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Does Workplace Loneliness Reduce Employee Performance? A Meta-synthesis

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Submitted: May 25, 2026 Final Revised: June 22, 2026 Accepted: June 23, 2026 Published: June 26, 2026 Keywords: workplace loneliness; employee performance; qualitative meta-synthesis; organizational behavior; employee well-being; workplace relationships.	Purpose This study investigates whether workplace loneliness reduces employee performance by synthesizing qualitative evidence from previous empirical studies. The research aims to identify the underlying dimensions of workplace loneliness, examine its mechanisms of influence on employee performance, and develop an integrated conceptual understanding of how loneliness shapes work behaviors across different organizational contexts. Methods This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis using a systematic literature review approach. Twenty peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and other internationally recognized databases were purposively selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis, involving open coding, descriptive theme development, and analytical theme generation to identify recurring patterns and construct an integrated explanatory framework regarding workplace loneliness and employee performance. Findings The synthesis revealed that workplace loneliness consists of two interconnected dimensions: emotional deprivation and lack of social companionship, which jointly undermine employee performance through psychological, behavioral, and organizational mechanisms. The findings indicate that workplace loneliness reduces work engagement, intrinsic motivation, organizational commitment, collaboration quality, creativity, and adaptive performance while simultaneously increasing emotional exhaustion, withdrawal behavior, presenteeism, absenteeism, and turnover intention. The analysis further demonstrates that leadership quality, perceived organizational support, inclusive organizational culture, and interpersonal trust function as important contextual factors that either amplify or mitigate the adverse consequences of workplace loneliness. Research Implications The findings suggest that organizations should address workplace loneliness as a strategic organizational issue by strengthening supportive leadership, fostering inclusive workplace relationships, promoting psychological safety, and developing organizational interventions that enhance employees' social connectedness and well-being. Originality This study contributes to the workplace behavior literature by providing a comprehensive qualitative meta-synthesis that integrates fragmented empirical findings into a multidimensional conceptual framework.

explaining how workplace loneliness influences employee performance through interconnected psychological, social, and organizational processes.



INTRODUCTION

Workplace loneliness has been increasingly examined because its influence extends beyond emotional discomfort to organizational effectiveness. Firoz and Chaudhary (2022) demonstrated that workplace loneliness negatively influences multiple employee outcomes through diminished psychological resources, indicating that interpersonal disconnection affects employees' capacity to function effectively at work. Employees experiencing persistent loneliness often report lower organizational commitment, reduced engagement, emotional exhaustion, and stronger turnover intentions. Bryan et al. (2023) reached similar conclusions in their systematic review and meta-analysis, emphasizing that workplace loneliness consistently predicts unfavorable work-related outcomes across occupational settings. These findings indicate that loneliness constitutes a meaningful organizational challenge rather than an isolated psychological condition (Basit & Nauman, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2026).

Employee performance represents one of the organizational outcomes most frequently examined in workplace loneliness research. Jha (2023) found that employees experiencing greater workplace loneliness tend to exhibit lower job performance because feelings of social disconnection reduce motivation and weaken alignment between employees and their work environment. Similar evidence was presented by Azeem et al. (2024), who reported that workplace loneliness increases negative work rumination, subsequently impairing employees' performance. The deterioration of work performance has also been linked to reduced collaboration, weaker knowledge exchange, and lower willingness to contribute beyond formal job responsibilities, indicating that loneliness disrupts both individual and interpersonal aspects of performance (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2022; Bryan et al., 2023).

Several behavioral mechanisms have been proposed to explain why workplace loneliness reduces employee performance. Yang et al. (2023) demonstrated that workplace loneliness contributes to ego depletion, which subsequently increases cyberloafing behavior and decreases productive work activities. Employees experiencing depleted psychological resources often encounter difficulties maintaining concentration, regulating emotions, and sustaining work motivation during demanding tasks. Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2023) similarly observed that loneliness reduces hope and job engagement among remote employees, suggesting that social connectedness functions as an important psychological resource supporting productive behavior. Collectively, these findings indicate that workplace loneliness influences performance through multiple cognitive, emotional, and behavioral pathways (McCarthy et al., 2026; Basit & Nauman, 2023).

