




Article type:  
Original Research

Article history:  
Received 10 June 2025  
Revised 14 September 2025  
Accepted 21 September 2025  
Published online 01 December 2025

Vahid. Mehtar Gharehdaghi <sup>1</sup>,  
Mohammad Hasan. Maleki <sup>2\*</sup>,  
Mohammad Reza. Soltani <sup>3</sup>

1 Department of Public Administration, kl.C.,  
Islamic Azad University, Kish Island, Iran  
2 Associate Professor, Department of  
Management, Faculty of Economic and  
Administrative Sciences, University of Qom, Qom,  
Iran  
3 Assistant Professor, Department of  
Management, Imam Hossein Comprehensive  
University, Tehran, Iran

Corresponding author email address:  
mh.maleki@qom.ac.ir

How to cite this article:  
Mehtar Gharehdaghi, V., Maleki, M. H., & Soltani,  
M. R. (2025). Examining the Factors Affecting  
Organizational Silence Among Employees of  
Governmental Organizations (Case Study: Social  
Security Organization of Iran). *Future of Work and  
Digital Management Journal*, 3(4), 1-18.  
<https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.114>



© 2025 the authors. This is an open access article  
under the terms of the Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC  
BY-NC 4.0) License.

## Examining the Factors Affecting Organizational Silence Among Employees of Governmental Organizations (Case Study: Social Security Organization of Iran)

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of factors influencing the formation of organizational silence among employees in governmental organizations and to design a conceptual model. Organizational silence, as a complex organizational phenomenon, can have negative consequences for both individual and organizational performance. This study is applied in purpose and descriptive-correlational in method. Research data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire from a sample of 238 employees of the Social Security Organization, who were selected through purposive random sampling based on accessibility and willingness to cooperate. The validity and reliability of the measurement instrument were confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis was performed using Structural equation modeling with SmartPLS software. The results showed that factors such as fear of negative consequences, distrust in management, and perceived inequality had a significant effect on organizational silence ( $\beta = \dots$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, organizational silence had a negative and significant effect on employees' negative emotions, decreased productivity, and the weakening of organizational culture ( $\beta = \dots$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, mediating variables such as perceived trust and Psychological safety had a reducing effect on organizational silence, whereas intervening variables such as organizational cynicism and Emotional exhaustion exacerbated its effects. The findings of this study indicate that in order to reduce organizational silence, improving organizational trust and fostering a positive organizational climate should be prioritized by human resource managers and organizational decision-makers. Practical recommendations were provided to reduce employee silence and enhance organizational interactions. The results of this study can serve as a suitable basis for future studies and for improving managerial processes in both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

**Keywords:** Organizational silence, Structural equation modeling, Antecedents of organizational silence, Consequences of organizational silence, Organizational behavior.

### Introduction

In contemporary organizational studies, the phenomenon of organizational silence has increasingly drawn scholarly attention due to its profound implications for individual performance, collective productivity, and organizational sustainability. Organizational silence refers to the deliberate withholding of ideas, opinions, or concerns by employees about organizational issues, even when they possess valuable insights that could contribute to improvement and change [1]. This behavior is often rooted in fear, distrust, or perceived futility and can hinder communication channels within organizations, especially in the public sector, where hierarchical structures and bureaucratic norms are dominant [2]. While silence may

appear as a passive act, it constitutes an active decision that shapes organizational dynamics, influencing both employee well-being and the organization's adaptive capacity [3].

Researchers have argued that silence can emerge from multifaceted antecedents, spanning individual, managerial, cultural, and structural domains [4-6]. Individual-level antecedents include personality traits, fear of retaliation, and previous negative experiences, which often compel employees to remain silent to avoid perceived risks [7]. On the managerial side, controlling leadership styles, lack of support, and punitive supervision cultivate climates in which voicing concerns is discouraged [8]. Culturally, collectivist norms, high power distance, and rigid hierarchies often institutionalize silence, making it part of the organizational fabric rather than an aberrant behavior [9]. Structurally, complex bureaucratic mechanisms and top-down communication channels diminish the perceived efficacy of speaking up, further reinforcing silence as an adaptive response [10].

In Iran, organizational silence has been found to be particularly prevalent in governmental organizations, where employees often operate under strong hierarchical constraints and ambiguous accountability structures [11]. This setting creates fertile ground for silence to flourish, particularly when employees perceive low psychological safety and limited support from superiors [4]. Studies have shown that silence among public sector employees in Iran not only impedes knowledge sharing and problem-solving but also fosters a culture of fear, mistrust, and disengagement [5, 6]. Such dynamics ultimately reduce organizational commitment and creativity among employees [12], thereby threatening the long-term resilience and adaptability of public institutions [13].

Organizational silence is not only a behavioral issue but also a socio-psychological phenomenon with emotional and ethical dimensions. Silence can stem from emotional exhaustion, workplace mistreatment, or exposure to unethical practices among peers, which undermine employees' sense of justice and belonging [14, 15]. When employees witness unethical behavior yet feel constrained to remain silent, their organizational identification and trust erode, which intensifies their disengagement [14]. Additionally, silence has been linked to defensive coping mechanisms during crises or structural reforms, where employees adopt silence to preserve their position or avoid conflict [10, 16]. In such cases, silence may initially serve as a protective strategy but gradually becomes an ingrained behavioral norm that diminishes organizational transparency and responsiveness [17].

The consequences of organizational silence extend far beyond interpersonal dynamics and can disrupt core organizational functions. Silence can delay the identification of errors, suppress innovative suggestions, and obscure emerging problems, thereby threatening organizational learning and adaptability [1, 18]. In the public sector, these effects are especially detrimental, as governmental agencies are tasked with public service delivery and must adapt continuously to policy reforms and societal changes [19]. Yet, when silence prevails, employees may comply outwardly while withholding dissent or alternative viewpoints, creating a façade of consensus that undermines reform efforts [10]. Over time, this weakens organizational culture, reduces employee morale, and fosters cynicism, which collectively erode public trust [20].

Several studies have sought to conceptualize the mechanisms through which silence emerges and sustains itself within organizations. Theoretical frameworks often portray silence as the outcome of perceived costs versus benefits of voice behavior, where perceived risks—such as punishment, social exclusion, or reputational damage—outweigh potential gains [3, 7]. Silence is thus seen as a rational, strategic choice under conditions of uncertainty and power asymmetry. However, silence can also be habitual or structural, embedded in organizational routines and power dynamics [15]. This dual nature of

silence—as both an individual coping strategy and a collective organizational pattern—complicates interventions aimed at reducing it.

In addressing organizational silence, scholars emphasize the importance of fostering psychological safety and trust, particularly in hierarchical public organizations where voice behaviors are often risky [21, 22]. Psychological safety enables employees to express concerns or dissent without fear of negative repercussions, thereby counteracting silence and promoting open communication [18]. Trust in leadership also plays a critical role; when employees perceive their leaders as supportive and just, they are more likely to share concerns and less likely to resort to silence [20]. Conversely, a lack of trust leads employees to interpret silence as safer and voice as threatening, perpetuating cycles of disengagement [7].

