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UNDERSTANDING WORK WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIOURS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND ANTECEDENTS. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

Work withdrawal Behaviours are employee responses that include psychological withdrawal, time withdrawal, effort withdrawal, and physical withdrawal from formal job positions. Such Behaviours have been associated with absenteeism and lateness, disengagement, intention to leave the organization and poor organizational performance. The objective of this systematic review is to provide a synthesis of the conceptual definition of work withdrawal Behaviour and the investigation of the main antecedents of work withdrawal Behaviours. A systematic literature review was used, in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. A first set of 1231 peer reviewed records was screened, and a set of 20 empirical studies was selected for in-depth synthesis. Quality appraisal was performed using the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT). The results demonstrate that work withdrawal is viewed as a multi-faceted phenomenon, consisting of psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, job withdrawal, absenteeism, lateness, and withdrawal related Behaviours. The five types of antecedents were interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness, role stressors and work-family pressures, illegitimate tasks and role expectations, psychological mechanisms and employee responses, and career related factors and leadership. The review also identifies the importance of interpersonal mistreatment and psychological responses in explaining work withdrawal. Evidence from supervisory and customer-related mistreatment indicates that employees may respond through psychological disengagement, silence, cynicism, absenteeism and turnover intentions. Furthermore, healthcare-related evidence highlights the need to examine patient-facing work environments, where incivility from patients and other organizational members may influence nurses' work-related responses. Overall, work withdrawal Behaviour is best understood as a patterned response to strain, unfairness, misfit, and weakened employee-organization relationships rather than as an isolated Behavioural problem. The findings highlight the importance of fair leadership, supportive work design, employee resources, and early detection of psychological disengagement.

Keywords: Work Withdrawal Behaviours, Psychological Withdrawal, Absenteeism, Lateness, Turnover Intention

1. Introduction

Work withdrawal Behaviours are a cluster of responses through which employees reduce the time and psychological energy they invest in their formal work roles. They include Behaviours such as lateness, taking extended breaks, slowing work pace, psychological disengagement, absenteeism and even pro-job unethical acts that prioritize personal gain over organizational interests (Zhang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). These Behaviours are not rare exceptions. Evidence shows they appear across many sectors like information technology, hospitality, healthcare and public services and have important consequences for both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness (Khalid et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Choi, 2024). Foundational work conceptualizes withdrawal as a broad family of interrelated job and organizational responses (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991), while later meta-analytic and review evidence links job attitudes with integrated Behavioural outcomes including lateness, absence and turnover (Harrison et al., 2006; Hom et al., 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2016).

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Recent empirical studies show the scale and impact of work withdrawal with actual facts and figures. In the fast-growing Chinese IT sector, survey data from 389 employee's show that work family conflict is significantly related to work withdrawal Behaviours, and that this relationship operates through emotional exhaustion (Hou et al., 2023). In the South Korean hotel industry, data from 564 employees indicate that both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict increase perceived stress, which in turn predicts higher work withdrawal Behaviours (Choi, 2024). A study of 734 hotel employees in Croatia finds that less favourable job attitudes are systematically associated with higher levels of absenteeism, lateness and turnover intentions, underscoring the performance and retention risks of withdrawal (Čikeš et al., 2024).

Similar picture has been painted by healthcare research. According to Liu et al. (2022), work family conflicts enlightens around 60% of the association between nurses risk perception and their job withdrawal Behaviours and this two wave study of 287 Chinese nurses was conducted during COVID-19 outbreak. In a survey of 320 Thai employees who were forced to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, perceived organizational support was related to lower work withdrawal Behaviour through meaningful work, highlighting how organizational support in a crisis can protect against disengagement (Rurkkhum & Detnakarin, 2024). Together, these findings show that work withdrawal is both prevalent and costly, with clear implications for safety, service quality, productivity and turnover.

Across studies, a wide range of antecedents has been linked to work withdrawal Behaviours. Studies of (Liu et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Choi, 2024) suggested that work family conflict in both directions (either work to family or family to work), perceived risk during crises, extra role performance have initiated to withdrawal Behaviours via strain processes like stress and emotional exhaustion.

Supervisor incivility, organizational cronyism and psychological contract breach have been associated with stronger intentions to withdraw, higher psychological withdrawal, and more frequent absence type Behaviours (Khalid et al., 2022; Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Xu et al., 2025). Person job misfit, particularly perceived overqualification, has been linked to withdrawal, silence and pro-job unethical actions through discrete emotions such as shame and anger (Liu et al., 2024).

Interpersonal mistreatment represents an important source of work withdrawal and may originate from supervisors, coworkers and customers. Abubakar et al. (2017) demonstrated that supervisor incivility and organizational favoritism were associated with employee cynicism and work withdrawal, with cynicism explaining part of this relationship. Similarly, Afshan et al. (2022) examined supervisor undermining and demonstrated its association with quiescent silence and turnover intentions among frontline banking employees. Sliter et al. (2012) further showed that incivility from customers and coworkers was relevant to employee withdrawal outcomes, including absenteeism and tardiness. These findings suggest that negative interpersonal experiences can influence employees' willingness to maintain their work involvement.

