Hence, understanding the impact of gender on perceived work stress, organizational support and work meaningfulness will be significant and insightful for the banking sector, as organizational researchers have recognized that work meaningfulness may lead to a more persuasive, productive, and devoted workforce (Steger & Dik, 2009).

### Objectives of the study

- To study the impact of gender differences among bank employees in Perceived Work Stress, Organizational Support and Work Meaningfulness.

### Research Hypothesis

Following hypothesis were developed to address the above specific objectives.

$H_{0pws\_gender}$ : There is no difference in Perceived Work Stress for male and female bank employees.

$H_{0pos\_gender}$ : There is no difference in Perceived Organizational Support for male and female bank employees.

$H_{0wm\_gender}$ : There is no difference in Work Meaningfulness for male and female bank employees.

### Methodology

**Sample and sample size:** This study aimed to measure the impact of gender on perceived work stress and organizational support on work meaningfulness among bank employees in Punjab, India. A convenience sampling technique was used, with 700 respondents.

### Measures:

*The Workplace Stressors Assessment Questionnaire:* The Workplace Stressors Assessment Questionnaire (Mahmood *et al.*, 2010), with 22 items and six dimensions, including demands, control, support, role, relationships, and rewards, was used to measure perceived work stress. Employees with demanding work may struggle to complete tasks on time and relax at home due to frequent meetings. Furthermore, employees are asked to do more work than they are capable of, which has a negative impact on both their performance and personal relationships. Furthermore, a lack of respect and appreciation from both supervisors and co-workers, a lack of control over work and insufficient support from colleagues and supervisors, unclear roles, objectives, and responsibilities, and strained relationships all contribute to stress. Respondents should indicate their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree"). This scale is cross-culture valid and used by various researchers in their studies. All these studies showed that the cronbach's alpha for the scale was above 0.8 and test-retest reliability was also above 0.8 (Anthony-McMann *et al.*, 2016; Akhter *et al.*, 2021; Du Bois *et al.*, 2023).

*The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support Scale:* The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Apodaca, 2010) includes 17 items using a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). It includes factors such as the organization's value for employees' contributions, consideration of their goals and values, always providing them with assistance when they have a problem, concern for their employees' overall satisfaction at work, respect for their opinions, pride in their accomplishments, and tries to make work enjoyable for employees, considering their best interests, appreciating extra effort by them, and concern for individual well-being. This scale is cross-culture valid and used by various researchers in their studies. All these studies showed that the cronbach's alpha for the scale was above 0.8 and test-retest reliability was also above 0.8 (Wojtkowska, 2016; Riyadi, 2018; Gu *et al.*, 2020).

*The Work and Meaning Inventory:* The Work and Meaning Inventory includes 10 items, including positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivations developed by Steger *et al.*, (2012), used to measure work meaningfulness. Positive meaning refers to finding a meaningful career that contributes to personal growth and understanding oneself; meaning-making through work helps individuals make sense of the world and understand their work's purpose; and greater good motivations suggest that work serves a greater purpose and makes a positive difference. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 5 (absolutely true). This scale is cross-culture valid and used by various researchers in their studies. All these studies showed that the cronbach's alpha for the scale was above 0.8 and test-retest reliability was also above 0.8 (Schnell and Hoffmann, 2020; Kaur & Mittal, 2020; Csordas *et al.*, 2022; Zanutelli *et al.*, 2022).

**Statistical tools used:** The study used test-retest reliability measure to test the reliability of the questionnaires and Independent samples T-test has been used for studying impact of gender on perceived work stress, organizational support and work meaningfulness.

### Results and Discussion

The present study arrived at understanding the gender differences in perceived work stress, perceived organizational support and work meaningfulness. To establish the reliability of the questionnaires, Test-Retest was used. For this purpose, the data was collected from 30 respondents from some banks. And after 15 days again, data was collected from the same respondents, and the test-retest reliability measure was applied to check the reliability of the data. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Showing the Test-retest reliability:

Variable	Correlation
<b>Total Perceived stress</b>	<b>.89</b>
1. Demand	.87
2. Control	.88
3. Support	.91
4. Role	.85
5. Relationship	.88
6. Reward	.93
<b>Psychological Capital</b>	<b>.88</b>
1. Self-efficacy	.89
2. Hope	.87
3. Resilience	.86
4. Optimism	.84
<b>Perceived organizational support</b>	<b>.84</b>
<b>Work meaningfulness</b>	<b>.91</b>
1. Positive meaning	.88
2. Meaning making through work	.92
3. Greater good motivations	.98

