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**Job Autonomy and Nurses Empowerment; The Mediating role of Job Crafting in Azad Kashmir's Healthcare Sector**

**Dr. Adeeba Khan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Madiha Jabeen<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Naveed**

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, University of Poonch Rawalakot.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Management Sciences, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto women University Peshawar.

<sup>3</sup> (Corresponding Author), Professor, Management Sciences, CITY University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar.

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**Abstract**

The nursing profession is increasingly affected by workload pressures, emotional issues, and resource difficulties. In this study, job autonomy positively related among nurse's engagement and satisfaction at workplace. Along with this, job crafting act as an interlinking mechanism in this relationship. A self-administered structured survey with a sample comprising 286 nurses from public and private hospitals in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) was used to collect the empirical information. The findings suggested that job autonomy positively and significantly affects engagement and job satisfaction. Furthermore, job crafting partially mediates the relationship between job autonomy and job engagement and job satisfaction. This suggests that nurses with higher job autonomy are more inclined to change their tasks and interactions with the job proactively in order to engage with and be satisfied with the job. This study makes the following contributions to the research literature, it provides empirical evidence about a relatively under-studied setting, examining the mediator role of job crafting in the relationship between autonomy and positive outcomes at the workplace. The findings suggest that there should be an increased focus within healthcare organizations on creating nursing positions with a greater sense of autonomy as well as designing jobs proactively to promote sustainable engagement, job satisfaction and overall well-being of nurses working in those organizations.

**Keywords:** Job autonomy, Job crafting, Job engagement, Job satisfaction, Healthcare Sector.

**Introduction**

As medical experts, nurses are essential to a long-term healthcare system. It is now more clear how important nurses are to the healthcare system (Yildiz & Elibol, 2020). The need to enhance unpleasant working circumstances for nurses and the longevity of current positive attitudes and affective, motivating states have been brought to light by unpredictable shifts. Because nurses make up the majority of the healthcare workforce and spend the majority of their working hours with patients and care services, to maintain their workplace satisfaction and involvement in career become major agenda in management science literature. Prior studies examined in nursing research regarding the connection between job satisfaction and work engagement (De Simone et al., 2018). Work engagement and job happiness are two different but closely connected concepts. The latter is connected to the actual content of the work, whereas the former is associated with the job itself and formed as an attitude toward a job (Garg et al., 2018).

The health industry is the one that has historically appeared to be most impacted by these kinds of situations,

especially when it comes to nurses, who make up a professional group that satisfies high responsibility, job engagement, and job satisfaction. According to Gimenez-Espert et al. (2020), better working circumstances and professional development have an impact on nurses' well-being and quality of life as well as their performance and the overall operation of the health care system. At the same time, workers are inspired to put out their best effort in order to achieve an organization's aims and objectives (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018). To put it another way, companies want to know how to maintain the commitment and engagement of their workers (O'Riordan, 2017). One of the psychological states resulting from Hackman and Oldham's (1976) work characteristics model (JCM) is experienced responsibility for outcomes as a result of the individual's job autonomy. Workplace autonomy fosters an individual's capacity for thought and creativity, which equates to work engagement. It also allows the individual to plan his work for better results. However, the JCM focused mostly on positive work outcomes, such as engagement and job satisfaction (Othman & Nasuridin, 2019). According to Malinowska et al. (2018), autonomy differs at the job, day, and task levels and is linked to work engagement, particularly at the job level. Having employment autonomy allows you to try new and effective work strategies and break free from tedious jobs, which can lead to more positive results. It also allows you to experience the vigor component of work engagement, which increases your commitment to your job (Metin, 2019). The primary purpose of the current study is to look into how job autonomy influences nurses' involvement at work in Azad Kashmir.

Furthermore, enhanced job satisfaction among nurses is thought to be significantly predicted by a higher degree of autonomy (Allah Bakhshian et al., 2017). Low autonomy among nurses has also been linked to burnout, depression, job change, and lower job satisfaction (Hara, Asakura & Asakura, 2020). An employee's physical and mental health, productivity, happiness, and work-related activities can all be impacted by job satisfaction, which is the assessment and expression of emotional reactions in the workplace. Nurses can be satisfied with their occupations and the workplace by assessing the needs of the institution's managers, implementing necessary safety measures, and improving workers' motivation and quality of life. Positive and unfavorable corporate circumstances influence employee job satisfaction (Pursio, Kankkunen, Sanner-Stiehr, & Kvist, 2021). Nurses are more productive at work, have a high degree of job satisfaction, and enhance patient satisfaction, performance, and care quality, claim Durmaz and Sabuncu (2019). The literature has not adequately examined how job autonomy affects nurses' job satisfaction in Azad Kashmir. The current study will look at their link.