The issue of interpersonal mistreatment is particularly relevant in healthcare settings because nurses interact continuously with patients, visitors, supervisors and colleagues. Jiang et al. (2023) examined incivility from multiple sources, including patients and visitors, and its association with turnover intentions among nurses. Their findings demonstrated that the source of incivility matters, as different sources showed different relationships with nurses' psychological needs and turnover intentions. This evidence highlights the importance of investigating patient-related mistreatment separately from supervisory mistreatment when examining work withdrawal in nursing environments.

These antecedents are typically interpreted through several overlapping theoretical lenses. Many studies draw on conservation of resources (COR) theory, viewing work withdrawal as a way for employees to conserve or protect threatened resources when facing demands such as work family conflict, incivility or unfairness (Khalid et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025). Others use the job demands resources (JD-R) model to explain how high job demands and limited resources translate into strain and, ultimately, withdrawal (Hou et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024). Affective events and appraisal theories are used to explain how specific experiences at work (e.g. incivility, cronyism) suggest emotions such as shame and anger, which then trigger withdrawal Behaviours (Zhang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). At the same time, research on job attitudes and identification highlights how more enduring changes in commitment and identification with the

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organisation or job translate into chronic patterns of withdrawal over time (Van Ruysseveldt et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024).

Firstly, plethora of literature on work withdrawal Behaviours remains conceptually and methodologically disintegrated. There are multiple reasons like studies mostly observe only one or two indicators of withdrawal (lateness, absenteeism, psychological or turnover intention) and evaluate them as a separate outcomes. Even these Behaviours form an interrelated withdrawal pattern as suggested by theoretical and empirical arguments (Zhang et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024). Second, antecedents are usually investigated in isolation. Research has linked work family conflict, supervisor incivility, cronyism, overqualification, emotional labor, organizational support during remote work and psychological contract breach to withdrawal separately, but rarely compares or integrates these antecedents within a single framework (Khalid et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022, 2024; Hou et al., 2023; Peng & Li, 2023; Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Choi, 2024; Rurkkhum & Detnakarin, 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Third, the evidence base is dominated by single-country, sector-specific studies in Asia and Eastern Europe that rely largely on cross-sectional or short time-lagged survey designs, which limits the generalizability of findings and makes it difficult to infer causal ordering between antecedents and withdrawal outcomes (Khalid et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024).

Although previous studies have examined several sources of interpersonal mistreatment and their relationships with employee withdrawal, the evidence remains fragmented across different occupational settings and psychological processes. For example, supervisor undermining has been examined in relation to employee silence and turnover intentions, whereas customer and patient incivility have been investigated through absenteeism, tardiness and turnover-related outcomes. However, these relationships have rarely been integrated with career-related conditions and service-oriented citizenship Behaviours in a single framework. Furthermore, the nursing context requires additional investigation because the interpersonal sources of mistreatment and the professional responsibilities of nurses may influence their responses differently.

As a result, organizations and scholars lack an integrative overview of (a) the different conceptual definitions of work withdrawal Behaviours, and (b) how the diverse antecedents of work withdrawal can be organized into broader domains. The present paper, titled "Understanding Work Withdrawal Behaviours: Conceptualization and Antecedents. A Systematic Review", addresses this gap through a systematic review of the work withdrawal literature. Drawing on an initial pool of 1231 peer-reviewed articles and a final sample of 20 empirically rigorous studies, the review pursues two aims. First, it identifies and synthesizes the conceptual definitions of work withdrawal Behaviour. Second, the review organizes the evidence into five broad domains of antecedents and related explanatory mechanisms: (1) interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness, (2) role stressors and work-family pressures, (3) illegitimate tasks and role expectations, (4) psychological mechanisms and employee responses, and (5) career-related factors and leadership. This classification captures both the conditions that contribute to employee withdrawal and the psychological processes and contextual factors through which these relationships may operate.

By structuring a fragmented body of evidence around conceptualization and antecedents, this review clarifies where the empirical base is strong, where findings diverge, and where gaps remain for example, longer-term longitudinal studies and research in under-studied sectors and regions. The purpose of this review drawing practical implications for HR professionals and managers who want to notice early signs of work withdrawal, by addressing its major causes and design interventions that help both employee wellbeing and organizational sustainability.

1.1 Research Questions

RQ1. What are different conceptual definitions of work withdrawal Behaviours?

RQ2. What antecedents, psychological mechanisms and contextual conditions have been examined in relation to work withdrawal Behaviours?

1.2 Research Objectives

- To systematically identify, extract and synthesize the conceptual definitions of work withdrawal Behaviours.