Recent meta-analyses and synthesis studies have underscored the need for comprehensive models that integrate individual, organizational, and contextual factors influencing silence [2, 11]. These studies argue that piecemeal approaches—targeting only one dimension, such as individual fear or managerial behavior—are insufficient. Instead, multidimensional frameworks are required to capture how antecedents interact with mediating and intervening variables, ultimately producing silence as an emergent organizational phenomenon [3]. For instance, hierarchical culture may magnify the impact of managerial authoritarianism on silence, while supportive climates can buffer these effects and encourage voice [9].

Furthermore, organizational silence cannot be understood in isolation from organizational change and agility. In environments marked by volatility and continuous reform, such as the Iranian public sector, silence undermines agility by constraining feedback loops and slowing decision-making [13]. Employees who refrain from voicing operational problems or policy challenges impede the organization's capacity to adapt to new conditions, implement innovations, or correct errors quickly [1]. Thus, silence not only impairs current performance but also erodes future readiness and resilience, making its management a strategic imperative for public institutions.

Despite growing recognition of its importance, organizational silence remains under-examined in public sector contexts, particularly through integrated structural models that trace its antecedents, mediating dynamics, intervening factors, and consequences simultaneously [2]. Existing studies often focus on isolated determinants or rely on qualitative approaches, which, while insightful, offer limited generalizability [5, 6]. There is a pressing need for empirical, theory-driven models that can clarify the causal pathways of silence and inform targeted interventions. Moreover, the interplay between silence and other organizational constructs such as commitment, creativity, and ethical climate warrants deeper investigation [12, 17].

The present study aims to address these gaps by examining the factors influencing organizational silence among employees in the Social Security Organization, a major governmental body in Iran.

## Methodology

This study is applied in purpose, as it seeks to present a practical model for the Social Security Organization of Iran. It is descriptive-survey in terms of research method. Secondary data and information were collected through library research, meaning that primary sources were extracted from books, previous studies, and scholarly articles. Primary data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire developed based on identified dimensions and components.

The extracted questionnaire was first validated in terms of face validity by university professors and was then statistically validated. Convergent validity was assessed by examining the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, and

discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the AVE of each construct with the shared variance between constructs. Furthermore, the reliability of the collected data was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha.

To collect expert opinions from the management and medical services deputy sectors of the Social Security Organization, as well as from the academic community related to the subject area, sampling was conducted. The estimated number of employees in the management and medical services deputy departments across various branches of the Social Security Organization in Tehran was reported to be approximately 620 to 650. To determine the sample size, the maximum possible number of questionnaires was considered. According to Cochran's formula for estimating sample size in large populations, and an error margin of 0.1, which is common in social science studies. Based on these calculations, for a population of 620 individuals, a sample size of 238 was required. To ensure the minimum threshold was met, an additional 10% was added, and thus nearly 250 questionnaires were distributed among experts. Participants were selected through purposive random sampling: purposive in that individuals were chosen based on expertise, experience, and education, and random in that the questionnaires were distributed randomly among those selected.

## Findings and Results

Before examining correlations between variables and conducting regression analysis, each construct was validated based on the collected data.

To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must be examined.

**Table 1.**

*Comparison Matrix of AVE Square Roots and Correlation Coefficients for the Antecedents of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

	Individual	Managerial	Organizational Leadership	Organizational	Other Employees' Behavior	Psychological	Cultural and Social	Financial and Economic Conditions
Individual	0.761							
Managerial		0.825						
Organizational Leadership			0.788					
Organizational				0.803				
Other Employees' Behavior					0.816			
Psychological						0.796		
Cultural and Social							0.785	
Financial and Economic Conditions								0.749

As shown in the matrix above, the square root of each construct's AVE (the diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (the off-diagonal values), indicating acceptable discriminant validity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for the antecedents of employees' organizational silence construct, as shown below:

**Table 2**

*Reliability Results for Each Factor of the Antecedents of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Individual	0.927	0.869
Managerial	0.868	0.824
Organizational Leadership	0.925	0.847
Organizational	0.812	0.898

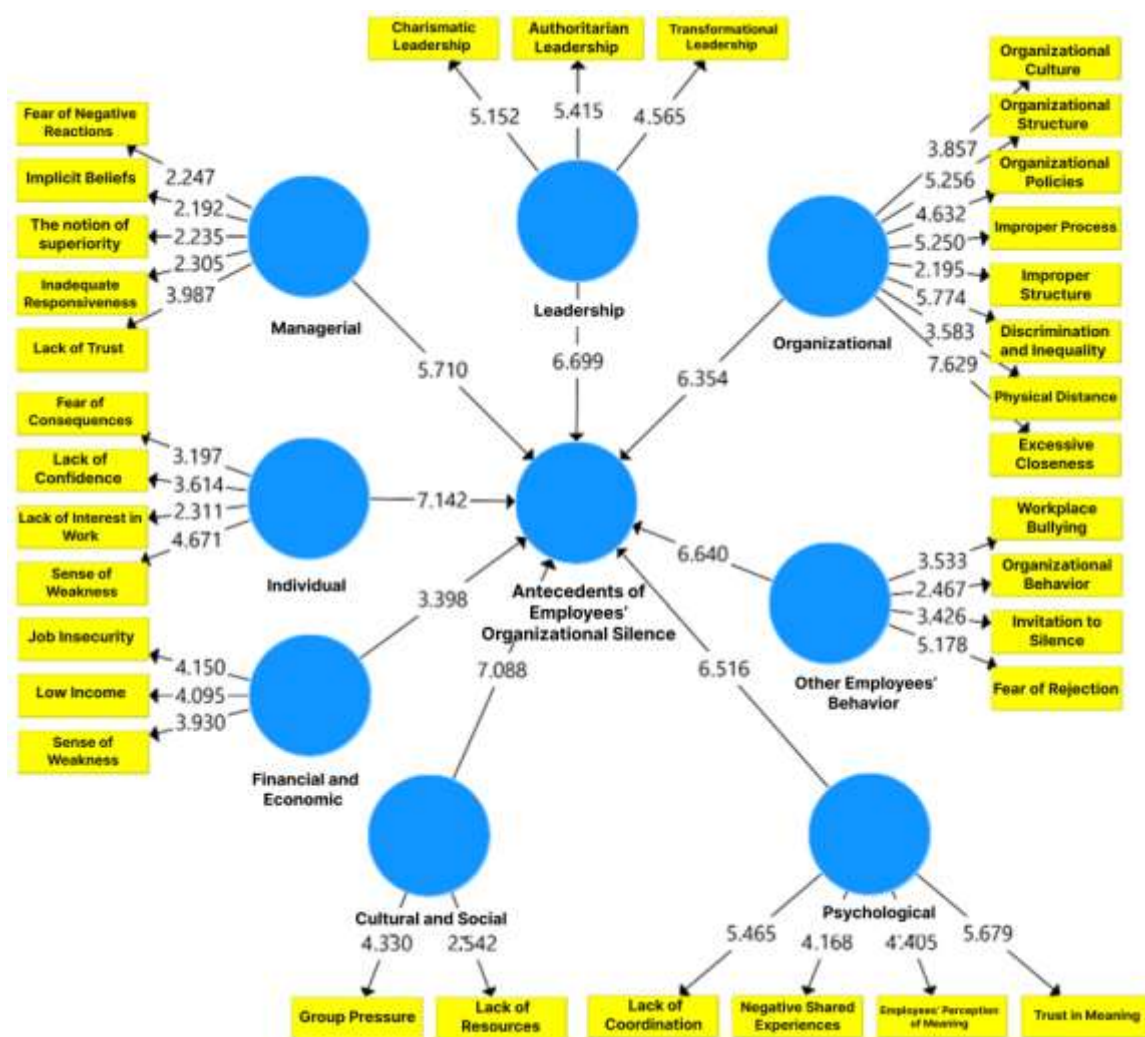
Other Employees' Behavior	0.868	0.824
Psychological	0.868	0.724
Cultural and Social	0.878	0.788
Financial and Economic Conditions	0.795	0.832