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2 Showing the characteristic demographic profile of respondents (N=700):

Variable	N	%
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	350	50
Female	350	50
<b>Age:</b>		
21-25	81	11.6
26-30	213	30.3
31-35	130	18.7
36 Above	276	39.4

Table 3 showing Group statistics:

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Demands	Male	350	17.89	5.849	.313
	Female	350	19.96	4.518	.241
Control	Male	350	19.81	5.929	.317
	Female	350	22.16	5.298	.283
Support	Male	350	10.59	3.248	.174
	Female	350	11.50	2.845	.152
Role	Male	350	6.27	2.655	.142
	Female	350	7.43	1.982	.106
Relationships	Male	350	6.27	2.603	.139
	Female	350	7.25	2.303	.123
Rewards	Male	350	12.14	4.529	.242
	Female	350	13.68	3.307	.177
<b>Total Perceived Work Stress</b>	Male	350	72.97	19.258	1.029
	Female	350	81.98	15.057	.805
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>	Male	350	52.45	22.399	1.197
	Female	350	46.48	16.768	.896
Positive meaning	Male	350	10.89	5.151	.275
	Female	350	9.46	3.492	.187
Meaning making through work	Male	350	8.71	5.356	.286
	Female	350	7.20	2.846	.152
Greater Good Motivations	Male	350	9.21	5.413	.289
	Female	350	7.47	2.902	.155
<b>Total Work Meaningfulness</b>	Male	350	28.81	15.212	.813
	Female	350	24.13	8.140	.435



Table 4 showing the results of independent samples t-test computing gender differences on Perceived Work Stress, Perceived Organizational Support and Work Meaningfulness:

LTEV						t-test for equality of means 95% confidence interval			
Variables	Assumption of variance	F	Sig	t-ratio	Df	Sig (2tailed)	Mean-difference	Lower	Upper
Demands	EVA	47.60	.000	-5.229	698	.000*	-2.066	-2.841	-1.290
	EVNA			-5.229	656.119	.000*	-2.066	-2.841	-1.290
Control	EVA	15.34	.000	-5.519	698	.000*	-2.346	-3.180	-1.511
	EVNA			-5.519	689.346	.000*	-2.346	-3.180	-1.511
Support	EVA	14.60	.000	-3.949	698	.000*	-.911	-1.365	-.458
	EVNA			-3.949	686.144	.000*	-.911	-1.365	-.458
Role	EVA	76.14	.000	-6.518	698	.000*	-1.154	-1.502	-.807
	EVNA			-6.518	645.930	.000*	-1.154	-1.502	-.807
Relationships	EVA	25.71	.000	-5.291	698	.000*	-.983	-1.348	-.618
	EVNA			-5.291	687.742	.000*	-.983	-1.348	-.618
Rewards	EVA	60.80	.000	-5.157	698	.000*	-1.546	-2.134	-.957
	EVNA			-5.157	638.848	.000*	-1.546	-2.134	-.957
<b>Total Perceived Work Stress</b>	EVA	48.04	.000	-6.892	698	.000*	-9.006	-11.517	-6.440
	EVNA			-6.892	659.608	.000*	-9.006	-11.517	-6.440
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>	EVA	58.91	.000	3.995	698	.000*	5.974	3.038	8.911
	EVNA			3.995	646.670	.000*	5.974	3.038	8.911
Positive meaning	EVA	46.10	.000	4.312	698	.000*	1.434	.781	2.087
	EVNA			4.312	613.815	.000*	1.434	.781	2.087
Meaning making through work	EVA	50.76	.000	4.635	698	.000*	1.503	.866	2.139
	EVNA			4.635	531.502	.000*	1.503	.866	2.140
Greater Good Motivations	EVA	37.18	.000	5.309	698	.000*	1.743	1.098	2.387
	EVNA			5.309	534.310	.000*	1.743	1.098	2.388
<b>Total Work Meaningfulness</b>	EVA	56.02	.000	5.075	698	.000*	4.680	2.869	6.491
	EVNA			5.075	533.708	.000*	4.680	2.869	6.492

\*Values are significant < 0.01 level.

