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Designing a Model of Antecedents and Consequences of Employees' Loneliness in Governmental Organizations: A Case Study of Ilam City

ABSTRACT

Loneliness in the workplace, as one of the most significant psychological and social challenges faced by employees, has attracted growing attention from researchers and organizational managers in recent years. This phenomenon not only has extensive psychological and individual consequences, but can also directly affect organizational commitment, productivity, and the quality of work relationships. In Iranian governmental organizations—particularly in cities such as Ilam, which are characterized by bureaucratic administrative structures and formal patterns of interaction—examining the dimensions and shaping factors of loneliness becomes especially important. The purpose of the present study was to design a conceptual model of the antecedents and consequences of employees' loneliness in governmental organizations in Ilam. This research was applied in purpose and qualitative in methodology, conducted using thematic analysis. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 employees and managers of governmental organizations in Ilam, selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The participants had diverse demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational background, years of service, and organizational position, enabling the acquisition of varied perspectives regarding the experience of loneliness in the workplace. The collected data were analyzed in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, ultimately resulting in the extraction of main and subcategories related to the antecedents and consequences of loneliness. The findings indicated that loneliness in the workplace is shaped by three categories of factors: individual, interpersonal, and organizational. Furthermore, the results showed that the consequences of loneliness emerge at three levels: psychological (reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression), behavioral (silent withdrawal, reduced social interactions), and organizational (performance decline, reduced commitment, and increased turnover intention). Finally, the conceptual model developed in this study illustrates the relationships between the antecedents and outcomes of workplace loneliness in a systematic framework. This model can serve as a basis for human resource policymaking and the development of intervention programs aimed at mitigating the negative effects of loneliness and enhancing organizational well-being in the public sector.

Keywords: conceptual model design, antecedents and consequences, employee loneliness, governmental organizations

Introduction

Loneliness in the workplace has emerged as one of the most significant psychological and organizational concerns of the past two decades, attracting the attention of scholars across psychology, organizational behavior, management, and public administration. While loneliness is fundamentally a subjective emotional experience characterized by a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships, its manifestations in organizational settings often extend far beyond individual

affective distress [1]. As organizations increasingly rely on collaborative work, interpersonal communication, and shared social meaning, the experience of workplace loneliness has become recognized as a critical determinant of employee well-being, job performance, and organizational sustainability. Early conceptualizations emphasized the interpersonal deprivation employees feel when they lack meaningful social ties at work, a condition that undermines both psychological security and professional identity [2]. Subsequent empirical studies have shown that loneliness at work represents not an isolated emotional state but a complex psychosocial construct shaped by relational, organizational, and cultural contexts.

Growing evidence suggests that workplace loneliness has profound implications for employee behavior and performance. Research indicates that loneliness reduces job performance by impairing emotional energy, diminishing motivation, and limiting cognitive engagement [3]. Employees who feel socially disconnected from their peers or managers often report negative perceptions of workplace climate, less access to social resources, and lower participation in collaborative tasks. This strain becomes especially salient when workplace relationships are characterized by low-quality communication or lack of trust. Unsatisfactory workplace relationships have been shown to predict reduced psychological well-being, decreased organizational commitment, and higher withdrawal intentions [4]. Indeed, loneliness at work is not merely a personal experience but also a relational and structural one, deeply embedded in the quality of work interactions and the degree of perceived social inclusion.

The antecedents of workplace loneliness are diverse and multifaceted. Individual predispositions such as attachment insecurity and social apprehension may contribute to employees' difficulties in initiating and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Attachment theory, which explores the internal dynamics of closeness and emotional dependence, provides a valuable lens for understanding how insecure attachment styles lead to heightened sensitivity to rejection and greater vulnerability to loneliness at work [5]. Personality traits—such as introversion, low sociability, or interpersonal inhibition—may also predispose individuals to experience workplace isolation more intensely. Yet personality alone cannot fully explain the emergence of loneliness in organizational settings; contextual and structural features also play a critical role.

At the interpersonal level, loneliness is shaped by the quality and frequency of interactions among colleagues. When employees lack supportive relationships, collaborative networks, or informal communication channels, feelings of isolation naturally arise. Workplace bullying, exploitation, and negative supervisory behaviors have been identified as important relational antecedents of loneliness, each contributing to feelings of rejection and marginalization among employees [6]. Similarly, a lack of supportive peer relationships or emotionally meaningful colleague interactions has been shown to undermine employees' sense of belonging and connection within the organizational environment [7]. These studies emphasize that workplace loneliness is fundamentally relational, emerging from patterns of interaction rather than solely internal psychological processes.