Based on the results, all identified factors within this construct demonstrated high reliability in the model. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7 for all variables. Therefore, the results confirm the model's goodness of fit for the antecedents of employees' organizational silence based on these two criteria.

Figures 1 and 2 present the revised Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results and standardized factor loadings for the antecedents of employees' organizational silence construct. The goodness-of-fit indices of each confirmatory model indicated acceptable fit for the construct.

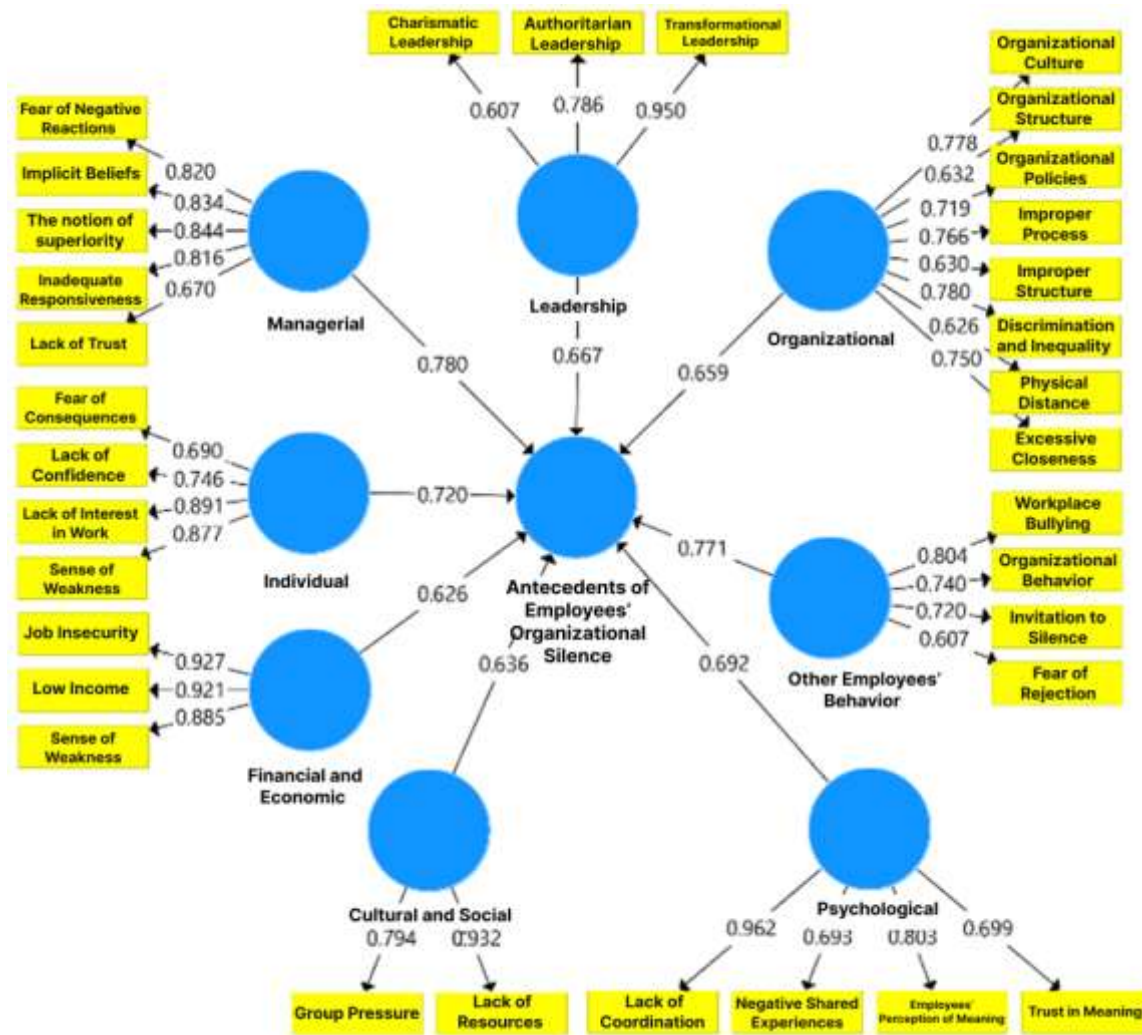
**Figure 1**

*t-Statistics for Each Relationship Between Components of the Antecedents of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*



**Figure 2**

*Standardized Factor Loadings of the Antecedents of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*



Preliminary results show that, from the perspective of the statistical population, all identified components belong to the construct, and the antecedents of employees' organizational silence are correctly formed from the specified dimensions. The table below shows the goodness-of-fit indices for this construct within the model.

**Table 3**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Antecedents of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

Index	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	d-ULS	d-G	NFI
Calculated Value	1.849	0.075	0.92	0.87	0.94
Acceptable Threshold	$\leq 3$	$\leq 0.1$	$< 0.90$	$< 0.80$	$< 0.90$
Result	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Accordingly, the results indicate that the designed construct for the antecedents of employees' organizational silence has an acceptable fit and is therefore confirmed.

**Table 4**

*Comparison Matrix of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Square Roots and Correlation Coefficients for the Consequences of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

	Impact on Employees	Impact on the Organization
Impact on Employees	0.852	
Impact on the Organization		0.819

As shown in the matrix above, the square root of each construct's AVE (the diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (the off-diagonal values), which indicates acceptable discriminant validity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for the consequences of employees' organizational silence construct, as shown below:

**Table 5**

*Reliability Results for Each Factor of the Consequences of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