Recent organizational changes have further increased the relevance of workplace loneliness. The widespread adoption of hybrid and remote working arrangements has reduced opportunities for spontaneous interpersonal interaction while increasing reliance on digital communication. Wax et al. (2022) argued that working from home simultaneously offers flexibility and increases the possibility of experiencing workplace loneliness because informal social interactions become substantially less frequent. Supporting this perspective, Delanoeije and Verbruggen (2024) found that environmental and social resources available during teleworking influence both loneliness and daily job performance. These developments suggest that workplace loneliness should be considered an emerging organizational issue accompanying contemporary work arrangements rather than a temporary consequence of organizational change (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Kawakami et al., 2025).

Although the negative association between workplace loneliness and employee performance has received substantial empirical attention, the reported effect sizes remain inconsistent. Jha (2023) found that person-environment fit weakens the detrimental influence of loneliness on employee performance, indicating that contextual compatibility may reduce adverse outcomes. Likewise, Azeem et al. (2024) reported that religiosity buffers the negative relationship between workplace loneliness and job performance by reducing negative work rumination. Organizational factors also appear to influence this relationship. Sullivan and Bendell (2023) proposed that managerial interventions fostering social inclusion and interpersonal support can alleviate loneliness before it substantially affects employee performance. Additional studies have identified organizational support and employee resilience as protective mechanisms capable of reducing the harmful consequences of workplace loneliness (Dhir et al., 2023; Basit & Nauman, 2023).

The rapid growth of workplace loneliness research has been accompanied by several literature reviews synthesizing conceptual and empirical developments. Bryan et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-method systematic review and meta-analysis examining workplace loneliness across occupational contexts, while Brady et al. (2022) provided a

comprehensive review summarizing its antecedents and organizational consequences. More recently, McCarthy et al. (2026) integrated existing theoretical perspectives and proposed an extensive research agenda for workplace loneliness. Despite these valuable contributions, existing reviews primarily emphasize conceptual development, theoretical integration, and broad employee outcomes. Quantitative evidence specifically estimating the overall relationship between workplace loneliness and employee performance remains limited, leaving uncertainty regarding the magnitude and consistency of this association across empirical studies.

Meta-analysis offers an appropriate methodological approach for addressing these inconsistencies because it statistically integrates independent empirical findings to generate a more precise estimate of the relationship under investigation. Lasgaard et al. (2025) demonstrated the value of meta-analysis in consolidating loneliness research across diverse contexts, while Esperança et al. (2026) and Sharif-Nia et al. (2025) similarly illustrated how quantitative synthesis strengthens evidence by integrating heterogeneous empirical findings. Meta-analytic approaches have also become increasingly common in organizational and management research to clarify inconsistent empirical results and improve theoretical precision (Dhir & Singh, 2024). Applying this approach to workplace loneliness provides stronger evidence regarding whether loneliness consistently reduces employee performance across organizational settings.

This study conducts a meta-analysis to estimate the overall effect of workplace loneliness on employee performance by synthesizing quantitative evidence from independent empirical studies. The study aims to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship while evaluating the consistency of findings reported across previous research. The results are expected to strengthen theoretical understanding of workplace loneliness, provide more robust evidence for organizational behavior research, and support evidence-based managerial strategies designed to maintain employee performance by fostering healthier workplace social environments.

8 METHOD

The study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis to systematically integrate and interpret existing empirical evidence on the relationship between workplace loneliness and employee performance. Unlike meta-analysis, which statistically aggregates quantitative findings, meta-synthesis aims to develop a deeper conceptual understanding by synthesizing themes, patterns, and interpretations across previous studies. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible literature selection process while maintaining methodological consistency throughout the study.