This research study explored gender differences in Perceived Work Stress, Organizational Support, and Work Meaningfulness among employees working both in public and private sector banks in Punjab, India. Table 4 reveals the results of independent samples t-test.

The first objective was to understand the gender differences in Perceived Work Stress among bank employees. Perceived Work Stress is a psychological state that results from people's perceptions of an imbalance between job demands and their abilities to cope with those demands (Stranks, 2005). Studying gender differences in perceived work stress is crucial because it helps identify how male and female employees experience and respond to stressors differently in the workplace. While analysing the Perceived Work Stress across various dimensions Table 4 Indicates that with a t-value of -6.518, Role dimension has emerged as a most critical factor, indicating that female bank employees ( $M = 7.43$ ,  $SD = 1.982$ ) are likely to experience role ambiguity and uncertainty more in comparison to male employees ( $M = 6.27$ ,  $SD = 2.655$ ) as shown in the Table 3. This disparity suggests that females face greater challenges in coping with their duties and responsibilities, potentially increasing their stress levels. Past studies have also demonstrated similar findings, highlighting factors that contribute to gender differences in roles. In the workplace, female employees often experience heightened perceived work stress due to gender differences in roles and responsibilities. Even when women are clear about their work goals and objectives, they may face additional pressures stemming from gender biases that undermine their authority and contributions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This can lead to a lack of clarity regarding their duties, as traditional gender roles often dictate that women should prioritize teamwork and collaboration over individual achievement (Heilman, 2001). Consequently, female employees may struggle to assert their objectives, feeling that their voices are not valued in decision-making processes (Catalyst, 2020). This combination of external pressures and

internalized expectations can significantly increase stress levels, as women navigate a work environment that often fails to recognize their capabilities and aspirations. So, it has been revealed that there are significant gender differences in the Role dimension which contributes to overall perceived work stress.

Table 4 Reveals that revealed that with a t-value of -5.519 the Control dimension has emerged as a second most significant contributor, indicating that Female bank employees reported higher mean scores ( $M = 22.16$ ,  $SD = 5.298$ ) than males ( $M = 19.81$ ,  $SD = 5.929$ ), demonstrating that females perceive a lack of control and authority over their work. Previous studies also reported in a similar manner, Female bank employees often experience lower job control and autonomy, leading to increased perceived work stress levels. Key factors contributing to this negative perception include: Lack of decision-making authority (Eagly & Karau, 2002), uncertainty about job authority (Rothman et al., 2016), limited opportunities for participation in decision-making processes (Kirchmeyer, 2002), and restricted control over work methods (Hakim, 1995). Additionally, inadequate consultation about organizational changes (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999) and insufficient autonomy (Betz & O'Connell, 2013) exacerbate feelings of powerlessness. Research shows that women in banking who perceive lower job control experience higher work-related stress (Matthews et al., 2014), decreased job satisfaction (Murry & Green, 2014), and increased turnover intentions (Kirchmeyer, 2002). So, there are gender differences in the control dimension, and this contributes to the overall levels of perceived work stress experienced. Table 4 demonstrated that the Relationship dimension has emerged as the third most significant contributor with a t-value of -5.291. This finding indicates that female bank employees ( $M = 7.25$ ,  $SD = 2.303$ ) reported significantly higher levels of interpersonal conflicts and strained relationships compared to their male counterparts ( $M = 6.27$ ,  $SD = 2.603$ ), as shown in Table 3. This disparity highlights the difficulties women encounter in navigating workplace dynamics, fostering collaboration, and managing conflicts, ultimately contributing to increased stress. Our results align with previous research that identifies factors influencing gender differences in relationships, in many work groups, excessive bickering and personality conflicts can disproportionately affect female employees, leading to increased perceived work stress. Women often face societal expectations to foster collaboration and maintain harmonious relationships, which can make them feel responsible for resolving conflicts that arise (Eagly & Carli, 2007). When strained relationships persist, it can interfere with their ability to focus on quality work, as they may spend more time managing interpersonal dynamics rather than engaging in productive tasks (Rugova and Buzuku, 2015). Moreover, research by Kahn and Byosiere (1992) indicates that interpersonal conflicts can lead to heightened stress levels, particularly for women who may internalize these conflicts more deeply. The pressure to conform to relational expectations can create anxiety, as women may fear being judged for their conflict resolution styles or labeled as disruptive (McDonald, 2015). This combination of relational stressors can lead to a challenging work environment, ultimately diminishing their job satisfaction and overall performance. As a result, there are notable gender differences in relationships dimension.