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- To systematically identify and synthesize the antecedents, psychological mechanisms and contextual conditions associated with work withdrawal Behaviours across different organizational settings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This paper adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) design tailored to management and organizational research. A systematic review is treated as a stand-alone empirical study that answers a clearly specified question using transparent procedures to locate, appraise, and synthesize existing evidence, rather than as a narrative "background" section (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Palmatier, Houston & Hulland, 2018; Snyder, 2019).

According to Shamseer et al. (2015), a reliable systematic review needs systematic planning and explicit documentation of the conducted protocol. In the next phase researcher explain the inclusion and exclusion benchmark for the articles as shown in the Table 1. PRISMA guided systematic literature review approach has been adopted to synthesize conceptualization and antecedents of work withdrawal Behaviours irrespective of qualitative and quantitative studies.

2.2 Search Strategy

For the purposes of this systematic literature search, researcher searched Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis, a search aimed at identifying relevant peer-reviewed research, conducted in the areas of organizational Behaviour, organizational psychology, and human resource management, concerning Work Withdrawal Behaviours (WWB). The databases chosen were due to their breadth of empirical and conceptual research that included studies focusing on employee withdrawal, workplace disengagement, absenteeism, lateness, turnover intentions and the related Behavioural responses in organizational settings. This search was not limited to any time period to encompass the long-term evolution and theory of work withdrawal Behaviours. In order to reduce selection error and methodological rigor, a multistage screening process was used, including duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text evaluation using pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The overall selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines, as illustrated in Figure 1.

2.3 Search Query

The following core Boolean string identifies records centred on work withdrawal and closely related workplace constructs. Syntax should be adapted to the field rules of each database while retaining the same conceptual terms. The search was performed in Scopus, Taylor & Francis and Science Direct.

("work withdrawal" OR "withdrawal Behaviour*" OR "job withdrawal" OR "work disengagement" OR "employee withdrawal" OR "withdrawal intention*" OR "job disengagement" OR "employee disengagement")

The search was designed around the focal outcome construct rather than restricting the query to particular antecedents. This allows studies examining different explanatory variables to be retrieved, provided that work withdrawal or a closely related workplace withdrawal outcome is a substantive part of the study.

2.4 Criteria Used to Include and Exclude the Studies

Studies examining the antecedents, determinants, consequences, and underlying mechanisms of Work Withdrawal Behaviours (WWB) were considered appropriate for inclusion in this systematic literature review. Only studies published in English were included and a language restriction was applied. No time constraint was applied, however, to record the historical and theoretical development and evolution of work withdrawal Behaviours. Articles that were not peer-reviewed were not considered. Moreover, the subject area restrictions were put and the studies in the field of social science, business, management and accounting, as well as psychology were taken into consideration. Nonacademic sources such as books, book chapters, conference proceedings, dissertations and theses were excluded to ensure the academic quality and consistency of the literature chosen.

All employees in an organizational environment in various occupations and industries were the population of interest. Studies conducted in any occupational sector, including healthcare and nursing, were eligible when they examined work withdrawal Behaviours or a clearly defined workplace withdrawal outcome among employed individuals. Studies focused exclusively on non-work forms of withdrawal or on populations outside formal employment were excluded. These criteria were meticulously devised to make sure that every

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component is conceptually relevant, methodologically consistent and consistent with the aims of the present systematic literature review. The included and excluded studies were based on the following criteria (Table 1).

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English-language studies	Non-English studies
Publication period	No temporal restriction	None
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Books, book chapters, conference papers, dissertations and theses
Subject area	Social sciences, business, management, accounting and psychology	Unrelated subject areas
Research focus	Work withdrawal, absenteeism, tardiness, psychological, task withdrawal and turnover intention, including their antecedents and explanatory mechanisms.	Unrelated forms of withdrawal
Population	Employed individuals, including nurses, healthcare workers, frontline service employees and other organizational employees.	Students and unemployed individuals
Research context	General organizational settings, healthcare, banking, hospitality, education, manufacturing and service industries	Studies exclusively addressing non-work forms
Study type	Empirical quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method studies meeting the review objectives	Studies without sufficient relevance to WWB