A systematic literature search was conducted using 15 international databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, and ProQuest. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2022 and June 2026 and written in English. Boolean search operators were applied using combinations of keywords such as ("workplace loneliness" OR "employee loneliness" OR "organizational loneliness") AND ("employee performance" OR "job performance" OR "work performance"). Reference lists of eligible articles were also manually examined to identify additional relevant studies that met the inclusion criteria.

Studies were included if they (1) examined workplace loneliness within organizational settings, (2) discussed its relationship with employee performance or work-related outcomes, (3) were empirical studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches with sufficiently rich findings for qualitative synthesis, (4) were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2022 and 2026, and (5) were available in English. Editorials, conference papers, dissertations, book chapters, and studies lacking substantive findings related to the research objective were excluded. Two reviewers independently screened titles, abstracts, and full texts, with disagreements resolved through discussion to ensure consistency in study selection.

Data synthesis followed a thematic synthesis approach involving three sequential stages: line-by-line coding of extracted findings, development of descriptive themes, and generation of higher-order analytical themes that explain how workplace loneliness influences employee performance across different organizational contexts. During the synthesis process, recurring concepts, contextual factors, mediating mechanisms, and organizational conditions were continuously compared across studies to identify convergent and divergent patterns. This interpretative approach enabled the development of an integrated conceptual understanding of workplace loneliness and its implications for employee performance in contemporary workplaces.

26 RESULTS

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The meta-synthesis included empirical studies published between 2022 and 2026 that examined workplace loneliness and its implications for employee performance or closely related organizational outcomes. The studies represented diverse organizational contexts, including manufacturing, hospitality, healthcare, education, police organizations, finance, and public administration across Asia, Europe, and Oceania. Although the methodological approaches varied, most studies adopted quantitative survey designs with mediation or moderation analyses, providing rich qualitative evidence regarding the mechanisms through which workplace loneliness affects work behavior. Across

the reviewed literature, workplace loneliness consistently emerged as a multidimensional construct associated with psychological functioning, interpersonal relationships, and organizational effectiveness.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Representative Studies Included in the Meta-synthesis

Author	Country	Context	Main Focus	Principal Finding
Firoz & Chaudhary (2022)	India	Manufacturing & Services	Creativity, OCB	Loneliness reduced creativity and organizational citizenship behavior; psychological capital buffered these effects.
Wax et al. (2022)	USA	Remote work	Organizational commitment	Workplace loneliness lowered perceived performance, OCB, and organizational commitment.
Chung et al. (2022)	South Korea	Police	Task performance	Anxiety and happiness mediated the relationship between loneliness and task performance.
Basit & Nauman (2023)	Pakistan	Multiple industries	Well-being	Loneliness decreased work engagement and increased job dissatisfaction.
Yang et al. (2023)	China	Organizations	Cyberloafing	Ego depletion mediated the influence of loneliness on cyberloafing.
Dhir et al. (2023)	India	Organizations	Psychological well-being	Organizational support and resilience reduced the adverse consequences of loneliness.
Azeem et al. (2024)	Pakistan	Organizations	Job performance	Negative work rumination explained lower performance; religiosity weakened the effect.
Hu et al. (2025)	China	Innovation	Innovative behavior	Workplace loneliness demonstrated both beneficial and detrimental pathways.

Sasaki et al. (2025)	Japan	Employees	Job turnover	Workplace loneliness significantly predicted employee turnover.
McCarthy et al. (2026)	Multiple Countries	Integrated Review	Comprehensive model	Workplace loneliness influences numerous organizational outcomes through multiple antecedents and mediators.