Additionally, research has validated the beneficial effects of job crafting on workers and companies. Through ongoing self-adjustment, workers may find a better match with their positions and companies, leading to increased workplace engagement. Workers will feel more motivated and content at work as a result of job crafting (Salamone & Lordan, 2022). Job crafting is a bottom-up endeavor to transform oneself at work that focuses on an individual's initiative to redesign work within the business. The job demand resource hypothesis states that high levels of work engagement are produced and employees' work potential is stimulated (Petrou et al., 2017). Work can better suit employees' "unique skills, motivations, and interests" thanks to job designing. Parker et al. (2010) claim that autonomy motivation is the foundation for employees' realization of job-crafting behavior. Employees with high levels of autonomy are more likely to actively look into person-job fit and take part in job design. Ho, Kong, Lee, Dubreuil, and Forest (2018) claim that work meaning can boost a person's identification with the position and the company, which can enhance their engagement and job happiness. Job autonomy and work purpose are two positive employment characteristics that satisfy workers' fundamental psychological needs and can boost their enthusiasm and engagement, according to Slemp, Zhao, Hou, and Vallerand (2021).

In particular, recent research suggests that job crafting mediates the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction (Cheng and O-Yang 2018; Kim and Beehr 2019). Current study indicates that knowledge workers with a high level of job autonomy are more likely to engage in job crafting, which raises job satisfaction. Employees with high structural rank only participate in more job crafting when they have great

job autonomy, according to Sekiguchi et al. (2017). Several recent studies have also found that job crafting alters the link between job autonomy and job satisfaction in knowledge-intensive service industries, such as the public sector (Zito et al. 2019) and the hospitality industry (Kim, Im, and Qu 2018). Building on these rational arguments, the current study examines job crafting as a mediating mechanism between job autonomy and employees' job happiness and engagement.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Job Autonomy and Job Engagement**

Job autonomy and work engagement are two fundamental ideas in understanding healthcare professionals' performance and well-being in contemporary healthcare systems. According to van Dorssen-Boog, Jong, Veld, and Vuuren (2020), job autonomy defined as the degree of freedom and discretion employees have in organizing their work, establishing objectives, making decisions, and choosing methods to achieve work goals has emerged as a critical job resource in healthcare settings. Job engagement, which is characterized as a happy, fulfilling work-related state of mind distinguished by vitality, commitment, and absorption, reflects the extent to which healthcare workers are mentally present and invested in their professional activities. There has been a lot of research interest in the relationship between these constructs, particularly in light of the unprecedented challenges that healthcare organizations face globally, such as the need to maintain high-quality patient care, burnout epidemics, and workforce shortages (Malinowska, Tokarz, & Wardzichowska, 2018). The primary theoretical underpinnings for the relationship between job autonomy and work engagement are the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and Self-

Determination Theory (SDT), two complementary frameworks. According to SDT, human motivation and well-being depend on three basic psychological requirements: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). According to this theory, healthcare workers create autonomous motivation that supports sustained engagement and optimal functioning when they feel satisfied with their autonomy through control over their work processes and decisions. According to recent studies, meeting autonomy requirements improves work well-being indirectly by boosting the satisfaction of other psychological needs, resulting in a synergistic impact that increases engagement (Pursio, Kankkunen, & Kvist, 2023). These theoretical frameworks are integrated in current research to investigate the various ways in which autonomy promotes involvement. Research shows that autonomy functions through intermediary mechanisms that explain its motivational impact in addition to directly predicting engagement (Scheepers et al., 2023). However, conjectured as:

**H1: Health care workers' job autonomy and job engagement are positively related.**

### **Job Autonomy and Job Satisfaction**

Workplace autonomy is seen as a crucial component of what constitutes a profession. Autonomy at work is linked to job satisfaction, according to nursing literature. There are several theoretical definitions of autonomy. Practicality: When asked, employees stated that the most important component of feeling autonomous at work is not being under constant supervision (Zychova, Fejfarova, & Jindrova, 2024). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), autonomy is one of the fundamental human desires and has been seen as crucial to career advancement. Because it enables workers to carry out tasks and work in a manner that represents their judgment and preferences, autonomy is crucial in today's workplace (Wan & Duffy, 2022). As a result, Wang et al. (2022) claim that job autonomy encourages workers to feel comfortable and free, which leads to more passionate work. A key idea in organizations, job satisfaction has long been discussed, particularly in relation to organizational success (Balzer et al., 1997). More recently, work satisfaction has been described as an employee's subjective attitude about their job. Like job autonomy, job satisfaction is frequently explained by Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics theory. They recommended five critical components for increasing employee job satisfaction. This hypothesis proposes that intrinsic work

motivation increases job satisfaction. On the other hand, having both internal and external sources is essential for feeling fulfilled. However, job satisfaction is linked to the health of persons in the employee's immediate surrounds, as well as being important for personal reasons and employee well-being (Kwok, 2020). Gozukara and Çolakoglu (2016). Therefore, based on the explanation above, the current research project is hypothesized as;