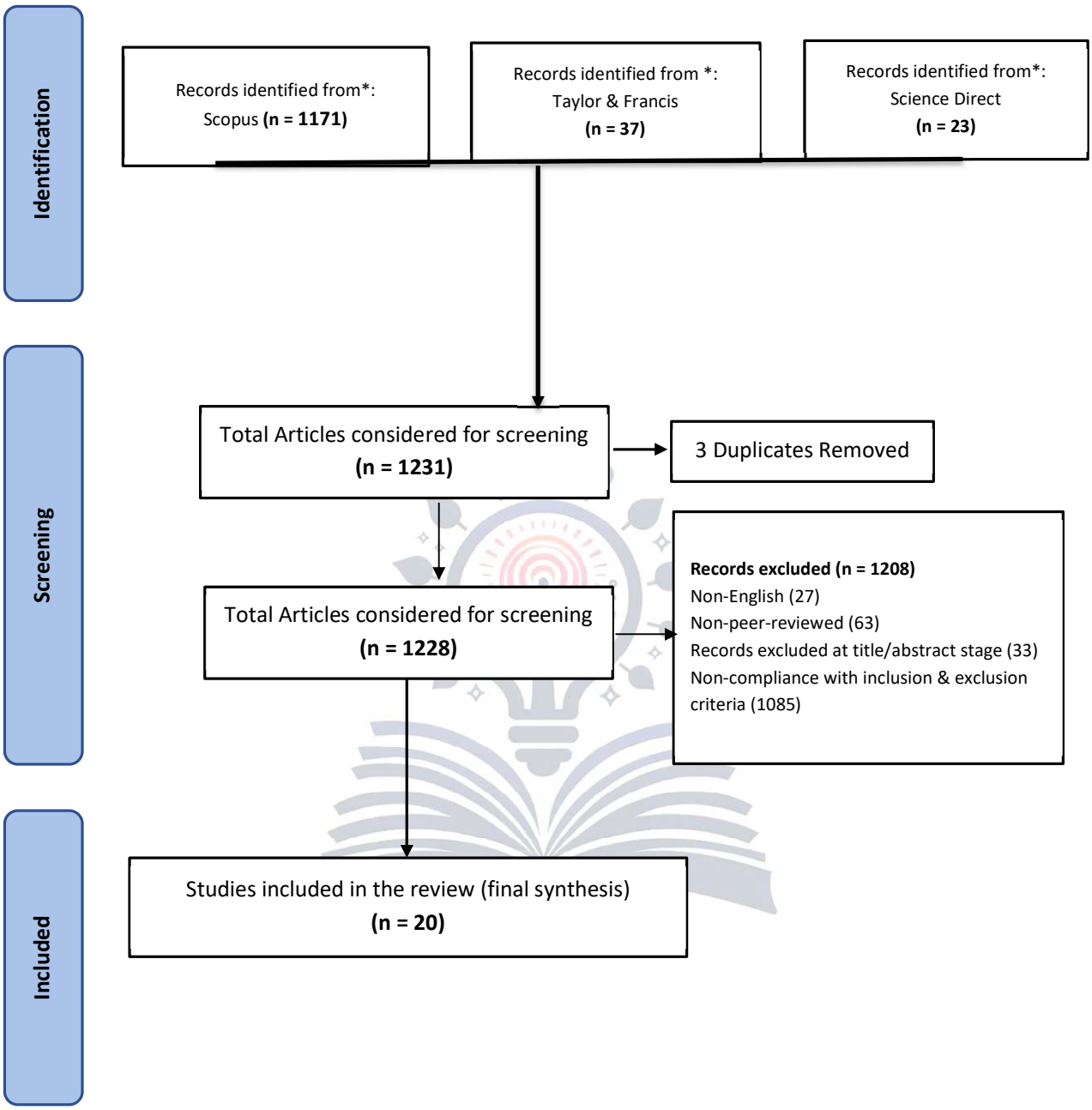
2.5 Study Selection and Extraction of Data

The PRISMA diagram shows the selection criteria in detail. A systematic literature search resulted in a total of 1231 records from three main academic databases, namely: Scopus (n = 1171), Taylor & Francis (n = 37) and ScienceDirect (n = 23). After the first retrieval, 3 duplicate records were eliminated and the pool contained 1228 articles to be screened further.

Of these, 1208 were excluded at screening, mostly due to their being non-English or non-peer reviewed or not following the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following this extensive filtering, 20 studies were ultimately retained and were used in the final synthesis.

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Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram



Note. PRISMA = Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.

2.6 Quality Appraisal

Quality appraisal is essential in systematic literature reviews to ensure the methodological rigor and credibility of the included studies (Shamseer et al., 2015). In this review, the methodological quality of studies on Work Withdrawal Behaviours (WWB) was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018), which is suitable for evaluating qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research designs.

Two independent reviewers with expertise in organizational Behaviour and human resource management assessed the selected studies. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus.

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To carry out quantitative studies, five criteria were measured: (1) the appropriateness of the sampling strategy, (2) the representativeness of the sample, (3) the validity of the measurement instruments, (4) consideration of response bias, and (5) the appropriateness of the statistical analysis. The evaluation of qualitative studies was done in terms of the appropriateness of the research approach, data collection, deriving findings, interpretation, and coherence between the data collection and analysis. Mixed-method studies were evaluated based on the following criteria: research rationale, integration of methods, interpretation of findings, inconsistencies in the data, and quality standards of the two methods.

Five criteria were used for each study and scores were recorded as "Yes," "No" or "Can't tell," depending on the research design of each study. The conclusions of the appraisal were applied to assess methodological strengths and weaknesses of the studies included and to help synthesize the studies. Table 2 shows the results of the quality appraisal.