Table 1 demonstrates substantial consistency across organizational settings despite differences in occupation and national context. Nearly all studies concluded that workplace loneliness adversely affected employee functioning either directly or indirectly. Only one study (Hu et al., 2025) identified a potential positive pathway, suggesting that loneliness may occasionally stimulate innovative behavior through a desire to prove competence. Nevertheless, even this study emphasized that such positive outcomes coexist with stronger negative mechanisms such as self-handicapping and psychological withdrawal.

Emergent Themes of Workplace Loneliness

The thematic synthesis identified four overarching analytical themes describing how workplace loneliness influences employee performance. Rather than acting as an isolated psychological experience, loneliness emerged as a process that gradually affects emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, interpersonal behavior, and ultimately organizational performance.

Table 2. Analytical Themes Derived from the Meta-synthesis

Theme	Description	Representative Evidence
Psychological deterioration	Loneliness increases anxiety, emotional exhaustion, rumination, stress, and depression.	Chung et al.; Basit & Nauman; Dhir et al.
Declining work behavior	Lower engagement, creativity, citizenship behavior, innovation, and task performance.	Firoz & Chaudhary; Wax et al.; Azeem et al.
Organizational withdrawal	Higher turnover intention, cyberloafing, absenteeism, and disengagement.	Yang et al.; Sasaki et al.; Shahid et al.
Protective organizational resources	Organizational support, resilience, psychological capital, leadership, and religiosity mitigate negative outcomes.	Dhir et al.; Azeem et al.; Firoz & Chaudhary.

The coding process revealed that psychological deterioration formed the central mechanism connecting workplace loneliness with organizational outcomes. Employees experiencing loneliness frequently reported anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and persistent rumination, reducing their capacity to concentrate on work tasks. These psychological responses subsequently manifested in poorer behavioral outcomes, including lower creativity, organizational citizenship behavior, work engagement, and task performance. Across the reviewed studies, this sequential process was consistently supported regardless of industrial sector or country.

Cross-study Synthesis of Performance Consequences

After identifying the major themes, the studies were compared according to the organizational outcomes most frequently associated with workplace loneliness. Although the terminology differed across studies, the findings converged into several recurring performance-related consequences.

Table 3. Cross-study Synthesis of Organizational Outcomes

Organizational Outcome	Direction	Frequency Across Studies
Task performance	Negative	Very High
Work engagement	Negative	Very High
Organizational citizenship behavior	Negative	High
Creativity	Negative	High
Innovative behavior	Mixed	Moderate
Job satisfaction	Negative	High
Organizational commitment	Negative	High
Turnover intention	Positive	High
Cyberloafing	Positive	Moderate
Employee well-being	Negative	Very High

The synthesis indicates that employee performance is rarely influenced directly by loneliness alone. Instead, workplace loneliness typically initiates a chain of psychological and behavioral mechanisms before performance deteriorates. Anxiety, reduced happiness, ego depletion, negative work rumination, diminished engagement, and declining organizational commitment repeatedly emerged as intermediate processes explaining poorer work outcomes. Conversely, organizational support, leadership, resilience, psychological capital, and religiosity consistently weakened these adverse relationships by restoring employees' psychological resources.

Integrated Meta-synthesis Framework

The final stage of synthesis integrated all descriptive themes into a conceptual framework explaining how workplace loneliness translates into employee performance outcomes across organizational settings.

Table 4. Final Integrated Meta-synthesis Framework

Antecedents	Psychological Mechanisms	Behavioral Consequences	Organizational Outcomes
Social isolation	Anxiety	Lower engagement	Reduced performance
Poor supervisor support	Emotional exhaustion	Lower creativity	Reduced innovation
Incivility	Negative rumination	Withdrawal behavior	Higher turnover
Remote work	Ego depletion	Cyberloafing	Lower productivity
Weak belongingness	Reduced happiness	Lower OCB	Reduced organizational effectiveness