Organizational factors play an equally central role in shaping employees' experiences of loneliness. Bureaucratic structures, rigid administrative systems, and task-oriented climates can reduce opportunities for social interaction and limit the development of meaningful interpersonal connections. When organizations emphasize results over relationships or prioritize hierarchical control over relational warmth, employees may feel emotionally disconnected from their work environment. Organizational injustice, perceived inequality in promotions, or inconsistency in managerial support can exacerbate feelings of detachment and alienation, contributing directly to workplace loneliness [8]. Furthermore, exploitative or authoritarian leadership approaches create climates of fear, silence, and emotional detachment, pushing employees

toward psychological withdrawal from organizational life [9]. In modern organizations—especially governmental institutions where formal structure often dominates—these conditions are particularly relevant.

The consequences of workplace loneliness can be severe, affecting individual psychological health, interpersonal behavior, and overall organizational functioning. Numerous studies have demonstrated that loneliness is strongly associated with increased stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, impairing employees' capacity for emotional regulation and meaningful engagement at work [10]. Loneliness has been linked to psychological alienation and emotional exhaustion, both of which reduce employees' willingness to participate in collaborative tasks and their overall sense of job meaningfulness [11]. Moreover, chronic loneliness in the workplace has been identified as a major predictor of silence behaviors, withdrawal tendencies, and passive resistance, which collectively hinder healthy organizational communication [12]. The presence of such consequences at the behavioral level outlines the critical need to consider loneliness as a central indicator of organizational health.

At the organizational level, workplace loneliness undermines employee performance, commitment, and long-term retention. Experimental and field studies show that lonely employees perform more poorly due to reduced emotional absorption, impaired cognitive functioning, and lower creative capacity [13]. They also exhibit lower levels of organizational commitment, higher turnover intentions, and diminished alignment with organizational goals [14]. These findings align with earlier research demonstrating that loneliness is one of the strongest predictors of organizational detachment and decreased trust in organizational leadership [15]. The negative organizational implications highlight that loneliness is more than a subjective emotional experience; it is a phenomenon with concrete and measurable impacts on productivity and institutional functioning.

The broader social significance of loneliness has also been emphasized by public health scholars. Workplace loneliness has been described as an emerging “epidemic” that threatens not only organizational effectiveness but also national health and societal cohesion [16]. Cross-cultural analyses reveal that loneliness affects employees differently depending on cultural expectations, social norms, and organizational climate. Comparative studies show that the consequences of loneliness—such as absenteeism, reduced mental health, and lower performance—are consistent across diverse work contexts, reinforcing the universal nature of the phenomenon [17]. Meanwhile, job embeddedness theory provides a valuable framework for explaining how employees' interpersonal and organizational linkages may buffer or exacerbate the effects of loneliness; strong embeddedness can reduce the negative emotional consequences associated with workplace isolation [18].

Recent research has also explored moderating or buffering mechanisms that attenuate the harmful effects of workplace loneliness. Religiosity, for example, has been shown to serve as a psychological resource that reduces the emotional burden of loneliness and helps employees maintain well-being in socially deprived work settings [19]. Psychological capital—including optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—has also been found to mitigate the impact of loneliness on employee outcomes by promoting coping strategies and adaptive emotional functioning [9]. These findings underscore that while loneliness exerts significant negative effects, its impact is not uniform, and moderating variables can influence how individuals interpret and respond to experiences of isolation.

Beyond consequences, workplace loneliness influences key developmental and career-related outcomes. Studies have shown that loneliness can diminish career advancement opportunities, undermine employees' trust in colleagues and leaders, and weaken their willingness to engage in risk-taking or innovative activities [20]. Loneliness may also reduce

employees' readiness to seek mentorship, participate in developmental networks, or communicate openly about challenges, all of which are essential components of career growth. Additionally, loneliness correlates with reduced psychological safety, which is necessary for creativity, idea-sharing, and interpersonal experimentation—behaviors crucial for innovation in modern organizations [12]. As workplaces increasingly prioritize creativity and innovation, understanding how loneliness hampers these behaviors becomes critically important.