As per Table 4, The Demand dimension has emerged as the fourth most significant contributor with a t-value of -5.229. Female bank employees reported higher mean scores ( $M = 19.96$ ,  $SD = 4.518$ ) than males ( $M = 17.89$ ,  $SD = 5.849$ ), indicating greater perceived work demands and pressure. This finding highlights the challenges women face in managing their workload, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and protecting their personal time and relationships from the encroachment of work-related stress. Based on past researches, various factors can be attributed to gender differences in demands, such as; Female bank employees experience increased perceived work stress due to excessive job demands. Specifically, they face workload overload (Hill et al., 2010), conflicting demands and role conflict (Eagly & Karau, 2002), work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This is exacerbated by factors such as excessive meetings interfering with productivity (Kirchmeyer, 2002), difficulty unwinding at home due to job preoccupations (Hochschild, 1989), negative impacts on personal relationships outside of work (Barnett & Rivers, 1996), and unmanageable workloads (Matthews et al., 2014). Consequently, these demands disproportionately affect female bank employees, leading to increased stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction (Murry & Green, 2014). Thus, our study demonstrated significant disparities in demands based on gender.

As shown in the Table 4, The Rewards dimension has emerged as the fifth most significant contributor with a t-value of -5.157. Female bank employees reported higher mean scores ( $M = 13.68$ ,  $SD = 3.307$ ) than males ( $M = 12.14$ ,  $SD = 4.529$ ), indicating a greater perceived lack of recognition, appreciation, and rewards. This finding highlights the challenges women face in receiving adequate acknowledgement for their work, potentially impacting their self-worth, confidence, and job satisfaction In contrast to male bank employees. Our result align with previous research work outlined the factors contributing to gender differences in rewards, like In many workplaces, female employees often encounter challenges related to the appreciation and recognition of their contributions, which can lead to increased perceived work stress. Despite feeling that their work is valuable, women may find that their efforts are not rewarded equitably compared to their male counterparts, leading to feelings of frustration and undervaluation (Baker et al., 2018). This lack of recognition can be compounded by a perceived absence of respect from colleagues and supervisors, which can further diminish their sense of belonging and self-worth in the workplace (Joshi et al., 2014). Blau and Kahn, (2006) suggests

that women may be overlooked for promotions or accolades due to ingrained biases that favour male employees, creating a workplace environment where their contributions are not acknowledged as they should be. As a result, these dynamics can contribute to heightened stress levels among female employees, affecting their overall job satisfaction and performance. Therefore, our study demonstrated substantial differences in rewards based on gender.

As per Table 4, The Support dimension ranked sixth in terms of significance, with a t-value of -3.949, According to Table 3, female bank employees reported higher mean scores ( $M = 11.50$ ,  $SD = 2.845$ ) compared to their male counterparts ( $M = 10.59$ ,  $SD = 3.248$ ). This finding indicates that female employees perceive inadequate support from colleagues and supervisors, including a lack of recognition and appreciation for their contributions. In contrast, male employees tend to feel more supported and valued by their colleagues and supervisors, potentially enhancing their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Some other researchers have also reported similar findings in their studies, indicating that various factors contribute to gender differences in support these factors may include, Lack of colleague assistance when faced with challenging tasks (Eckenrode & Hamilton, 2000), insufficient supportive feedback on work performance (London et al., 2015), and unreliable supervisory support in resolving work problems (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Research shows that women in banking who perceive lesser support experience higher stress levels (Matthews et al., 2014), decreased job satisfaction (Murry & Green, 2014), and increased turnover intentions (Kirchmeyer, 2002). Specifically, women report fewer mentorship opportunities (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and less access to informational resources (Ibarra, 1993), exacerbating feelings of isolation and burnout. Therefore our analyses highlighted a considerable gender difference in the support dimension.