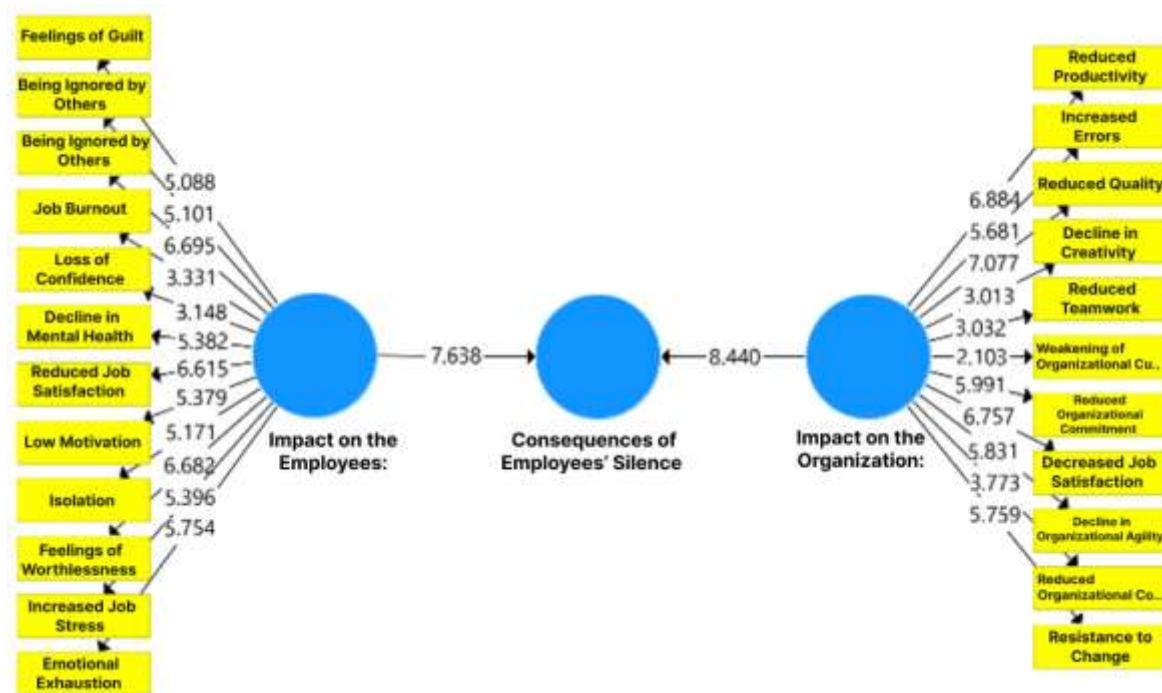
Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Impact on Employees	0.925	0.841
Impact on the Organization	0.913	0.809

Based on the results, all identified factors in this construct demonstrated high reliability in the model. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7 for all variables. Therefore, the results confirm the model's goodness of fit for the consequences of employees' organizational silence based on these two criteria.

In Figures 3 and 4, the revised Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results and standardized factor loadings for the consequences of employees' organizational silence construct were evaluated. The goodness-of-fit indices of each confirmatory model indicated acceptable fit for this construct.

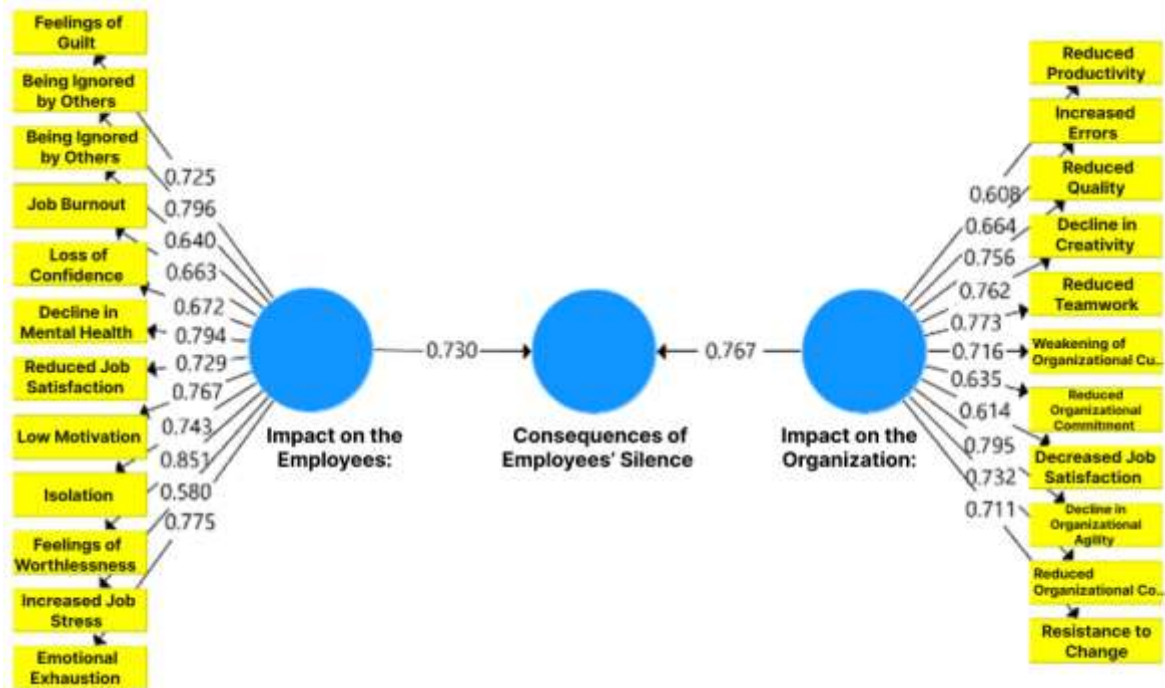
**Figure 3**

*t-Statistics for Each Relationship Between Components of the Consequences of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*



**Figure 4**

*Standardized Factor Loadings of the Consequences of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*



Preliminary results show that, from the perspective of the statistical population, all identified components belong to the construct, and the consequences of employees' organizational silence are correctly formed from the specified dimensions. The table below presents the goodness-of-fit indices for this construct within the model.

**Table 6**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Consequences of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

Index	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	d-ULS	d-G	NFI
Calculated Value	1.654	0.077	0.93	0.89	0.91
Acceptable Threshold	$\leq 3$	$\leq 0.1$	$< 0.90$	$< 0.80$	$< 0.90$
Result	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Accordingly, the results indicate that the designed construct for the consequences of employees' organizational silence has an acceptable fit and is therefore confirmed.

The matrix for assessing discriminant validity in the model of research constructs is presented in the table below.

**Table 7**

*Comparison Matrix of AVE Square Roots and Correlation Coefficients for the Mediating Variables of the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

	Preventive Factors	Intensifying Factors
Preventive Factors	0.794	
Intensifying Factors		0.812

As shown in the matrix above, the square root of each construct's AVE (the diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (the off-diagonal values), which indicates acceptable discriminant validity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for the mediating variables of the formation of employees' organizational silence construct, as shown below:

**Table 8**

*Reliability Results for Each Factor of the Mediating Variables of the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence*