Studies from organizational behavior literature further highlight that loneliness interacts with cultural and contextual variables, influencing how employees perceive their social environment and internalize feelings of exclusion. For example, organizational cultures that promote collaboration, mutual respect, and collective identity tend to reduce loneliness, whereas competitive or high-pressure environments may magnify it [15]. Interpersonal trust, fairness perceptions, and psychological safety are therefore central mediators in the relationship between workplace structure and loneliness. Moreover, research indicates that organizational bullying, exploitative supervision, and abusive leadership are among the strongest predictors of loneliness, particularly in hierarchical institutions where power asymmetry is pronounced [6].

Despite the growing body of literature, significant gaps remain—particularly in the context of public-sector organizations. Governmental institutions often operate within rigid bureaucratic frameworks, formal communication channels, and hierarchical structures that may exacerbate loneliness among employees. While studies conducted in private-sector or Western organizations have provided valuable insights, less is known about how workplace loneliness manifests within public administrative systems, especially those characterized by high levels of procedural formality and limited social flexibility. Recent research suggests that loneliness may be particularly acute in such environments due to reduced autonomy, limited informal communication, and constrained social networks [8]. Additionally, the emotional culture of governmental workplaces may lack the relational warmth and interpersonal connectivity required to buffer employees from emotional isolation.

Given these complexities, scholars increasingly call for contextualized models that address workplace loneliness as a multidimensional construct shaped by individual, interpersonal, and structural variables. The conceptualization of workplace loneliness requires an integrated framework that explains how personal predispositions, social interactions, leadership behaviors, organizational systems, and cultural expectations converge to shape employees' emotional and behavioral responses. In line with this argument, recent studies emphasize the importance of examining loneliness within specific cultural and institutional contexts, rather than relying solely on generalized theories or imported models [17].

Public-sector research remains particularly limited, despite evidence that workplace loneliness has significant implications for service delivery, organizational cohesion, employee morale, and retention. Governmental organizations, especially in developing countries, face unique challenges related to bureaucratic inertia, limited resources, rigidity in structure, and high formality in communication—all of which may contribute to heightened experiences of isolation [13]. Furthermore, employee loneliness in public institutions can hinder policy implementation, reduce citizen satisfaction, and weaken trust in public administration.

In response to these gaps and based on the growing recognition of the importance of workplace loneliness, the present study seeks to contribute to the literature by developing a comprehensive, contextualized, and empirically grounded model of the antecedents and consequences of workplace loneliness among employees of governmental organizations. Accordingly,

the aim of this study is to design a conceptual model explaining the antecedents and consequences of workplace loneliness among employees in governmental organizations in Ilam.

Methodology

The research method used in this study was qualitative and applied in nature, conducted through thematic analysis. In the qualitative approach, the objective is to understand and interpret a complex and multidimensional phenomenon—such as loneliness in the workplace—through individuals' lived experiences. Thematic analysis, as a structured and interpretive method for identifying patterns and meaningful concepts within textual data, constituted the primary analytical framework of this study. This method allows the researcher to identify key themes in participants' statements and develop a localized conceptual model aligned with the context of governmental organizations in the country.

The research population consisted of employees of governmental organizations in Ilam. Participants were selected purposefully based on criteria such as a minimum of five years of work experience, lived experience of workplace loneliness, and the ability to clearly articulate their experiences. The sampling procedure continued until theoretical saturation was reached, resulting in a final sample of 25 employees with diversity in gender, age, organizational affiliation, and job position. Sampling was carried out through the snowball method, whereby the researcher initially identified key participants and, through their introductions, identified a network of suitable individuals for further interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The interview questions were designed in an open and flexible manner to allow participants to freely describe their personal experiences. Alongside the interviews, field notes and the researcher's diary reflections contributed to the richness of the data. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and carefully reviewed. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase model. In this process, the data were read repeatedly, and through open coding, initial meaning units were extracted. Subsequently, similar codes were organized into categories and subthemes, and through axial coding, the relationships among them were clarified. In the final stage, using selective coding, the main themes were identified and the final conceptual model was developed. Efforts were made to depict the causal relationships between antecedents, loneliness, and its consequences in a coherent and systematic model.

To enhance the scientific rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were adopted. First, member checking was conducted through having some participants review the analysis results to ensure that the extracted themes aligned with their actual experiences. Second, triangulation was employed, meaning that data were collected and analyzed from multiple sources (interviews, documents, and notes). Additionally, the researcher attempted to provide a rich description of the social, cultural, and organizational context of the participants to facilitate transferability of the findings. Full documentation of the analytical steps and key decisions also ensured confirmability and traceability of the research process. Overall, the methodology of this study was designed to maintain scientific precision and adhere to the principles of qualitative research, while enabling the development of a valid and field-driven model of loneliness in governmental organizations. Ethical considerations—including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' privacy—were essential components of the research.