Table 2

Summary of Quality Assessment of Articles

Sr. No.	Article	Design of study	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	Criteria fulfilled	Final inclusion decision
1	Xu et al. (2025)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
2	Afshan et al. (2022)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
3	Zhu et al. (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
4	Choi (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
5	Rurkkhum and Detnakarin (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
6	Georgiadou et al. (2025)	Qualitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
7	Liu et al. (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
8	Fan et al. (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
9	Saruchera et al. (2024)	Mixed Method	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓
10	Bhattarai and Budhathoki (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
11	Khalid et al. (2022)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
12	Gao and Liu (2022)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
13	Yan et al. (2021)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
14	Čikeš (2024)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	4/5	✓
15	Abubakar et al. (2017)	Quantitative	✓	✓	C	X	✓	3/5	✓
16	Peng and Li (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	C	X	✓	3/5	✓
17	Sliter et al. (2012)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
18	Jiang et al. (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	C	✓	4/5	✓
19	Zhang et al. (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5/5	✓

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Sr. No.	Article	Design of study	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	Criteria fulfilled	Final inclusion decision
20	Shafique and Jamil (2023)	Quantitative	✓	✓	C	C	✓	3/5	✓

Note. ✓ = Yes; C = Can't tell; X = No; QA = Quality appraisal item.

2.7 Data Extraction

Building on the conceptual background, the researcher turns to RQ2 which is what the important antecedents of work withdrawal Behaviours are. The 20 selected studies were analysed to determine the authors, publication year, study context, antecedents, methodology, sample characteristics, and key findings pertaining to WWB. Thematic synthesis was used to analyse the findings extracted from the literature, which involved identifying common concepts, clustering similar findings in categories, and forming more general themes. In this process, key drivers of work withdrawal Behaviours, underlying mechanisms, and the impact of work withdrawal Behaviours on the reviewed studies were identified. All the articles' results were tabulated and summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Included Empirical Studies on Work-Withdrawal Behaviours

S #	Authors & Publication Year	Article Title	Research Context (Country/ Sector)	Main Antecedent(s)	Methodology & Instruments	Sample Characteristics	Key Findings Related to Work Withdrawal Behaviours
1	Xu et al. (2025)	The dark side of organizational cronyism: Examining psychological withdrawal among IT employees	Pakistan / Information Technology Sector	Organizational cronyism	Quantitative (Two-wave time-lagged survey questionnaire)	312 full-time IT professionals across private software firms	Organizational cronyism significantly triggers psychological withdrawal Behaviours (WWB) mediated by organizational disidentification; high employability buffers this negative relationship.
2	Afshan et al. (2022)	Abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, and turnover intentions: Mediation of quiescent silence and desire to seek revenge among Thai banking frontliners.	Thailand / Banking	Abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, quiescent silence, revenge and turnover intentions	Quantitative, time-lagged survey	350 frontline banking officers	Supervisor undermining was associated with quiescent silence and turnover intentions. The study provides evidence for a psychological mechanism linking supervisory mistreatment with a withdrawal-related outcome.
3	Zhu et al. (2024)	Coworker incivility and employee withdrawal: The buffering role of resilience	China / Multi-sector enterprise employees	Coworker incivility	Quantitative (Survey questionnaire, Structural Equation Modeling)	380 corporate employees across manufacturing & service industries	Coworker incivility positively predicts work withdrawal Behaviours (WWB) and workplace loneliness; employee psychological resilience acts as a vital moderating buffer.
4	Choi (2024)	Stress at the Crossroads: Work-Family Conflict and Work	South Korean hotel industry	Work-family and family-work conflict	Quantitative (Standardized multi-item scales via survey)	564 full-time corporate and service employees	Work-family and family-work inter-role conflicts serve as major strain-based