*Construct*

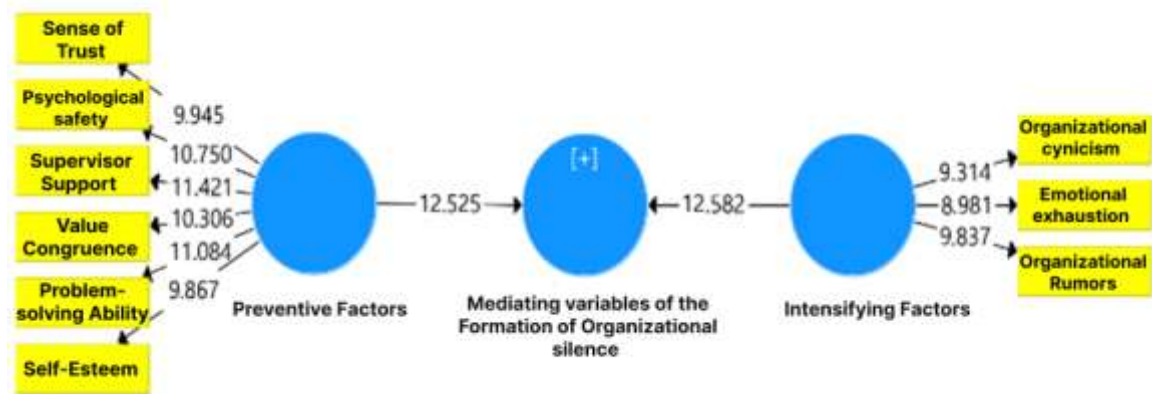
Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Preventive Factors	0.798	0.756
Intensifying Factors	0.842	0.783

Based on the results, all identified factors in this construct demonstrated high reliability in the model. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7 for all variables. Therefore, the results confirm the model's goodness of fit for the mediating variables of the formation of employees' organizational silence based on these two criteria.

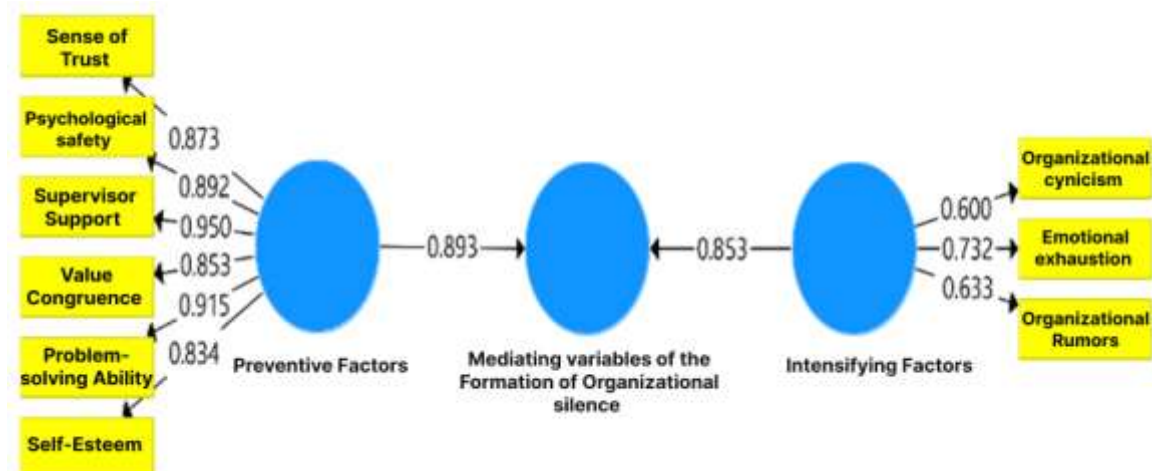
In Figures 5 and 6, the revised Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results and standardized factor loadings for the mediating variables of the formation of employees' organizational silence construct were evaluated. The goodness-of-fit indices of each confirmatory model indicated acceptable fit for this construct.

**Figure 5**

*t-Statistics for Each Relationship Between Components of the Mediating Variables of the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

**Figure 6**

*Standardized Factor Loadings of the Mediating Variables of the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*



Preliminary results show that, from the perspective of the statistical population, all identified components belong to the construct, and the mediating variables of the formation of employees' organizational silence are correctly formed from the specified dimensions. The table below presents the goodness-of-fit indices for this construct within the model.

**Table 9**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Mediating Variables of the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

Index	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	d-ULS	d-G	NFI
Calculated Value	1.559	0.064	0.94	0.91	0.93
Acceptable Threshold	$\leq 3$	$\leq 0.1$	$< 0.90$	$< 0.80$	$< 0.90$
Result	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Accordingly, the results indicate that the designed construct for the mediating variables of the formation of employees' organizational silence has an acceptable fit and is therefore confirmed.

**Table 10**

*Comparison Matrix of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Square Roots and Correlation Coefficients for the Intervening variables in the Formation of Employees' Organizational silence Construct*

	Organizational Factors	Individual Factors
Organizational Factors	0.877	
Individual Factors		0.894

As shown in the matrix above, the square root of each construct's AVE (the diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with other constructs (the off-diagonal values), which indicates acceptable discriminant validity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for the intervening variables in the formation of employees' organizational silence construct, as shown below:

**Table 11**

*Reliability Results for Each Factor of the Intervening Variables in the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

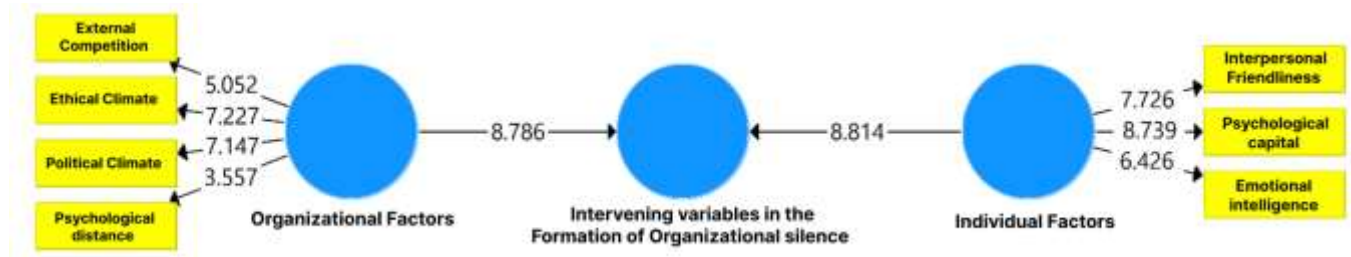
Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Organizational Factors	0.915	0.862
Individual Factors	0.947	0.883

Based on the results, all identified factors in this construct demonstrated high reliability in the model. Both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7 for all variables. Therefore, the results confirm the model's goodness of fit for the intervening variables in the formation of employees' organizational silence based on these two criteria.

In Figures 7 and 8, the revised Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results and standardized factor loadings for the intervening variables in the formation of employees' organizational silence construct were evaluated. The goodness-of-fit indices of each confirmatory model indicated acceptable fit for this construct.

**Figure 7**

*t*-Statistics for Each Relationship Between Components of the Intervening Variables in the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct

**Figure 8**

Standardized Factor Loadings of the Intervening Variables in the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct



Preliminary results show that, from the perspective of the statistical population, all identified components belong to the construct, and the intervening variables in the formation of employees' organizational silence are correctly formed from the specified dimensions. The table below presents the goodness-of-fit indices for this construct within the model.