Findings and Results

To achieve the research objective—designing a model of antecedents and consequences of workplace loneliness among employees of governmental organizations—the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed. These interviews were conducted with 25 employees and managers of governmental organizations in Ilam. Participants were selected considering demographic diversity such as gender, age, education, years of service, and job position to ensure a broad representation of perspectives and lived experiences.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	60%
	Female	10	40%
Age	Under 30	5	20%
	30–40	10	40%
	Over 40	10	40%
Educational Level	Bachelor's degree	12	48%
	Master's degree	10	40%
	Doctorate	3	12%
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	8	32%
	5–10 years	10	40%
	More than 10 years	7	28%
Job Position	Senior manager	5	20%
	Middle manager	10	40%
	Administrative staff	10	40%

The demographic table shows that of the 25 participants, 15 were male (60%) and 10 were female (40%). In terms of age, 5 individuals were under 30 (20%), 10 were between 30 and 40 (40%), and 10 were over 40 (40%). Regarding educational background, most participants held a bachelor's degree (48%) or a master's degree (40%), and 3 held doctoral degrees. Participants' work experience ranged from less than 5 years to over 10 years. In terms of job position, the sample included a mix of senior managers (20%), middle managers (40%), and administrative staff (40%). This demographic diversity enabled the analysis of the phenomenon of workplace loneliness from various organizational and individual perspectives.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. To ensure methodological rigor, the data analysis process was conducted systematically based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. In the first phase, all interviews were carefully transcribed and repeatedly read by the researcher to gain deep familiarity with the content. In the second phase, meaning units related to experiences of loneliness, its shaping conditions, and its consequences were identified as initial codes. These codes consisted of words, phrases, and sentences representing key concepts in participants' responses.

In the third phase of analysis, similar and related codes were organized into subthemes and then into main themes. This categorization enabled an understanding of the conceptual structure of workplace loneliness. The main themes were then reviewed and refined to prevent conceptual overlap, ensuring that each theme clearly contributed to the explanation of a specific aspect of the final model. The final stage of analysis involved designing the conceptual model in which the main themes were organized into two major categories: antecedents of loneliness and consequences of loneliness. Throughout this process, the researcher ensured full adherence to the interview data and participants' real experiences, presenting findings as localized and comprehensible concepts for governmental settings in Iran.

To enhance the validity of the analysis, the codes were reviewed by two research colleagues, participant feedback was obtained, and data triangulation was utilized. Additionally, providing rich descriptions of participants' quotations in the results section increased the transferability of the findings.

Open coding constituted the first stage of data analysis in this study and was conducted to extract basic concepts from the semi-structured interviews with employees and managers of governmental organizations in Ilam. In this stage, the interview transcripts were examined line by line, phrase by phrase, and word by word in order to identify the smallest recognizable meaning units embedded within the data. The main objective of this stage was to break down the data into independent concepts and assign descriptive labels to them, ensuring that no theoretical presupposition influenced the analysis and that meanings were derived directly from the participants' own words. Through this process, more than 200 initial codes were extracted from the interviews. These codes, through refinement, removal of redundancies, and integration of similar concepts, were condensed into a more concise set of key concepts.

Concepts such as "lack of empathetic interaction with colleagues," "absence of emotional support from managers," "organizational distrust," "feeling overlooked," "distance between employee and manager," and "nonparticipation in group decision-making" were among the most frequently identified initial concepts. Many participants, using emotionally expressive language, described loneliness as a gradual, internal, and sometimes painful experience that is directly or indirectly connected to organizational structures and interactions.

Open coding served as the foundation for thematic analysis, facilitating axial coding and the final design of the conceptual model of the study. Below is a portion of the initial codes extracted at this stage:

Table 2

Initial Codes Extracted from the Data (Open Coding Stage)