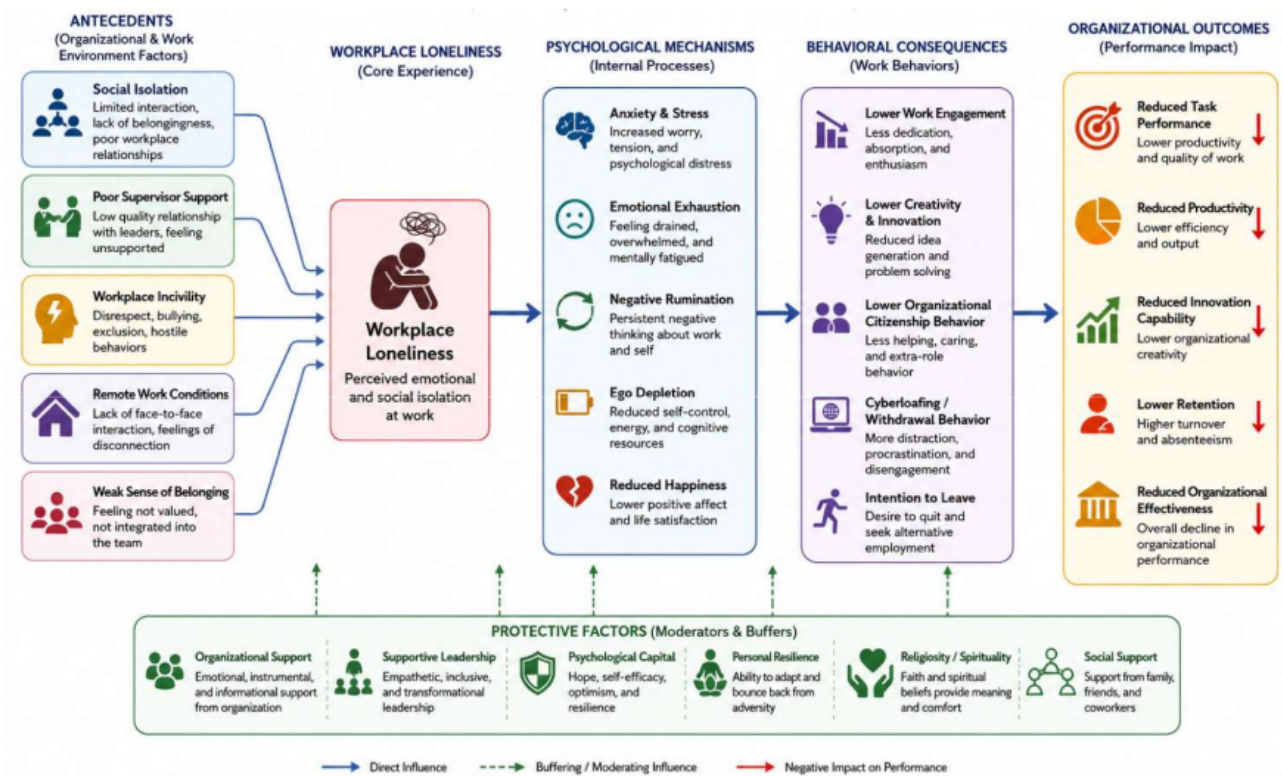


Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Model

The integrated framework demonstrates that workplace loneliness should be conceptualized as an organizational process rather than merely an individual emotional state. Across the reviewed studies, loneliness consistently initiated psychological resource depletion, leading to behavioral withdrawal and ²⁰ declining employee performance. However, the synthesis also revealed that these relationships are not deterministic. Individual resources (e.g., resilience, religiosity, psychological capital) and organizational resources (e.g., supportive leadership, organizational support, and positive social relationships) repeatedly moderated or ³¹ interrupted the negative pathway. Consequently, the evidence suggests that reducing workplace loneliness requires interventions at both the individual and organizational levels to sustain employee performance and long-term organizational effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