**Table 12**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Intervening Variables in the Formation of Employees' Organizational Silence Construct*

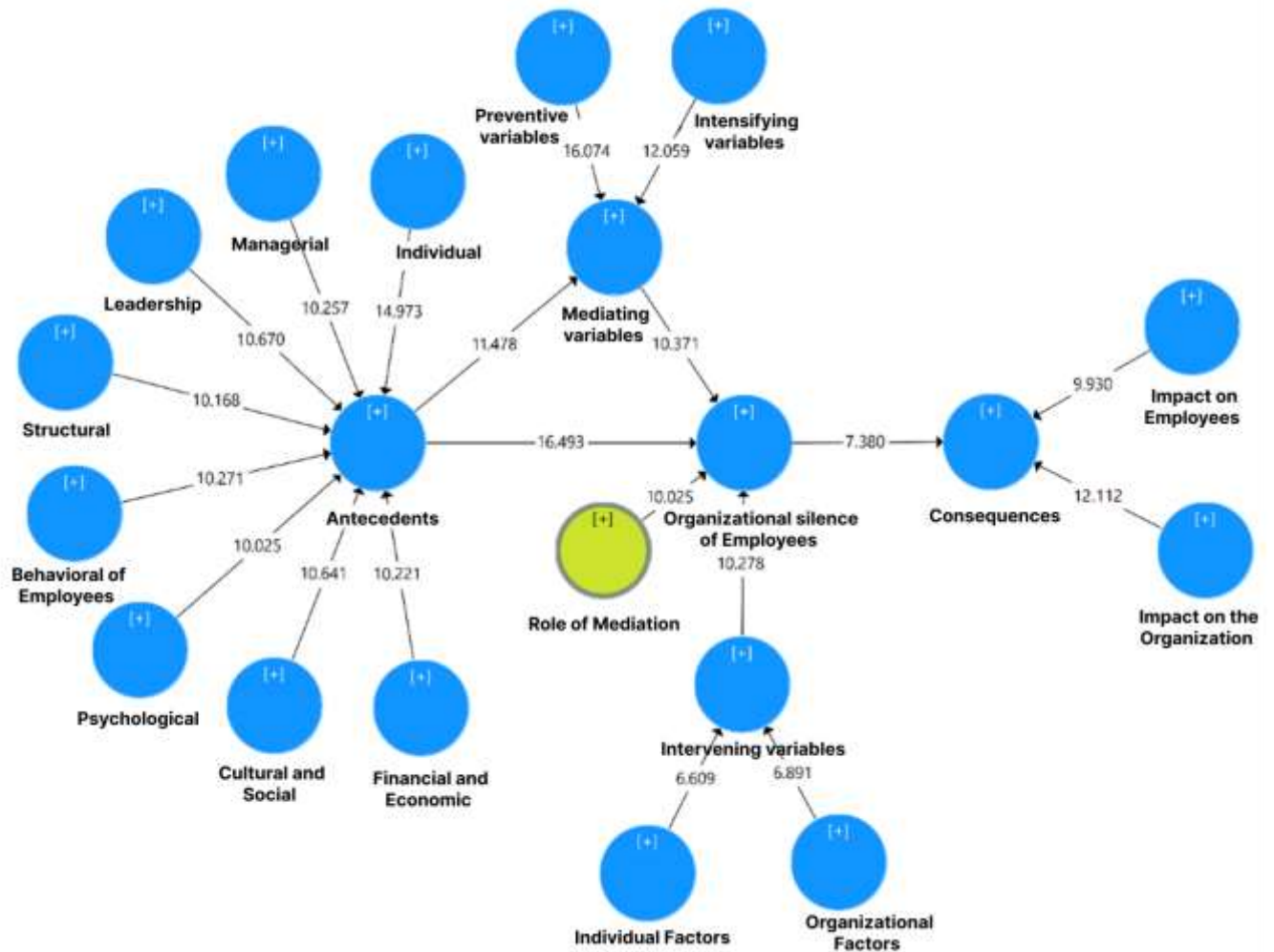
Index	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	d-ULS	d-G	NFI
Calculated Value	1.524	0.081	0.94	0.91	0.92
Acceptable Threshold	$\leq 3$	$\leq 0.1$	$< 0.90$	$< 0.80$	$< 0.90$
Result	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Accordingly, the results indicate that the designed construct for the intervening variables in the formation of employees' organizational silence has an acceptable fit and is therefore confirmed.

After confirming the designed constructs through Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the relationships between the identified categories were examined in this section. The significance of the relationships between the variables and then the effect size of each variable were analyzed.

**Figure 9**

*t*-Statistics for the Significance of Relationships Between Variables in the Employees' Silence Model in the Social Security Organization