No.	Initial Code Extracted from Interviews	Key Concept
1	Feeling rejected by colleagues	Social isolation
2	Lack of willingness to participate in group activities	Reduced job-related bonds
3	Absence of informal dialogue with managers	Lack of organizational emotional interaction
4	Efforts being ignored by the manager	Reduced motivation
5	Feeling useless in decision-making	Lack of role participation
6	Large distance from senior managers	Organizational gap
7	Lack of trust in colleagues' intentions	Interpersonal distrust
8	Negative competition among employees	Unhealthy organizational climate
9	Lack of psychological support during difficult work conditions	Insufficient support
10	Others' indifference toward personal and work-related problems	Emotional neglect
11	One-sided decision-making by managers	Exclusion from decision-making processes
12	Observing discrimination in the distribution of opportunities	Organizational injustice
13	Feeling aimless at work	Job meaninglessness
14	Misalignment between personal and organizational goals	Value conflict
15	Work pressure without human interaction	Impersonal organizational structure
16	Lack of appropriate feedback from managers	Occupational devaluation
17	Feeling alone during work crises	Lack of organizational companionship
18	Weak interaction in work meetings	Task-oriented communication
19	Colleagues' absence in critical moments	Lack of team cohesion
20	No opportunity to express emotions	Emotional inhibition
21	Lack of deep connections with colleagues	Surface-level interaction
22	Feeling like a stranger among colleagues	Social alienation
23	Lack of incentives for interpersonal interaction	Weakening of social capital
24	Inability to advance without personal connections	Sense of inequality
25	Excessive emphasis on quantitative results	Neglect of humanity
26	Fear of judgment when expressing problems	Internal suppression
27	Lack of a close friend at work	Emotional loneliness
28	Distrust toward the evaluation system	Psychological insecurity
29	Manager's indifference toward personal concerns	Manager-employee emotional disconnect
30	Lack of managerial responsiveness under pressure	Weak supportive leadership
31	Absence of group brainstorming sessions	Minimal participation
32	Feeling discouraged due to organizational inattention	Reduced organizational commitment

33	Feeling deprived of resources	Resource injustice
34	Lack of opportunities for personal growth	Job burnout
35	Employees' voices not heard in policymaking	Organizational silence
36	Lack of teamwork in projects	Enforced individual performance
37	No direct communication channel with the manager	Excessive formal distance
38	No feedback on ideas	Ineffectiveness of innovation
39	Formal, rigid environment with no interaction	Cold human relationships
40	Lack of transparency in organizational power relations	Structural ambiguity
41	Fear of telling the truth in the presence of a manager	Suppression of expression
42	Continuous conflict among colleagues	Interpersonal conflict
43	Ignoring employees' individual characteristics	Disregard for individual differences
44	Unclear expectations from employees	Role ambiguity
45	Working alone and isolated in tasks	Lack of team spirit
46	Avoiding interaction due to past negative experiences	Negative social learning
47	Feeling an unclear position in the organization	Identity ambiguity
48	High pressures without resource support	Unsupported job stress
49	No opportunity to express ideas in formal meetings	Intellectual exclusion
50	Experiencing organizational silence	Structural voicelessness

Axial coding constituted the second step in the thematic analysis process of this study, during which the initial codes obtained from open coding were categorized and organized based on conceptual and semantic similarities. The purpose of this stage was to create theoretical coherence among scattered data and shape core categories that could represent the fundamental dimensions of workplace loneliness. This process was guided by strategic questions such as “What factors have led to this phenomenon?”, “Under what conditions does it occur?”, “What consequences does it entail?”, and “What strategies exist for confronting or managing it?”. In this stage, codes with shared meanings were grouped into subcategories, and each set was then transformed into a core category. These categories formed the preliminary conceptual structure of the research model. The analysis revealed that loneliness in the workplace is a multilayered, socially embedded, and organization-driven phenomenon shaped by individual, interpersonal, and structural factors, producing multiple psychological and organizational consequences.

In total, eight core categories were identified from the data: individual factors influencing loneliness, weak social interactions, cold formal structures, perceived injustice, weak organizational support, psychological consequences, behavioral consequences, and organizational consequences. To ensure accuracy in organizing the data, a combined approach using axial categorization and conceptual network mapping was employed. This stage provided a suitable foundation for constructing the final model and contextualizing the findings within the environment of Iranian governmental organizations.