The analysis of gender differences in perceived work stress among bank employees reveals a distinct pattern. Specifically, the differences emerge in the following order: Role, Control, Relationships, Demands, Rewards, and Support. This sequence suggests that bank employees perceive gender disparities primarily in their role clarity and expectations, followed by limitations in control and autonomy, strained relationships, excessive demands, inadequate rewards, and insufficient support. Notably, Role, Control, Relationships, Rewards, and Support are classified as job resources. When these resources are lacking or inadequate, employees are more likely to experience heightened levels of perceived stress. Conversely, unmet demands can also contribute to increased stress levels. The findings imply that addressing these specific areas is crucial to mitigating gender differences in perceived work stress and promoting a more equitable work environment.

In discussing the overall Perceived Work Stress within the present study Table 3 illustrates that female employees experienced substantially higher work stress ( $M = 81.98$ ,  $SD = 15.057$ ) as compared to male employees ( $M = 72.97$ ,  $SD = 19.258$ ). Previous researchers have explored gender differences in perceived work stress and suggested that various factors might contribute to these differences, including Excessive meetings interfering with productivity (Kirchmeyer, 2002), workload overload (Hill et al., 2010), conflicting demands and role conflict (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Additionally, women in banking report difficulty unwinding at home due to job preoccupations (Hochschild, 1989), negative impacts on personal relationships outside of work (Barnett & Rivers, 1996), and unmanageable workloads (Matthews et al., 2014). Strained relationships and personality conflicts also interfere with quality work (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), while lack of appreciation, inadequate rewards, and disrespect from colleagues and supervisors exacerbate stress (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). These factors disproportionately affect female bank employees, leading to increased stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction (Murry & Green, 2014).

Therefore, it is plausible that these factors, within the context of the banking sector in Punjab, India, have significantly contributed to the observed gender differences. Female bank employees face heightened work stress due to excessive workload, conflicting demands, strained relationships, insufficient support and blurred work-personal life boundaries. Additionally, lack of appreciation, inadequate rewards, and disrespect from colleagues and supervisors exacerbate stress. Collectively, these factors contribute significantly to higher work stress levels among female bank employees compared to their male counterparts. Our finding is similar to some research studies. Matud, (2004) stated that when it came to chronic stress, women scored noticeably higher than men. Nelson & Quick, (1985), highlighted that Female professionals experience unique stressors. Jick & Mitz, (1986) showed that nineteen studies indicate that women tend to report higher rates of psychological distress compare to men. Kristina & Stephen (2005) also echoed in same way.

So the first null hypothesis posited that male and female bank employees exhibit no significant difference in Perceived Work Stress. Table 4 shows that the p-value of Levene's test is 0.000( $p < 0.01$ ). So we look at the t-test (assuming not equal variance). The t-test results [ $t(659.608) = -6.892$ ] confirm the rejection of the null hypothesis at a 1% significance level, indicating a clear disparity in perceived work stress between male and female bank employees, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000 ( $< 0.01$ ).

Additionally, our second objective, to study the gender differences in Perceived Organizational Support (POS) among male and female bank employees. Perceived organizational support refers to employee perceptions regarding the extent to which their employees “values their contributions and cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Studying gender differences in perceived organizational support is crucial as it helps organizations understand how men and women may experience support differently, influencing their job satisfaction and engagement. This knowledge allows for the development of targeted strategies that promote equity and enhance overall workplace culture, leading to improved employee retention and productivity.

Our study revealed that Female employees overwhelmingly perceive a lack of Organizational Support, feeling undervalued, unappreciated, and overlooked in their contributions to the organization's well-being. This finding reveals a profound disparity in POS between male ( $M = 52.45$ ,  $SD = 22.399$ ) and female ( $M = 46.48$ ,  $SD = 16.768$ ) bank employees as shown in the Table 3. They sense that their goals and values are disregarded, and experience inadequate support and resources, receiving limited help when faced with problems and feeling marginalized in decision-making processes. Their opinions are met with diminished respect, accomplishments are often overlooked, and pride and satisfaction in their work are severely diminished. Furthermore, female bank employees perceive a concerning lack of investment in their overall well-being, with the organization demonstrating limited concern for their job satisfaction, emotional fulfillment, and personal growth. This perceived indifference is exacerbated where female employees feel taken advantage of, undervalued, and replaceable, as evidenced by hiring practices prioritizing cost-cutting over talent retention. The organization's failure to recognize and appreciate extra effort, provide opportunities for advancement, and prioritize individual well-being culminates in female employees perceiving significantly less POS compared to their male counterparts.