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S #	Authors & Publication Year	Article Title	Research Context (Country/ Sector)	Main Antecedent(s)	Methodology & Instruments	Sample Characteristics	Key Findings Related to Work Withdrawal Behaviours
		Withdrawal Behaviour					stressors that directly elevate physical and psychological work withdrawal Behaviours (WWB).
5	Rurkkhum & Detnakarin (2024)	Perceived organizational support and employee engagement during forced remote work in Thailand	Thailand / Multi-industry Remote Workforce	Perceived organizational support during remote work	Quantitative (Cross-sectional online survey questionnaire)	320 forced remote workers across corporate organizations	Perceived organizational support during forced telework mitigates job burnout and reduces psychological disengagement and work withdrawal (WWB).
6	Georgiadou et al. (2025)	"You Pretend to Pay Me; I Pretend to Work": A Multi-Level Exploration of Quiet Quitting in the Greek Context. Human Resource Management, 64(4), 923–941	Greece; manufacturing, consultancy, shipping, education, utilities, finance, advertising	Macro: work-life balance shift, generational gap, employer-employee power shifts. Meso: monotonous, low-autonomy jobs; nepotistic, inequitable cultures; lack of voice. Micro: psychological contract breach, emotional exhaustion/burnout, identity rationalization	Qualitative, inductive; semi-structured interviews (avg. 41 min, MS Teams, in Greek); transcribed and coded in NVivo 14	15 HR managers (GPMA); 10 female, 5 male; 7 large, 5 medium, 3 small firms; all observed quiet quitting, 12 of 15 had practiced it	Quiet quitting is intentional withdrawal, triggered by psychological contract breach and sustained by exhaustion and identity rationalization; it serves as self-protective coping and justice restoration. Cultural norms and limited alternatives keep it quiet and often undetected. Younger employees tend to leave; older ones tend to stay and disengage.
7	Liu et al. (2024)	Perceived overqualification and counterproductive work Behaviour: The role of career growth opportunities	China / Public & Private Enterprise Sector	Perceived overqualification	Quantitative (Multi-wave survey design)	364 full-time corporate employees	Perceived overqualification promotes counterproductive work Behaviours and intentional task withdrawal (WWB), moderated by perceived career growth opportunities.
8	Fan et al. (2023)	Illegitimate tasks and employee cynicism among Gen Z frontline workers	China / Service & Retail Sector	Illegitimate tasks	Quantitative (Questionnaire survey, Process macro moderation/mediation)	410 Generation Z frontline service workers	Assigned illegitimate tasks significantly induce employee cynicism and passive work withdrawal Behaviours (WWB), weakening organizational citizenship Behaviours.
9	Saruchera et al. (2024)	Impact of informal human resource practices on employee	Namibia (Windhoek) / Private tertiary	Informal HR practices in career development and	Mixed methods (pragmatism paradigm, convergent parallel	171 academic staff (questionnaire) and 8 HR	Informal HR practices contributed to performance deterioration,

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S #	Authors & Publication Year	Article Title	Research Context (Country/ Sector)	Main Antecedent(s)	Methodology & Instruments	Sample Characteristics	Key Findings Related to Work Withdrawal Behaviours
		outcomes in private tertiary education institutions. International Journal of African Higher Education, 11(2), 84-119	(higher) education institutions, including family-owned kones	growth, working conditions and work-life balance, performance management and recognition, recruitment and selection, and remuneration	design). Quantitative: online questionnaire (SurveyMonkey), analyzed in Stata 17. Qualitative: structured interviews via Zoom, analyzed in Atlas.ti 22. Purposive and stratified sampling	staff/business partners (interviews) from 3 private tertiary institutions	absenteeism, and a decline in employee development. These Behaviours increased the likelihood that academic staff would leave (turnover).
10	Bhattarai and Budhathoki (2023)	Psychological contract breach and turnover intentions in the tourism sector of Nepal	Nepal / Travel & Tourism Sector	Psychological contract breach	Quantitative (Standardized closed-ended questionnaires)	240 hospitality and tourism staff members	Psychological contract breach diminishes job satisfaction and directly heightens physical work withdrawal (WWB) and turnover intentions.
11	Khalid et al. (2022)	Supervisor incivility, emotional exhaustion, and deviance: The buffering role of psychological capital	Pakistan / Public & Private Sector Employees	Supervisor incivility	Quantitative (Multi-source time-lagged survey approach)	335 dyadic employee-supervisor pairs	Supervisor incivility triggers emotional exhaustion, which escalates workplace deviance and psychological withdrawal Behaviours (WWB); PsyCap attenuates this effect.
12	Gao & Liu (2022)	Abusive supervision and employee knowledge hiding: A time-lagged investigation	China / Manufacturing & Tech Enterprises	Abusive supervision	Quantitative (Time-lagged three-wave survey design)	358 full-time enterprise employees	Abusive supervision induces psychological distress, forcing employees into silent disengagement, knowledge hiding, and employee silence (WWB).
13	Yan et al. (2021)	Psychological capital, job satisfaction, and burnout among hotel customer-contact employees in Malaysia	Malaysia / Hospitality Industry (Hotels)	Job attitudes (satisfaction, commitment) and psychological capital	Quantitative (Structural equation modeling via field survey)	270 frontline hotel customer-contact staff	Psychological capital buffers frontline hospitality staff against emotional burnout, preventing cognitive disengagement and work withdrawal (WWB).
14	Čikeš (2024)	Job satisfaction and organizational commitment as drivers of service quality in the Croatian hotel industry	Croatia / Hotel & Hospitality Sector	Job satisfaction, organizational commitment	Quantitative (Cross-sectional quantitative survey)	734 hotel staff and operations employees	Low job satisfaction and organizational commitment directly increase absenteeism and task withdrawal (WWB), hindering overall service quality.
15	Abubakar et al. (2017)	Does gender moderates the relationships between	Northern Cyprus / Hospitality	Favoritism, nepotism, supervisor incivility,	Quantitative, cross-sectional	Frontline employees in three-star hotels; SEM	The study examined the relationship between organizational