Table 3

Axial Coding of the Study

No.	Core Category	Subcategories	Sample Related Initial Codes
1	Individual factors influencing loneliness	– Personality traits (introversion, quietness) – Weak communication skills	Feelings of withdrawal, inability to initiate conversation, quietness
2	Weak social interactions	– Absence of informal relationships with colleagues – Lack of friendship at work	Surface-level interactions, lack of close friendships, limited dialogue
3	Cold formal structure	– Rigid administrative processes – Emphasis on tasks instead of human relations	Purely task-oriented meetings, cold atmosphere, absence of human connection
4	Perceived injustice	– Discrimination in promotion – Inequality of opportunities	Feeling of discrimination, dissatisfaction with resource distribution, unequal opportunities
5	Weak organizational support	– Managerial inattention to employees' conditions – Lack of psychological support during crises	Being ignored by managers, indifference under pressure, loneliness during crises
6	Psychological consequences	– Feelings of worthlessness – Stress, anxiety, and depression	Reduced self-esteem, job-related depression, feelings of uselessness
7	Behavioral consequences	– Reduced participation – Tendency to withdraw	Avoiding interaction, decreased motivation to cooperate, silent withdrawal
8	Organizational consequences	– Decline in performance – Reduced organizational commitment	Frequent absenteeism, turnover intention, reduced productivity, organizational fatigue

Table 4*Clustering of Antecedents and Consequences of Workplace Loneliness*

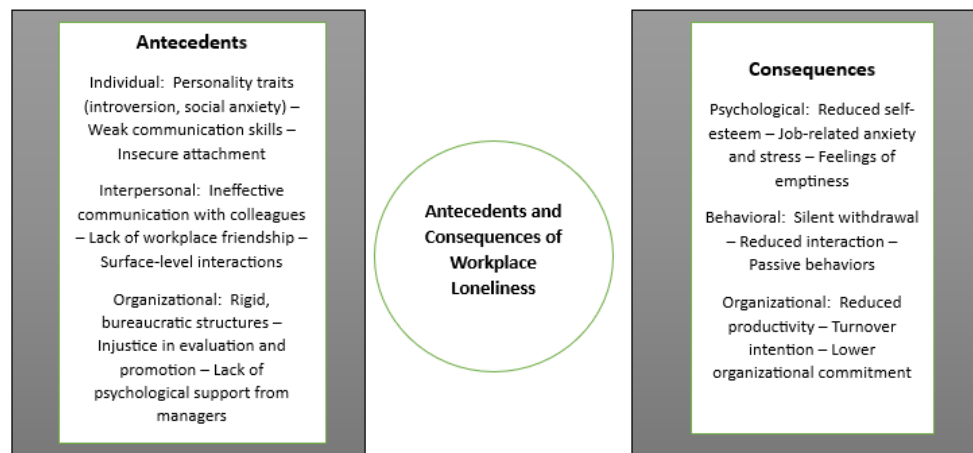
Overall Cluster	Category	Subcategories	Sample Key Concepts
Antecedents	Individual	– Personality traits (introversion, social anxiety) – Weak communication skills – Insecure attachment	Quietness, interaction avoidance, inability to express emotions
	Interpersonal	– Ineffective communication with colleagues – Lack of workplace friendship – Surface-level interactions	Task-oriented communication, feelings of rejection, lack of empathy
	Organizational	– Rigid, bureaucratic structures – Injustice in evaluation and promotion – Lack of psychological support from managers	Perceived discrimination, absence of human connection, weak supportive leadership
Consequences	Psychological	– Reduced self-esteem – Job-related anxiety and stress – Feelings of emptiness	Job depression, lack of purpose, feelings of worthlessness
	Behavioral	– Silent withdrawal – Reduced interaction – Passive behaviors	Avoidance, reduced responsibility, indifference
	Organizational	– Reduced productivity – Turnover intention – Lower organizational commitment	Absenteeism, reduced motivation, misalignment with organizational goals

In this study, the final conceptual model designed to explain the antecedents and consequences of loneliness among employees of governmental organizations was depicted as a causal–outcome structure. This model demonstrates that loneliness is not merely a psychological experience but a phenomenon emerging from the interaction of individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors within a structured context. In fact, employees' sense of loneliness does not stem solely from personality traits or insufficient communication skills; it is also strongly shaped by organizational conditions, leadership styles, and perceived justice in the workplace. Therefore, a reductionist perspective on this phenomenon can impede a comprehensive understanding of its dimensions.

In the antecedent section of the model, three sets of factors were identified as separate yet interconnected. First, individual factors such as introversion, social anxiety, and weak interpersonal skills form the psychological predispositions for experiencing rejection or isolation. Second, interpersonal factors such as weak informal relationships, surface-level interactions, and the absence of workplace friendships weaken social bonds and create emotional distance. Third, organizational factors such as rigid bureaucratic structures, unjust distribution of opportunities, and lack of psychological support from managers play a major role in institutionalizing feelings of isolation and alienation among employees.