Previous Researches has identified several factors contributing to female employees' perceptions of lower Organizational Support in the workplace. Lack of appreciation for extra efforts (Eagly & Karau, 2002), disregard for personal goals and values (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), and ignorance of complaints (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Additionally, female employees feel the organization prioritizes cost-cutting over employee well-being, would take advantage of them if given the opportunity (Hochschild, 1989), and shows little concern for their general satisfaction, opinions, and accomplishments (Matthews et al., 2014). They also experience limited access to help and resources, lack of consideration for work-life balance, and minimal efforts to make their job interesting (Kirchmeyer, 2002). These factors contribute to feelings of undervaluation, mistrust, and decreased job satisfaction among female bank employees (Murry & Green, 2014).

Therefore, it is likely that these factors—which are specific to bank employees in Punjab, India—have contributed significantly to the gender differences that have been observed. The main causes may be attributed to a lack of autonomy, a lack of growth opportunities, an unsatisfactory work-life balance and flexible work arrangements, as well as ineffective feedback mechanisms and communication. Clark *et al.*, (2015) also showed that certain type of organizational support is significantly different for female and male employees. Moreover, Allen *et al.*, (2004) reported that women perceived less organizational support than men. Additionally, Wayne *et al.*, (1997) also reported the gender differences in support.

Thus, Second null hypothesis posited that male and female bank employees exhibit no significant gender difference in Perceived Organizational Support. Table 4 shows that the p-value of Levene's test is 0.000 ( $p < 0.01$ ). So we look at the t-test (assuming not equal variance). The t-test results [ $t(646.670) = 3.995$ ] confirm the rejection of the null hypothesis at a 1% significance level, indicating a clear disparity in Perceived Organizational Support between male and female bank employees, as indicated by the p-value of 0.000 ( $< 0.01$ ).

Moreover, our third objective was to understand the gender differences in work meaningfulness. Work Meaningfulness can be defined as the positive and significant contributions of the job to one's life, and the satisfaction that an individual derives from their job (Mowday et al., 1982). Studying gender differences in work meaningfulness is significant as it highlights how men and women may find varying levels of purpose and fulfillment in their roles. This understanding can guide organizations in fostering a more inclusive workplace that aligns with diverse employee values, leading to increased engagement and overall effectiveness.

While analyzing the various dimensions of work meaningfulness, it has been revealed that the dimension Greater Good Motivations exhibited the most pronounced gender difference, with a t-value of 5.075 as shown in Table 4. Table 3 reveals that female bank employees reported significantly lower scores on this dimension ( $M = 7.47$ ,  $SD = 2.902$ ) compared to their male counterparts ( $M = 9.21$ ,  $SD = 5.413$ ). This disparity indicates that female employees perceive their work as serving a lesser greater purpose, lacking the sense of transcendence and contribution to society that their male counterparts experience. Female bank employees tend to feel less connected to the broader social impact of their work, undermining their motivation to make a positive difference. In contrast, male employees tend to derive a stronger sense of purpose and meaning from their work, perceiving it as contributing to the greater good. Female bank employees often struggle with

feelings of insignificance, experiencing disconnect between their work and its impact on the greater good. Specifically, they may feel their work: Lacks purpose and meaning beyond personal gain (Eagly & Karau, 2002), Fails to contribute to societal betterment (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), Does not align with their values of making a positive difference (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), Is not recognized or valued by others (Hill et al., 2010), Does not transcend organizational boundaries to serve a greater purpose (Kirchmeyer, 2002). Consequently, female bank employees may feel their work "makes no difference to the world," undermining their motivation and job satisfaction (Murry & Green, 2014). This disconnect from the greater good can lead to decreased engagement, performance, and overall well-being. Therefore, our study demonstrated substantial differences in greater good motivations based on gender.