## **H2: Job autonomy of health care professionals is positively related with job satisfaction.**

### **Job Crafting as a mediator**

Job crafting has become a key concept in management science literature. Prior studies demonstrated that employees' proactive attempts to redesign their jobs by altering tasks, relationships, and cognitive perceptions to better align with their personal strengths, values, and preferences (Junça-Silva, Silva, and Caetano, 2022). Theoretical justification for job crafting's mediating function is based on the idea that autonomy by itself is not enough to achieve desired results; rather, autonomy's potential is realized through the active activity of job making. People with the freedom to make their own decisions will usually choose from three major ways to manipulate their jobs: (1) by making changes in the characteristics and scope of their job-related assignments, (2) through modifying their working relationships, including the way they are treated by co-workers, supervisors and others in the organization, and (3) by changing the way they perceive the job so as to convey its meaning and importance (Doblinger, 2023).

Recent research provides evidence of the mediating relationship between job crafting and other employees or organizations, with data collected from 483 respondents supporting this finding. Job crafting and psychological capital mediate job autonomy's relationship between work engagement and job engagement, with serial mediation explaining significant variance in work engagement. (Garcia-Merino, Martin, & Alcover, 2023). This result is consistent with the conservation of resources hypothesis, which holds that job crafting is a resource-building process in which workers use their independence to acquire more job resources, hence improving engagement and happiness (Jaleel & Sarmad, 2024). Job crafting has been shown through strong empirical support to act as a mediator for the relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction in many different types of professional sectors (e.g., healthcare, technology, retail, etc.) and across multiple culture types and environments (Robledo, Zappala, & Topa, 2019). Thus, postulated as,

### **H3a: Job crafting mediates in the relationship among job autonomy and job engagement among nurses across Azad Kashmir.**

### **H3b: Job crafting mediates in the relationship among job autonomy and job satisfaction among nurses across Azad Kashmir.**

## **Methods**

This research examined the effect of autonomous employment on employee satisfaction & engagement with an interlinking mechanism of job crafting by Nurses located throughout AJ&K (Azad Jammu & Kashmir). To get an in-depth insight into these interactions, a quantitative study was conducted in the article. The article also discussed the design of the study when explaining the procedures used to select the population and sample.

## **Research Design**

The idea of research design helps to ensure that data is used to provide a clear and systematic solution to a problem. According to Zikmund, "research design specifies the steps and procedures for acquiring and interpreting the needed data responses." Consequently, to analyze data, there is a two-wave time-lagged study design, which is useful for examining both possible causal effects and reducing potential common method

variance, explained by Podaskoff et al. (2024) and Hur et al. (2024). Data was gathered from healthcare professional’s especially from nurses at two intervals, each spaced four weeks apart. The four-week interval suits similar designs and facilitates variable changes during the study period without causing high participant loss. To conduct the survey, a self-administered adopted questionnaire was used.

**Population and Sampling**

This research focused on male and female nurses across Azad Jammu and Kashmir. As the population of the current study was unknown, the authors preferred a non-probability convenience sampling approach (Karunaratna et al., 2024). The quantitative study maintained its research integrity by initially targeting 286 respondents. The target participant count reflects the sample size estimation without known population metrics (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

**3.3 Measuring Instruments/ Scale**

Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire that participants completed independently. The questionnaire comprised well-established assessment techniques to evaluate the following characteristics.

**1.Job Autonomy (JA)**

In this study authors adopted Breugh, J. A. (1985) Job autonomy 9 items ,7 Likert Scale rage from 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Alpha reliability of this scale was .087

**2.Job Crafting**

Current research study to measure employee job crafting by 15 items scale rage from 1=hardly ever to 6= very often. To measure this adopted a scale by (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk 2009). Alpha reliability of this scale was .09

**3. Job Engagement**

To measure employee’s engagement at workplace study adopted Rich, B. L., LePine, J. A., & Crawford, E. R. (2010) 18 items, 5 Likert scale questionnaire with reliability .90.