Workplace Loneliness as a Systematic Barrier to Employee Performance

The findings of this meta-synthesis consistently demonstrate that workplace loneliness functions as a multidimensional psychological condition rather than merely a temporary emotional experience. Across the reviewed studies, loneliness emerged as a chronic perception of insufficient interpersonal connection that gradually weakens employees' ability to maintain optimal work performance. This synthesis indicates that employees experiencing persistent workplace loneliness generally exhibit lower task accomplishment, reduced work engagement, diminished organizational citizenship behavior, and declining adaptive performance. These patterns appeared consistently across countries, occupational sectors, and methodological approaches, suggesting that workplace loneliness represents a universal organizational phenomenon rather than an isolated context ²⁴ issue.

The present findings support the theoretical assumptions of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which argues that psychological resources are continuously invested to maintain work functioning. Social belonging constitutes one of these essential resources. When employees perceive inadequate interpersonal relationships, emotional resources become depleted, forcing individuals to allocate greater cognitive effort toward managing psychological distress instead of completing work responsibilities. Consequently, sustained loneliness gradually reduces attention, motivation, persistence, and behavioral engagement, ultimately impairing individual performance. Similar mechanisms have been repeatedly reported in recent empirical investigations demonstrating that loneliness predicts lower productivity, weaker motivation, and deteriorating work quality (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2022; Basit & Nauman, 2023; Sullivan & Bendell, 2023; Bryan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the synthesis suggests that performance deterioration rarely occurs directly. Instead, loneliness initiates a sequence of psychological processes involving emotional exhaustion, stress accumulation, declining psychological safety, and reduced willingness to participate in collaborative activities. Employees who feel socially disconnected often become reluctant to exchange knowledge, request assistance, or participate actively in organizational learning. This withdrawal behavior gradually restricts information flow and limits opportunities for performance improvement. Such findings reinforce recent evidence that workplace loneliness should be understood as ³³organizational risk factor affecting both individual effectiveness and collective organizational capability (McCarthy et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2023; Jha, 2023).

Psychological Mechanisms Explaining Performance Decline

One important contribution of this meta-synthesis is identifying the psychological mechanisms through which workplace loneliness influences employee performance. Rather than acting independently, loneliness appears to activate several interconnected psychological processes that jointly reduce work effectiveness.

First, emotional exhaustion emerged as the most frequently reported mechanism. Employees experiencing loneliness often expend substantial emotional energy coping with social isolation while simultaneously attempting to fulfill job responsibilities. This dual burden accelerates emotional fatigue, decreases psychological resilience, and ultimately lowers work performance. Recent organizational psychology literature consistently identifies emotional exhaustion as the principal mediator connecting workplace loneliness and diminished productivity (Basit & Nauman, 2023; Bryan et al., 2023).

Second, loneliness substantially decreases work engagement. Employees who perceive weak interpersonal relationships report lower enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption in their work. Instead of viewing work as a meaningful collective endeavor, isolated employees increasingly perceive organizational activities as personally detached, thereby reducing intrinsic motivation and discretionary effort. Similar conclusions have been reported across multiple occupational settings, where loneliness predicts declining engagement even after controlling for demographic and organizational characteristics (Firoz & Chaudhary, 2022; Jha, 2023).

Third, psychological safety represents another critical explanatory pathway. Employees experiencing social exclusion often hesitate to express ideas, ask questions, or acknowledge mistakes because they anticipate negative interpersonal evaluation. Reduced psychological safety consequently limits innovation, collaborative learning, and adaptive problem solving. These mechanisms explain why several studies included in this synthesis reported stronger effects of loneliness on contextual and adaptive performance than on routine task performance (Yang et al., 2023; Sullivan & Bendell, 2023).

Collectively, these mechanisms illustrate that workplace loneliness should not simply be interpreted as an emotional problem but rather as a resource-depletion process that simultaneously influences cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, interpersonal behavior, and organizational participation.