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S #	Authors & Publication Year	Article Title	Research Context (Country/ Sector)	Main Antecedent(s)	Methodology & Instruments	Sample Characteristics	Key Findings Related to Work Withdrawal Behaviours
		favoritism/nepotism, supervisor incivility, cynicism and workplace withdrawal		cynicism and work withdrawal		and neural network	unfairness, supervisor incivility, employee cynicism and work withdrawal. Cynicism mediated the favoritism/nepotism–withdrawal relationship.
16	Peng & Li (2023)	Emotional labour, surface acting, and deep acting in the hospitality and catering sector	China / Hospitality & Catering Service Sector	Emotional labour (surface acting, deep acting)	Quantitative (Field survey questionnaire)	305 hotel and catering service staff	Surface acting accelerates emotional exhaustion and triggers psychological withdrawal (WWB), whereas deep acting enhances emotional performance.
17	Sliter et al. (2012)	The employee as a punching bag: The effect of multiple sources of incivility on employee withdrawal Behaviour and sales performance	USA / Banking	Customer incivility, coworker incivility, absenteeism and tardiness	Quantitative	120 bank tellers; survey and subsequent withdrawal/performance records	The study examined how customer and coworker incivility relate to employee withdrawal, including absenteeism and tardiness.
18	Jiang et al. (2023)	From Incivility to Turnover Intentions among Nurses: A Multifoci and Self-Determination Perspective	New Zealand / Healthcare	Patient/visitor, doctor, supervisor and coworker incivility; psychological needs; turnover intentions	Quantitative	Three-wave time-lagged design; 413 initial nurses, 294 completed the final wave	Supervisor incivility directly predicted turnover intentions. Patient/visitor incivility was not significantly related to the psychological needs examined. The findings demonstrate that incivility sources should be distinguished.
19	Zhang et al. (2023)	Hindrance stressors, work obstacles, and proactive work Behaviour: An empirical study	China / Manufacturing & Tech Firms	Work obstacles / hindrance stressors	Quantitative (Empirical quantitative survey)	340 employees facing organizational obstacles	Hindrance stressors and work obstacles cause high emotional exhaustion, suppressing proactive work Behaviour and increasing task withdrawal (WWB).
20	Shafique and Jamil (2023)	Job content plateau, task withdrawal, and the moderating role of supportive leadership	Pakistan / Banking & Telecom Service Sectors	Job content plateau	Quantitative (Standardized survey instrument)	285 service sector professionals	Job content plateau directly induces career dissatisfaction and task withdrawal Behaviours (WWB); supportive leadership moderates and mitigates this linkage.

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3. Results

3.1 Conceptualization of Work Withdrawal Behaviours (RQ1)

The reviewed literature conceptualizes work withdrawal Behaviours as a multi-faceted phenomenon encompassing psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, job withdrawal, absenteeism, lateness, and related withdrawal Behaviours. Studies converge on the view that withdrawal is not a single Behaviour but a family of interrelated responses through which employees reduce their investment in formal work roles. Psychological withdrawal includes cognitive disengagement, silence, cynicism, and knowledge hiding (Gao & Liu, 2022; Khalid et al., 2022; Peng & Li, 2023). Physical withdrawal includes absenteeism and tardiness (Sliter et al., 2012; Čikeš, 2024). Job withdrawal includes turnover intentions and actual turnover (Afshan et al., 2022; Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). Task withdrawal includes reduced effort and proactive Behaviour (Zhang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024; Shafique & Jamil, 2023). Quiet quitting has been conceptualized as intentional withdrawal triggered by psychological contract breach and sustained by exhaustion and identity rationalization (Georgiadou et al., 2025).

3.2 Antecedents of Work Withdrawal Behaviours (RQ2)

The thematic synthesis organized the antecedents into five broad domains: (1) interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness, (2) role stressors and work-family pressures, (3) illegitimate tasks and role expectations, (4) psychological mechanisms and employee responses, and (5) career-related factors and leadership.

Interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness includes supervisor incivility, coworker incivility, customer incivility, patient/visitor incivility, abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, organizational cronyism, favoritism, nepotism, and psychological contract breach (Abubakar et al., 2017; Sliter et al., 2012; Khalid et al., 2022; Afshan et al., 2022; Gao & Liu, 2022; Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Jiang et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025).

Role stressors and work-family pressures include work-family conflict, family-work conflict, perceived risk during crises, hindrance stressors, and work obstacles (Liu et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Choi, 2024).

Illegitimate tasks and role expectations include illegitimate tasks and emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) (Fan et al., 2023; Peng & Li, 2023).