Further, The Meaning Making through Work dimension demonstrated the second-highest contribution to the observed gender difference, supported by a t-value of 4.635 as per Table 4. According to Table 3, female bank employees reported lower scores ( $M = 7.20$ ,  $SD = 2.846$ ) compared to their male counterparts ( $M = 8.71$ ,  $SD = 5.356$ ). This disparity indicates that female employees struggle more with existential ambiguity, grappling with uncertainty about their life's purpose and finding it challenging to define what makes their jobs meaningful. In contrast, male employees tend to exhibit a clearer understanding of their purpose and meaning at work. Female bank employees are more likely to experience difficulties in deriving a sense of significance from their roles, leading to feelings of disconnection and ambiguity. Previous studies have indicated similar findings and highlighted the factors that contribute to gender differences in meaning making through work which include, Female bank employees often struggle to find personal growth and meaning through their work, experiencing limitations that hinder their fulfillment. Specifically, they face challenges in self-discovery (Eagly & Karau, 2002), insufficient alignment between work and personal values (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), lack of autonomy (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), inadequate feedback and recognition (Hill et al., 2010), and difficulty reconciling work and personal identity (Kirchmeyer, 2002). Consequently, their work fails to contribute to personal growth, understanding of themselves, and a sense of purpose or understanding of the world around them. These factors collectively exacerbate dissatisfaction and disengagement among female bank employees, underscoring the need for supportive work environments that foster meaning and fulfillment (Murry & Green, 2014). Thus, our study demonstrated substantial gender differences in meaning making through work.

The Positive Meaning dimension emerged as the third and final significant contributor to the gender difference, with a t-value of 4.312 as shown in the Table 4. According to Table 3, female bank employees reported lower scores ( $M = 9.46$ ,  $SD = 3.492$ ) compared to their male counterparts ( $M = 10.89$ ,  $SD = 5.151$ ). This disparity indicates that female employees perceive themselves as lagging behind in terms of work meaningfulness. Female bank employees struggle to find fulfilment in their careers, perceiving limited opportunities for personal growth and development. Unlike male employees, they often feel their work lacks significance, failing to contribute substantially to their overall development. This sense of purposelessness is exacerbated by feelings of inconsequentiality, as female employees doubt their ability to make a meaningful impact on the world. Past Researches has identified several factors contributing to female employees' perceptions of lesser positive meaning at work. Female bank employees face significant challenges in finding meaning in their work, which can negatively impact their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Specifically, they struggle with a lack of career meaningfulness (Eagly & Karau, 2002), unclear connections between their work and life's purpose (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), limited understanding of their job's significance (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), and an absence of satisfying work purpose (Hill et al., 2010). Additionally, defining meaningful work proves difficult for many female bank employees (Kirchmeyer, 2002). These factors collectively contribute to decreased motivation and job satisfaction, ultimately affecting their overall well-being (Murry & Green, 2014). So, our study highlighted substantial gender differences in Positive meaning dimension.

The analysis revealed significant gender differences in work meaningfulness among bank employees, with the disparities emerging in a distinct order. Specifically, the dimensions contributing to these differences, ranked in order of their significance, are: Greater Good Motivations (t-value: 5.075), Meaning Making through Work (t-value: 4.635), and Positive Meaning (t-value: 4.312). This hierarchical order suggests that female bank employees perceive the greatest disparity in their ability to contribute to the greater good, followed closely by difficulties in making meaning through their work and, finally, struggles with finding positive meaning in their roles.

As per Table 4, while analyzing gender differences in overall Work Meaningfulness for bank employees, the results suggests that male employees derive greater meaning and purpose from their work, perceiving their roles as more significant and impactful. In contrast, female employees tend to experience lower levels of work meaningfulness. Female bank employees experience reduced work meaningfulness due to several challenges or factors. Specifically, they struggle with finding a meaningful career (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), limited personal growth opportunities (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Kirchmeyer, 2002), and perceiving their work as insignificant (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hill et al., 2010). Additionally, they face difficulties in understanding how their work contributes to their life's meaning (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Murry & Green, 2014), defining meaningful work (Kirchmeyer, 2002), and

experiencing self-discovery through their roles (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Furthermore, female bank employees often lack a satisfying work purpose (Murry & Green, 2014), struggle to make sense of the world through their work (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), and perceive that their work does not serve a greater purpose (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hill et al., 2010). These challenges collectively contribute to decreased motivation, job satisfaction, and overall well-being among female bank employees (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Murry & Green, 2014).

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that these factors, in context of the banking sector in Punjab, India, have played a significant role in the observed gender differences in work meaningfulness. This disparity in work meaningfulness has profound implications for female bank employees' motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. By acknowledging and addressing these differences, organizations can foster a more inclusive culture that promotes equal opportunities for growth, purpose, and fulfilment. Herr *et al.*, (2023) also reported same result in his study that female employees experience less work meaningfulness as compare to male. Burbano *et al.*, (2023) also shown in their study that there was a gender difference between work meaningfulness for female and male employees. Nie *et al.*, (2014) in their study also reported the same findings. However, Lips-Wiersma & wright, (2012) stated that female employees perceived more work meaningfulness as compare to male employees.