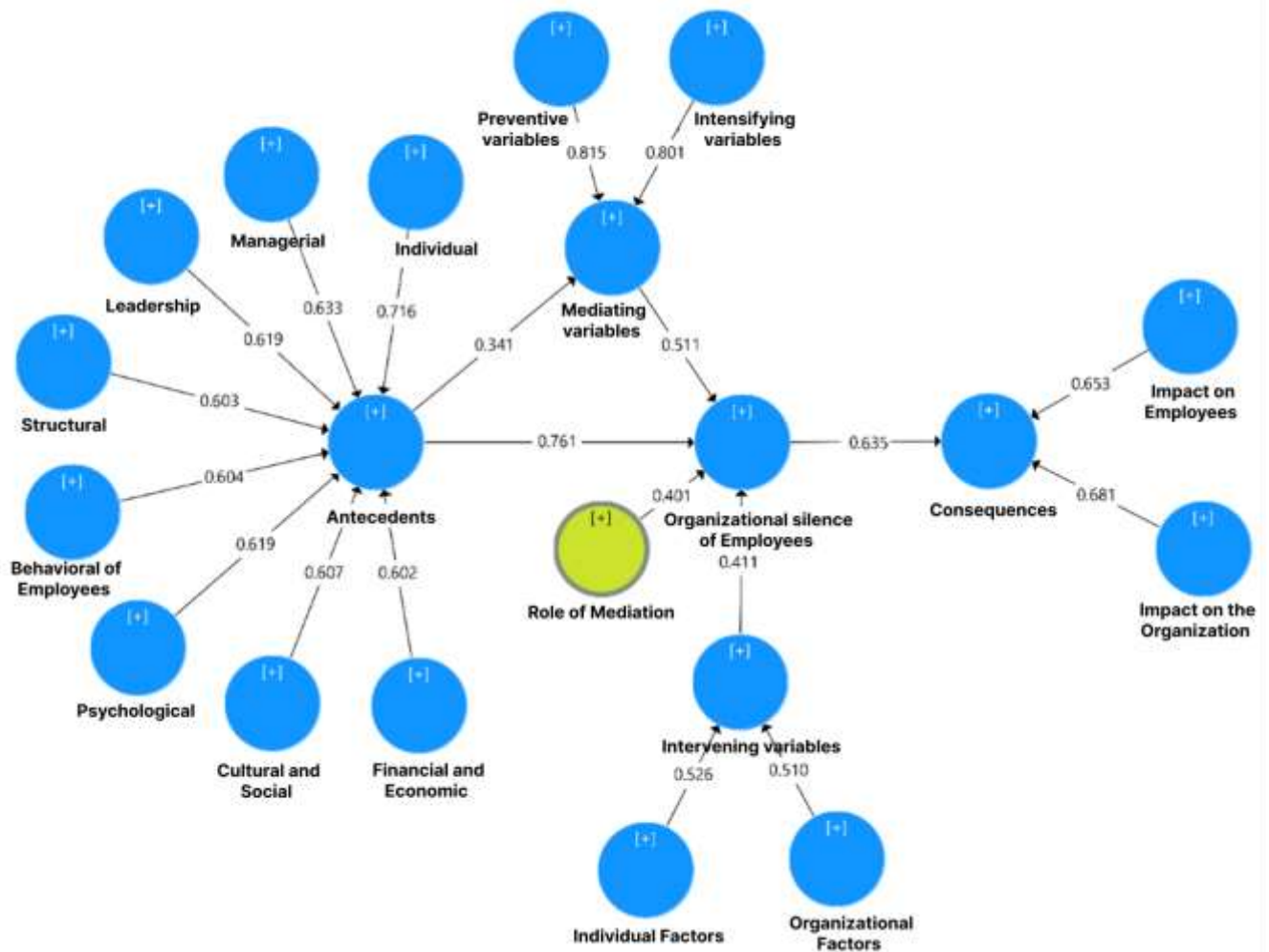


As shown in the figure, all relationships between the identified variables in the employees' silence model in the Social Security Organization are greater than 1.96, indicating that the relationships are statistically significant. Therefore, all relationships are significant, and the regression coefficients presented in the next figure are valid and meaningful.

The coefficients shown in Figure 10 demonstrate the relationships and regression coefficients between the research variables.

**Figure 10**

*Standardized Coefficients Obtained from Structural Equation Modeling for the Employees' Silence Model in the Social Security Organization*



The goodness-of-fit indices for the overall model are presented below.

**Table 13**

*Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Employees' Silence Model in the Social Security Organization*

Index	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	d-ULS	d-G	NFI
Calculated Value	1.852	0.0718	0.91	0.86	0.91
Acceptable Threshold	$\leq 3$	$\leq 0.1$	$< 0.90$	$< 0.80$	$< 0.90$
Result	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The results indicate that the model has an acceptable fit, and the results obtained from the model are reliable.

Given that the designed model was found to be reliable, the research hypotheses were then tested.

**Table 14**

*Examination of the Research Hypotheses*

No.	Research Hypotheses	Coefficient	Type of Effect	Result
1	The identified antecedents in the model had a significant role in the formation of employees' silence in the Social Security Organization.	0.761	Direct and significant	Confirmed
2	The identified Mediating variables significantly strengthened the relationship between the identified antecedents in the model and the formation of employees' silence in the Social Security Organization.	0.511	Indirect and significant	Confirmed

3	The identified intervening variables significantly strengthened the relationship between the identified antecedents in the model and the formation of employees' silence in the Social Security Organization.	0.411	Indirect and significant	Confirmed
4	The identified antecedents in the model had a significant role in the formation of the consequences and outcomes of employees' silence in the Social Security Organization.	0.635	Direct and significant	Confirmed

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the complex dynamics of Organizational silence among employees of the Social Security Organization, highlighting how individual, managerial, and organizational factors converge to shape silence behaviors and their subsequent outcomes. The results showed that antecedent factors—including fear of negative consequences, distrust toward management, and perceptions of injustice—had a significant and positive relationship with the emergence of silence. This aligns with prior research emphasizing that when employees perceive risks associated with speaking up, they are more likely to withhold their opinions and concerns [4, 5, 7]. Fear-based climates and a lack of psychological safety often push employees toward defensive silence, which serves as a self-protective strategy in hostile environments [10]. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that distrust in leadership not only diminishes employees' willingness to engage in voice behaviors but also fosters cynicism and disengagement, thereby reinforcing silence as a normative organizational behavior [14, 20].

The analysis further revealed that organizational silence exerted a negative and significant effect on emotional states, productivity levels, and organizational culture. This finding is consistent with the literature indicating that silence impairs knowledge sharing, creativity, and morale, which are vital to sustaining organizational effectiveness [1, 12]. Silence prevents timely identification of errors and weakens learning mechanisms, which can lead to a culture of conformity and stagnation [17, 18]. When employees habitually withhold information, organizational routines become rigid, and adaptive capacity diminishes—especially in public sector institutions facing frequent policy reforms [13]. Such environments require continuous feedback loops, yet silence disrupts these loops and undermines the organization's agility and responsiveness [2, 3].

In addition, the results demonstrated that mediating variables—specifically trust and Psychological safety—reduced the intensity of silence, while intervening variables such as Organizational cynicism and Emotional exhaustion amplified it. This confirms theoretical arguments that trust functions as a buffer, mitigating the perceived costs of speaking up and encouraging constructive voice behaviors [21, 22]. Psychological safety has been shown to create a climate where employees feel safe to share concerns without fear of reprisal, which counters silence and promotes open dialogue [18]. Conversely, cynicism and emotional fatigue erode employees' emotional resources and heighten perceptions of futility, thereby making silence appear to be a safer behavioral choice [15, 17]. The interplay of these mediating and intervening factors underscores the multidimensional nature of silence, which emerges not only from structural and cultural constraints but also from affective and cognitive states shaped by the organizational climate [14].

Moreover, the study confirmed that antecedents significantly influenced the emergence of silence, and that both mediating and intervening variables strengthened this relationship. This is consistent with prior meta-analyses which suggest that silence is a product of systemic interactions rather than isolated causes [2, 11]. For example, a culture characterized by hierarchical rigidity magnifies the effect of managerial authoritarianism on silence, while supportive managerial practices can attenuate this relationship [8, 9]. The findings also demonstrated that antecedents significantly influenced the consequences of silence, reinforcing the notion that silence can set off a chain of adverse outcomes—ranging from emotional disengagement to organizational inertia [3, 6]. This aligns with evidence that silence, once normalized, fosters a self-

perpetuating cycle: silence weakens organizational trust and innovation, which in turn make employees even more reluctant to speak up [1].

Crucially, the results highlight the unique vulnerability of public sector organizations to the detrimental effects of silence. In the case of the Social Security Organization, the presence of entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies, limited lateral communication, and low tolerance for dissent appears to have exacerbated silence behaviors. This finding resonates with earlier research indicating that public institutions—due to their bureaucratic culture and political constraints—are particularly prone to defensive silence as a reaction to uncertainty and change [10, 19]. Such dynamics are especially concerning given the critical service-delivery responsibilities of these organizations. When employees remain silent about operational inefficiencies or policy implementation issues, public institutions risk diminished performance, reduced citizen satisfaction, and loss of public trust [18, 20].

Overall, these findings support a multidimensional model of organizational silence in which individual, managerial, cultural, and structural antecedents interact with mediating and intervening factors to produce silence, which in turn leads to adverse emotional, behavioral, and cultural consequences. This comprehensive perspective is consistent with calls from recent scholarship for integrative frameworks that move beyond single-cause explanations [2, 3]. By demonstrating these causal pathways empirically in a large public sector organization, this study contributes to bridging the gap between conceptual and applied understandings of silence. Furthermore, it underscores the need for interventions that target not only individual-level behaviors but also the broader cultural and structural contexts that sustain silence [5-7].