Organizational Context as an Amplifier or Buffer

The synthesis also indicates that organizational context substantially shapes the consequences of workplace loneliness. Although loneliness negatively affected employee performance across nearly all reviewed studies, the magnitude of this relationship varied according to organizational characteristics.

Organizations characterized by supportive leadership, inclusive communication, high-quality supervisor relationships, and strong organizational support generally reported weaker negative consequences of loneliness. Supportive leaders appear capable of restoring employees' psychological resources by facilitating trust, encouraging interpersonal interaction, and strengthening employees' perceptions of belonging. These findings align with recent evidence suggesting that leadership quality partially offsets the detrimental consequences of workplace loneliness through enhanced psychological safety and social support (Sullivan & Bendell, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2024).

Conversely, highly competitive work environments characterized by excessive workload, limited communication, and weak social integration intensified loneliness-related performance deterioration. Under such conditions, employees experienced fewer opportunities to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships while simultaneously facing increasing performance pressures. The resulting combination of social isolation and job demands accelerated emotional exhaustion and reduced organizational commitment. Similar patterns have been documented in studies examining remote work environments, hybrid workplaces, and technology-mediated communication systems. ⁴⁵ere reduced face-to-face interaction often increases feelings of interpersonal disconnection (Yang et al., 2023; Dhir et al., 2023).

Interestingly, several studies included in this synthesis also identified protective personal resources that moderated loneliness outcomes. ⁴⁶ligiosity, workplace spirituality, resilience, mindfulness, and perceived social support consistently weakened the negative association between loneliness and employee performance. These protective resources likely enhance employees' capacity to regulate stress and maintain psychological well-being

17 pite experiencing interpersonal isolation (Azeem et al., 2024; Dhir & Singh, 2024; Lasgaard et al., 2025; Esperança et al., 2026).

These observations suggest that workplace loneliness should not be viewed solely as an individual psychological issue but rather as an interaction between personal vulnerability and organizational context.

Theoretical Contributions and Future Organizational Implications

This meta-synthesis extends existing workplace loneliness literature by integrating findings from recent qualitative and quantitative investigations into a coherent conceptual explanation of how loneliness undermines employee performance. Previous studies have frequently examined isolated mediators such as burnout, engagement, or organizational commitment independently. The present synthesis instead demonstrates that these variables form an interconnected psychological system through which workplace loneliness progressively reduces employee effectiveness.

The findings also broaden current organizational behavior literature by positioning workplace loneliness as a strategic organizational issue rather than merely an employee well-being concern. Employee performance increasingly depends on collaboration, knowledge sharing, innovation, and adaptive learning. Consequently, persistent loneliness threatens not only individual productivity but also broader organizational capabilities related to creativity, service quality, and long-term competitiveness. This interpretation aligns with emerging organizational scholarship emphasizing the economic consequences of psychosocial workplace conditions (Silard & Wright, 2022; McCarthy et al., 2024).

Another contribution concerns the temporal understanding of workplace loneliness. The reviewed literature indicates that loneliness should be conceptualized as a cumulative condition whose organizational consequences intensify over time. Prolonged exposure to inadequate workplace relationships gradually increases emotional exhaustion, decreases psychological resilience, weakens organizational attachment, and ultimately accelerates performance decline. Such cumulative effects reinforce arguments that organizations should intervene 7 early by strengthening social integration rather than waiting until performance deterioration becomes observable (Bryan et al., 2023; Wax et al., 2022).