At the center of the model lies workplace loneliness, identified as the core variable resulting from the cumulative and interactive influence of antecedents. This feeling intensifies especially when employees perceive themselves as being in an environment lacking support, opportunities for meaningful interaction, and human understanding of their circumstances. Experiencing loneliness in the organization affects not only communication but also job identity and employees' perceptions of their own value, leading to reduced work meaningfulness and psychological erosion. Ultimately, this condition triggers a series of individual and organizational reactions that appear in the consequences cluster.

The consequences of workplace loneliness in the proposed model are manifested at three levels: psychological, behavioral, and organizational. At the psychological level, feelings of emptiness, depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem are among the most prominent symptoms. At the behavioral level, employees may withdraw from social interactions, adopt organizational silence, or display passive and sometimes aggressive behaviors. Finally, at the organizational level, this condition leads to reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, turnover intention, and diminished organizational commitment. Thus, the final conceptual model demonstrates that workplace loneliness is a key variable in analyzing human resource dynamics and organizational performance—one that must be taken seriously in managerial policies and interventions.

Figure 1*Final Paradigm Model*

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop a contextualized conceptual model explaining the antecedents and consequences of workplace loneliness among employees in governmental organizations. The findings revealed that workplace loneliness is a complex, multidimensional experience shaped by the interplay of individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors. These factors collectively create situational and emotional conditions that increase employees' likelihood of feeling isolated, marginalized, or psychologically disconnected from their professional environment. Consistent with previous research, the results demonstrate that loneliness in the workplace is not a simplistic emotional reaction but a relational and structural outcome rooted in the dynamics of organizational life [2]. The identified antecedents—individual predispositions, interpersonal deficiencies, and organizational structural features—closely align with well-established theoretical and empirical studies that have emphasized the multilayered nature of workplace loneliness.

A primary finding concerned the role of individual factors, particularly introversion, social anxiety, communication difficulties, and insecure attachment patterns. These characteristics predisposed employees to interpret social cues negatively and to avoid opportunities for social engagement. This is consistent with attachment theory, which posits that insecure attachment styles limit one's capacity to form supportive workplace relationships, thereby increasing susceptibility to loneliness [5]. Prior research has shown that individuals with high social apprehension or lower interpersonal confidence are more prone to loneliness at work, as seen in studies highlighting the role of individual psychological vulnerabilities in shaping loneliness experiences [10]. Moreover, employees' difficulties in initiating conversations, forming friendships, or interpreting managerial feedback align with past findings that personal relational skill deficits contribute significantly to workplace isolation [4]. The current results therefore reinforce the view that loneliness is partially a function of personal predispositions that make employees vulnerable to social disconnection.

The second major antecedent identified was interpersonal relational deficits, particularly weak informal connections, absence of workplace friendships, and limited emotional exchanges with colleagues. The data showed that when employees perceive their coworker relationships as formal, superficial, or lacking empathy, the probability of experiencing loneliness

increases. This is strongly supported by previous findings that emphasize the importance of close workplace friendships and meaningful coworker interactions for reducing loneliness [7]. Furthermore, negative social dynamics—such as exclusion, competitive tension, or relational distrust—have been shown to exacerbate loneliness by undermining employees' sense of belonging and security [12]. The results also align with research indicating that organizational bullying, supervisor exploitation, or lack of supportive peer relationships act as powerful triggers of workplace loneliness [6]. Taken together, the findings affirm that loneliness is strongly shaped by relational processes and the presence or absence of emotionally supportive work relationships.

The third major antecedent consisted of organizational structural factors, particularly perceptions of injustice, hierarchical distance, rigid bureaucratic systems, and lack of managerial support. These findings strongly resonate with earlier studies showing that workplace environments characterized by formality, rigid procedures, and limited opportunities for social interactions create conditions that foster loneliness [8]. Employees who perceived decision-making processes as unfair or biased were more likely to feel marginalized, a finding that aligns with research demonstrating the powerful role of perceived injustice and structural inequality in shaping the social climate of organizations [14]. The absence of emotional support from managers and the prevalence of highly task-oriented climates echo the findings that managerial indifference and emotionally cold work structures weaken employees' sense of connection [4]. Additionally, the detrimental effects of authoritarian or exploitative leadership styles highlighted in previous literature corroborate the observed relationship between organizational climate and employee loneliness [9].