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design constrains the ability to make causal inferences about the relationships among antecedents, mediating and intervening variables, and consequences of organizational silence. Longitudinal research could offer stronger evidence regarding the temporal dynamics and potential feedback loops between these constructs. Second, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data raises the possibility of response biases, including social desirability bias and common method variance. Although steps were taken to ensure anonymity and reduce evaluation apprehension, these biases cannot be entirely ruled out. Third, the study focused solely on employees within the Social Security Organization, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other public or private sector contexts that differ in cultural, structural, or managerial characteristics. Finally, while the model captured a broad set of factors, other potentially relevant variables—such as personality traits, leadership styles, or organizational justice perceptions—were not included and warrant consideration in future models.

Future research could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal or mixed-method designs that capture the evolution of silence over time and its interplay with organizational change processes. Studies incorporating qualitative interviews or observational data could also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and contextual triggers of silence, complementing the quantitative approach used here. Comparative studies across different sectors, industries, and cultural contexts would help assess the generalizability of the proposed model and identify context-specific antecedents or moderating factors. Moreover, future research could investigate the role of leadership behaviors, ethical climate, and perceived organizational justice as additional antecedents or moderators that shape the emergence and impact of silence. Incorporating multi-source data, such as supervisor ratings and objective performance metrics, could further enhance the validity of findings and mitigate self-report biases.

For practitioners, the results underscore the urgency of addressing organizational silence as a systemic issue rather than an individual shortcoming. Public sector managers should focus on building psychological safety and trust by fostering transparent communication, rewarding constructive voice behaviors, and ensuring non-retaliatory responses to dissent. Training programs could equip managers with skills to recognize and respond supportively to employees' concerns, thereby weakening the perceived risks of speaking up. Structural reforms aimed at flattening hierarchies, enhancing lateral communication, and decentralizing decision-making could further diminish the conditions that breed silence. Additionally, embedding regular feedback mechanisms and participatory decision-making structures would create ongoing opportunities for employee input, helping to shift organizational norms from silence to open dialogue.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

### 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.

### Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

### References

- [1] E. W. Morrison and F. J. Milliken, "Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world," *Academy of Management review*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 706-725, 2021, doi: 10.2307/259200.
- [2] V. Mehter Gharadaghi, M. H. Maleki, and M. Soltani, "Designing a Model of Organizational Silence for Public Sector Employees Using a Systematic Literature Review and Meta-synthesis," *Management, Education, and Development in the Digital Age*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 163-178, 2024, doi: 10.61838/medda.1.4.11.
- [3] L. L. Dehkharghani, J. Paul, Y. Maharati, and J. Menzies, "Employee silence in an organizational context: A review and research agenda," *European Management Journal*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1072-1085, 2022, doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2022.12.004.

- [4] T. Enayati, A. Alipour, and S. F. Bozorgnia Hosseini, "Investigating the Causes of Organizational Silence in a Governmental Organization," *Human Resource Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 43-56, 2018.
- [5] H. Erfanian Khanzadeh, "A Conceptual Analysis of the Components of Organizational Silence and Its Effective Factors (A Mixed-Methods Approach)," *Quarterly Journal of Management Transformation Research*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 229-262, 2020.
- [6] A. Ghaedamini Harouni, R. Ebrahimzadeh Dastjerdi, and M. Sadeghi, "Understanding the Experience of Organizational Silence: A Phenomenological Study in the Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province," *Human Resource Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 31-50, 2020.
- [7] H. Hasanpour, D. Ma'roufi, and A. Vakili, "Identifying and Explaining the Factors Influencing the Organizational Silence of Permanent Personnel and Managers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Headquarters," *Military Sciences and Techniques*, vol. 16, no. 54, pp. 27-52, 2020.
- [8] L. Sheshparri and H. Momeni Mahmoei, "Identifying the Factors Effective in the Emergence of Teachers' Organizational Silence using a Research Synthesis Method," *Scientific Quarterly of Teaching and Learning Research, Azad University, Bojnurd Branch*, vol. 16, no. 68, pp. 141-164, 2021.
- [9] J. Siahkali Moradi, R. Tahmasebi, and A. Hamidzadeh, "Understanding the Role of Street Level Bureaucrats in Interpretation and Implementation of Public Policies (Case Study: Traffic Police Officers in Iran)," *Iranian Journal of Public Policy*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 119-142, 2019.
- [10] J. Wynen, B. Kleizen, K. Verhoest, P. Lægreid, and V. Rolland, "Just keep silent... Defensive silence as a reaction to successive structural reforms," *Public Management Review*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 498-526, 2020, doi: 10.1080/14719037.2019.1588358.
- [11] B. Panahi, "A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Organizational Silence in Iran," *Journal of Management Studies for Improvement and Transformation*, vol. 28, no. 94, pp. 85-107, 2019.
- [12] M. Sadeghi and M. R. Razavi, "Organizational silence, organizational commitment and creativity: The case of directors of Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi," *European Review of Applied Psychology*, vol. 70, no. 5, p. 100557, 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.erap.2020.100557.
- [13] M. Rezaei Shahsavari, M. H. Maleki, and M. Soltani, "Designing a Model for the Agility of the Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Management, Education, and Development in the Digital Age*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 260-274, 2024, doi: 10.61838/medda.1.3.16.
- [14] A. F. Sufi, U. Raja, and A. N. Butt, "Impact of Peer Unethical Behaviors on Employee Silence: The Role of Organizational Identification and Emotions," *Journal of Business Ethics*, pp. 1-19, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s10551-023-05397-x.
- [15] A. Matsson, "How to Organize Silence at work: An Organizational Politics Perspective on Pragmatic Mistreatment at work," *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, pp. 1-29, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s10672-023-09454-5.
- [16] S. W. Rayburn, A. McGeorge, S. Anderson, and J. J. Sierra, "Crisis-induced behavior: From fear and frugality to the familiar," *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 524-539, 2022, doi: 10.1111/ijcs.12698.
- [17] A. Mannan and M. Kashif, "Being abused, dealt unfairly, and ethically conflicting? Quitting occupation in the lap of silence," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 22-39, 2020, doi: 10.1108/APJBA-01-2019-0013.
- [18] K. Henriksen and E. Dayton, "Organizational silence and hidden threats to patient safety," *Health services research*, vol. 41, no. 4p2, pp. 1539-1554, 2018, doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6773.2006.00564.x.
- [19] H. Nahadi, S. J. Moradi, and S. M. Hosseini, "Studying the Organizational Anger's Cuases In Street Level Bureaucrats (Case Study: Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives of Qom)," 2020, pp. 387-410.
- [20] S. Joseph and N. Shetty, "An empirical study on the impact of employee voice and silence on destructive leadership and organizational culture," *Asian Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 11, no. Suppl 1, pp. 85-109, 2022, doi: 10.1007/s13520-022-00155-0.
- [21] P. K. Chopdar, J. Paul, and J. Prodanova, "Mobile shoppers' response to Covid-19 phobia, pessimism and smartphone addiction: Does social influence matter?," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, vol. 174, p. 121249, 2022, doi: 10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121249.

- [22] D. Chakraborty and J. Paul, "Healthcare apps' purchase intention: A consumption values perspective," *Technovation*, vol. 120, p. 102481, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.technovation.2022.102481.