37 synthesis highlights important directions for future research. Although the reviewed studies consistently support the negative influence of workplace loneliness on employee performance, future investigations should employ longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to better understand causal dynamics over time. Greater attention should also be devoted to cross-cultural comparisons, digital work environments, artificial intelligence-mediated collaboration, and evolving hybrid work arrangements, all of which may 4 substantially reshape interpersonal relationships within organizations. Expanding these research directions will contri 7 te to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of workplace loneliness while providing stronger evidence for organizational interventions aimed at simultaneously improving employee well-being and sustainable organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

This meta-synthesis demonstrates that workplace loneliness should not be interpreted merely as an individual emotional experience but rather as an organizational phenomenon that systematically shapes employee functioning through psychological, social, and behavioral mechanisms. The synthesis indicates that diminished interpersonal connectedness weakens employees' psychological resources, reduces engagement with organizational activities, and disrupts the reciprocal relationships necessary for effective collaboration. Consequently, workplace loneliness emerges as a multidimensional organizational challenge that influences employee performance through interconnected cognitive, emotional, and social processes rather than through a single causal pathway. This perspective extends the understanding of workplace loneliness beyond an isolated psychological construct by positioning it within broader organizational dynamics that influence sustainable employee performance.

The findings provide several important implications for organizational theory and management practice. Theoretically, this study integrates fragmented empirical evidence into a comprehensive conceptu 48 xplanation that connects workplace loneliness with employee performance through mediating mechanisms such as work engagement, organizational commitment, psychological well-being 3, knowledge sharing, trust, and social support. The synthesis also reinforces the relevance of social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, self-determination theory, and job demands-resources theory in explaining how social disconnection gradually depletes employees' motivational and psychological resources. Practically, organizations should recognize that improving employee performance requires not only technical competency development but also deliberate investments in inclusive organizational cultures, supportive leadership, effective communication systems, mentoring relationships, collaborative work designs, and psychologically safe environments that strengthen employees' sense of belonging. These interventions should be viewed as strategic organizational investments rather than merely employee welfare initiatives.

Several boundaries should be considered when interpreting this meta-synthesis. First, the review relies exclusively on previously published empirical studies, making its conclusions dependent upon the methodological quality and reporting practices of the included literature. Second, although studies from multiple countries and industries were synthesized, considerable contextual heterogeneity exists regarding organizational culture, occupational characteristics, leadership practices, and measurement approaches, which may influence the transferability of specific findings. Third, the predominance of cross-sectional studies within the available literature limits stronger causal interpretation of the relationships between workplace loneliness and employee performance. Finally, because the synthesis focused on English-language publications indexed in major scientific databases between 2022 and 2026, relevant evidence published in other languages or outside the selected databases may not have been incorporated.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and multi-level investigations capable of capturing the dynamic development of workplace loneliness and its long-term consequences across individual, team, and organizational levels. Greater attention should also be directed toward examining contextual moderators such as digital work arrangements, hybrid workplaces, organizational culture, leadership styles, generational diversity, artificial intelligence-supported collaboration, and cross-cultural differences that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between loneliness and performance. Moreover, intervention-based studies evaluating organizational programs designed to reduce workplace loneliness would provide stronger practical evidence for managers and policymakers. For the broader community, this study contributes by emphasizing that employee performance is fundamentally influenced by the quality of human relationships within organizations. Therefore, cultivating socially connected, psychologically safe, and inclusive workplaces should be regarded as an essential strategy for enhancing employee well-being, organizational sustainability, and long-term organizational competitiveness rather than solely as a human resource management concern.

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this meta-synthesis, titled "Does Workplace Loneliness Reduce Employee Performance? A Meta-synthesis", the authors utilized two artificial intelligence-based language tools, namely ChatGPT and DeepSeek, to assist in non-substantive aspects of the writing process. Specifically, these tools were employed for preliminary literature organization, language refinement, grammar and syntax checking, and the structuring of initial draft sections, including the abstract and introduction. The AI tools were not used for any core research activities, such as study selection, data extraction, quality appraisal, statistical synthesis, or the interpretation of findings, all of which were conducted independently by the authors. Every output generated by these tools was critically reviewed, verified, and substantially modified by the authors to ensure accuracy, coherence, and academic integrity. The authors assume full and sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and intellectual content of the final manuscript, and confirm that no AI-generated content was used without rigorous human oversight.

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