At the center of the model lies workplace loneliness itself—a psychological experience arising from the combined influence of the aforementioned antecedents. Participants described this experience as emotional detachment, social invisibility, and a sense of being disconnected from the organizational whole. This conceptualization is consistent with foundational definitions of workplace loneliness, which emphasize that loneliness reflects the subjective experience of unmet relational needs rather than simply the absence of social contact [1]. Importantly, the findings support the idea that loneliness in governmental organizations is intensified by the bureaucratic nature of public institutions, where formal structures and limited interpersonal flexibility contribute to employees' relational deprivation [3]. The fact that loneliness emerged as an emotionally painful and identity-relevant experience in the data aligns with earlier observations that loneliness affects employees' self-worth and sense of professional purpose [11].

In terms of consequences, the findings revealed significant psychological, behavioral, and organizational outcomes. At the psychological level, employees reported reduced self-esteem, heightened anxiety, increased stress, and depressive feelings—all of which mirror previous findings on the emotional and mental consequences of workplace loneliness [10]. These results align with research demonstrating that loneliness reduces emotional resilience, increases vulnerability to negative affect, and undermines meaningful engagement with work [15]. Furthermore, the experience of emotional exhaustion and perceived meaninglessness noted in the findings corresponds with the literature describing loneliness as a precursor to emotional withdrawal and professional alienation [11].

At the behavioral level, the results indicated declines in social participation, increased withdrawal behaviors, passive communication, and tendencies toward organizational silence. This is consistent with studies showing that workplace loneliness is strongly associated with avoidance behaviors, reduced expression of ideas, and passive resistance [12]. Furthermore, loneliness appears to trigger emotional self-protection strategies, causing individuals to detach from teamwork,

reduce communication, and limit engagement in discretionary behaviors. These patterns align with research on psychological capital, which shows that employees with lower emotional resources—often a by-product of loneliness—are less likely to engage in proactive organizational behaviors [9].

Finally, at the organizational level, the findings revealed significant consequences such as reduced productivity, weakened organizational commitment, increased absenteeism, and turnover intention. These results are strongly supported by earlier empirical work indicating that loneliness impairs cognitive functioning and emotional energy, both of which are essential for optimal performance [3]. The observed decline in organizational commitment among lonely employees corresponds with findings demonstrating that loneliness reduces individuals' emotional attachment to their organization and heightens desire to exit [7]. The link between loneliness and turnover intention is also consistent with studies emphasizing that reduced interpersonal connections weaken employee embeddedness and facilitate detachment from organizational identity [18]. Moreover, the increased absenteeism and mental health deterioration found in this study align with cross-national evidence showing that loneliness is significantly correlated with reduced workplace attendance and higher psychological distress [17].

A notable insight from the findings is the identification of moderating mechanisms that can buffer loneliness. Religious belief emerged as a coping resource, consistent with studies showing that religiosity can mitigate the harmful emotional effects of workplace loneliness by reinforcing meaning, solidarity, and psychological comfort [19]. This aligns with evidence demonstrating that personal or cultural resources help individuals reinterpret relational deprivation in less damaging ways.

Overall, the findings validate the broader literature by confirming that workplace loneliness is a deeply relational and organizationally embedded phenomenon that adversely affects multiple domains of employee functioning. At the same time, the study extends previous knowledge by contextualizing these dynamics within governmental organizations, where bureaucratic structures and formal communication norms uniquely shape loneliness experiences.

This study was qualitative in nature, and although it generated rich and contextualized insights, the findings cannot be generalized to all governmental organizations or cultural contexts. The sample size, while sufficient for achieving theoretical saturation, was limited to one geographic region, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other administrative environments. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced emotional or cognitive biases. The study also did not include longitudinal follow-up, limiting its ability to capture changes in loneliness over time.

Future studies should adopt mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to validate and extend the conceptual model developed here. Longitudinal research would be valuable for understanding how loneliness evolves and how organizational transitions, leadership changes, or structural reforms influence it. Future research should also examine potential protective factors such as emotional intelligence, job crafting, and social support interventions. Comparative studies across different sectors or cultures may further illuminate how context shapes the experience and consequences of loneliness.

Managers in governmental organizations should prioritize relational well-being and cultivate climates that support interpersonal connection. Leadership training should emphasize empathy, supportive communication, and the development of inclusive decision-making practices. Organizational structures should be redesigned to increase opportunities for informal interaction and collegial collaboration. Intervention programs should focus on improving communication skills, strengthening team cohesion, and enhancing employees' sense of belonging.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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