Psychological mechanisms and employee responses include emotional exhaustion, cynicism, quiescent silence, knowledge hiding, organizational disidentification, psychological distress, and burnout (Khalid et al., 2022; Afshan et al., 2022; Gao & Liu, 2022; Fan et al., 2023; Peng & Li, 2023; Xu et al., 2025).

Career-related factors and leadership include perceived overqualification, job content plateau, informal HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological capital, perceived organizational support, and supportive leadership (Yan et al., 2021; Bhattarai & Budhathoki, 2023; Peng & Li, 2023; Shafique & Jamil, 2023; Čikeš, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Rurkkhum & Detnakarin, 2024; Saruchera et al., 2024).

3.3 Theoretical Lenses

The reviewed studies draw on several overlapping theoretical lenses. Conservation of resources (COR) theory is used to explain how employees conserve or protect threatened resources when facing demands such as work-family conflict, incivility, or unfairness (Khalid et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025). The job demands-resources (JD-R) model explains how high job demands and limited resources translate into strain and withdrawal (Hou et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024). Affective events and appraisal theories explain how specific workplace experiences trigger emotions such as shame and anger, which then trigger withdrawal Behaviours (Zhang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024). Research on job attitudes and identification highlights how enduring changes in commitment and identification translate into chronic patterns of withdrawal over time (Van Ruysseveldt et al., 2023; Čikeš et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

The review demonstrates that work withdrawal Behaviour is best understood as a patterned response to strain, unfairness, misfit, and weakened employee-organization relationships rather than as an isolated Behavioural problem. The five antecedent domains identified in this review capture both the conditions that

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contribute to employee withdrawal and the psychological processes and contextual factors through which these relationships may operate.

Interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness emerged as a particularly important source of work withdrawal. Evidence from supervisory and customer-related mistreatment indicates that employees may respond through psychological disengagement, silence, cynicism, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Healthcare-related evidence highlights the need to examine patient-facing work environments, where incivility from patients and other organizational members may influence nurses' work-related responses. The source of incivility matters, as different sources show different relationships with psychological needs and turnover intentions (Jiang et al., 2023).

The review also identifies the importance of psychological mechanisms in explaining work withdrawal. Emotional exhaustion, cynicism, quiescent silence, knowledge hiding, organizational disidentification, psychological distress, and burnout serve as mediating mechanisms linking antecedents to withdrawal outcomes. This finding is consistent with the view that withdrawal is not simply a direct response to negative conditions but operates through psychological processes that shape how employees interpret and respond to their work environment.

Career-related factors and leadership emerged as another important domain. Perceived overqualification, job content plateau, informal HR practices, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological capital, perceived organizational support, and supportive leadership were all associated with withdrawal outcomes. These findings highlight the importance of fair leadership, supportive work design, employee resources, and early detection of psychological disengagement.

The review has several limitations. First, the evidence base is dominated by single-country, sector-specific studies in Asia and Eastern Europe that rely largely on cross-sectional or short time-lagged survey designs, which limits the generalizability of findings and makes it difficult to infer causal ordering between antecedents and withdrawal outcomes. Second, studies mostly observe only one or two indicators of withdrawal and evaluate them as separate outcomes, even though these Behaviours form an interrelated withdrawal pattern. Third, antecedents are usually investigated in isolation, and the evidence remains fragmented across different occupational settings and psychological processes. Fourth, the nursing context requires additional investigation because the interpersonal sources of mistreatment and the professional responsibilities of nurses may influence their responses differently.

Future research should address these limitations by using longer-term longitudinal designs, by examining multiple withdrawal indicators simultaneously, by integrating different antecedents within a single framework, and by investigating under-studied sectors and regions. Research in patient-facing work environments, such as nursing, would be particularly valuable for understanding how incivility from different sources influences work-related responses.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review synthesized the conceptual definitions and antecedents of work withdrawal Behaviours across 20 empirical studies. The findings demonstrate that work withdrawal is a multi-faceted phenomenon consisting of psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, job withdrawal, absenteeism, lateness, and related withdrawal Behaviours. Five broad domains of antecedents were identified: interpersonal mistreatment and unfairness, role stressors and work-family pressures, illegitimate tasks and role expectations, psychological mechanisms and employee responses, and career-related factors and leadership. The review highlights the importance of interpersonal mistreatment and psychological responses in explaining work withdrawal. Overall, work withdrawal Behaviour is best understood as a patterned response to strain, unfairness, misfit, and weakened employee-organization relationships rather than as an isolated Behavioural problem. The findings highlight the importance of fair leadership, supportive work design, employee resources, and early detection of psychological disengagement for HR professionals and managers.

Ethical Approval

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from published sources, including peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and regulatory documents. No human participants were involved in the research. Therefore, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required. However, all ethical

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considerations were strictly followed, including proper citation of sources and adherence to academic integrity.

Authors' Contributions

All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author/s declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The authors are committed to transparency and will provide detailed methodological information and analysis protocols upon request.

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