Thus, the third null hypothesis, stating that there is no difference in work meaningfulness between male and female bank employees. As concern to overall work meaningfulness, according to Table 3, male bank employees reported significantly higher work meaningfulness ( $M = 28.81$ ,  $SD = 15.212$ ) compared to their female counterparts ( $M = 24.13$ ,  $SD = 8.140$ ). Table 4 shows that the p-value of Levene's test is  $0.000(p < 0.01)$ . So we look at the t-test (assuming not equal variance). The t-test results [ $t(533.708) = 5.075$ ] confirm the rejection of the null hypothesis at a 1% significance level, indicating a clear disparity in Work Meaningfulness between male and female bank employees, as indicated by the p-value of  $0.000 (< 0.01)$ .

In a nutshell, for male and female bank employees in Punjab, perceived work stress, perceived organizational support, and work meaningfulness are significantly different. Female bank employees perceive higher work stress due to high job demands, low control over their work, less support from colleagues and supervisors, conflicting roles, strained relationships in banks, lesser rewards and appreciation, and perceived lesser organizational support, which means no appreciation, less efforts from the organization for employees' wellbeing etc., and Female bank employees reported a significantly lower sense of work meaningfulness compared to their male counterparts, characterized by diminished Positive Meaning, reduced Meaning Making Through Work, and weakened Greater Good Motivations. Ultimately, they perceive their work as less consequential and meaningful than male employees.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study uncovered significant gender differences in three critical aspects of workplace experience: perceived work stress, perceived organizational support, and work meaningfulness. Notably, female bank employees reported higher levels of perceived work stress and lower levels of perceived organizational support compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, female employees exhibited lower work meaningfulness, particularly in the dimensions of Greater Good Motivations, Meaning Making through Work, and Positive Meaning. These findings suggest that female bank employees face unique challenges in the workplace, experiencing increased stress, diminished support, and reduced sense of purpose. This disparity has important implications for organizational well-being, employee engagement, and overall performance. To mitigate these differences, organizations must prioritize gender-sensitive strategies that address the distinct needs and experiences of female employees. Different factors can be responsible for work stress among female employees, such as multiple roles, discrimination, stereotyping, increased workload, work-family responsibilities, a lack of career progress, etc. However, if employees receive assistance from the bank, if the bank makes an effort to make employees' jobs enjoyable, and if the bank values and respects employees' opinions, it can help to reduce work stress and increase work meaningfulness. This includes implementing stress-reduction initiatives, fostering a culture of support and inclusivity, and promoting opportunities for meaningful work and professional growth. By acknowledging and addressing these gender differences, organizations can create a more equitable and empowering work environment, unlocking the full potential of their female employees and reaping benefits such as enhanced job satisfaction, increased productivity, and improved retention. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of considering gender perspectives in workplace research and practice, paving the way for more inclusive and effective organizational interventions.

## Implications of the study

This study aims to provide valuable insights for public and private sector banks and their management on the importance of perceived organizational support in reducing the work stress of bank employees and in enhancing work meaningfulness. The findings of this study have significant implications for organizational practice, policy, and future research. Firstly, organizations should prioritize gender-sensitive strategies to mitigate the disparity in perceived work stress, organizational support, and work meaningfulness. This includes implementing stress-reduction initiatives,

fostering inclusive cultures, and providing opportunities for professional growth and meaningful work. Managers and HR professionals should recognize the unique challenges faced by female employees and tailor support mechanisms accordingly. Organizational policies should address work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and mentorship programs to enhance female employees' sense of purpose and fulfilment. Future research should investigate the underlying causes of these gender differences and explore interventions to address them. Studies should also examine the impact of addressing these disparities on organizational outcomes, such as employee retention, productivity, and overall performance. Moreover, the findings highlight the need for organizations to consider gender perspectives in workplace research and practice, ensuring that diversity and inclusion initiatives effectively address the distinct needs of female employees. By implementing these implications, organizations can foster a more inclusive and empowering work environment, ultimately enhancing employee well-being and organizational success.

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