**4. Job Satisfaction**

Current research study adopted measuring scale for employees’ job satisfaction by Spector, P. E. (1985). Scale included 36 items ranges from 1=disagree very much to 6- agree very much.

**Reliability Analysis**

*Table 1. Reliability Analysis*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach’s alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
<b>Job Autonomy</b>	09	.817
<b>Job Crafting</b>	15	.876
<b>Job Engagement</b>	18	.796
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	36	.900

Table 1; displays the scale reliabilities for the variables employed in the current investigation. Cronbach's alpha value of job autonomy was 0.817, Job crafting was 0.876, Job engagement was 0.769 and job satisfaction was 0.900 showed that all construct is reliable to use.

### Procedure to Gather Quantitative Data

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed both in person across public and private hospitals in Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and online via Google Forms. Participants for these surveys were recruited through professional networks, health institutions, or health care-themed social groups for these two regions. Every participant was provided with a link to complete a survey, along with information highlighting the aim of the study. To encourage people to complete the survey, the questionnaires were distributed with a gap of three waves, along with interval-based reminder messages.

### Demographic Analysis

#### Gender

*Table 2: Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	95	33.2	33.2	33.2
Male	191	66.8	66.8	100.0
Total	286	100.0	100.0	

On the basis of Table 2, it can be collected that the structure of the penis in the sample representing 286 participants was composed of 95 (33.2%) female participants and 191 (66.8%) male participants. The valid percentage reflects the percentage of participants according to the sample category: for female participants, it is 33.2%; for male participants, it is 66.8%. The cumulative percentage reveals the cumulative sum of valid percentages, showing that for the female category it is up to 33.2% while for the male category it is up to 100%.

#### Age

*Table 3. Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-30	96	33.6	33.6	33.6
31-40	119	41.6	41.6	75.2
41-50	59	20.6	20.6	95.8
51 Above	12	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	286	100.0		100.0

Table 3 shows the respondents' ages of professionals. As indicated in the responses, most of the professionals fall between the ages of 31 and 40 years. The numbers show that 33.6% of the employees are aged between 20 and 30, 41.6% are between 31 and 40, 20.6% between 41 and 50, and 4.2% are over the age of 51. The Valid Percent column indicates the percent of participants in each category relative to the total sample, with cumulative percentages from 33.6% for the 20-30 age group to 100% for the 51 and older age group

#### Experience

*Table 4. Experience*

Experience	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5	129	41.5	41.5	41.5
6-10	61	41.6	41.6	75.2
11-15	38	20.6	20.6	95.8
16 Above	58	20.3	20.3	100.0
Total	286	100.0		100.0

Table 4 lists the participants according to their years of experience. According to the results of the survey, 45.1% have 1-5 years of experience, 21.3% have 6-10 years of experience, 13.3% with 11-15 years of experience, and 20.3% have more than 16 years. The valid percent column shows the proportion of participants in each experience range, with the cumulative percentage reaching 45.1% for those with 1-5 years of experience, 66.4% for 6-10 years, 79.7% for 11-15 years, and 100% for those with 16 or more years of experience.

## Designation

**Table 5: Designation**

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Doctors	217	75.9	5.9	75.9
Nurses	38	13.3	13.3	89.2
Allied Health Professionals	15	5.2	5.2	94.4
Administrative Staff	16	5.6	5.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 5 presents the participants based on their designations. According to the responses, 75.9% were doctors, 13.3% were nurses, 5.2% were allied healthcare professionals, and 5.6% were administrative staff. The valid percent column indicates the proportion of each designation within the total sample, with the cumulative percentage reaching 75.9% for doctors, 89.2% for nurses, 94.4% for allied healthcare professionals, and 100% for administrative staff.

## Descriptive Analysis

**Table 6: Descriptive Analysis**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Job Autonomy</b>	286	3.50	0.739	1	5
<b>Job Crafting</b>	286	3.50	0.852	1	5
<b>Job Engagement</b>	286	3.26	0.727	1	5
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	286	3.61	0.718	1	5

Table 6, summarizes the descriptive values for job autonomy, job crafting, job engagement and job satisfaction with (Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.739), (M=3.50, SD=0.825), (Mean=3.26, SD=0.727) as well as (M=3.61, SD=0.718) respectively. All values meet the central tendency characteristics and able to conduct further analyses.

## Correlation Analysis

**Table 7: Correlations between Study Variables**

Variable	JA	JC	JE	JS
Job Autonomy	1			
Job Crafting	.523**	1		
Job Engagement	.599**	.659**	1	
Job Satisfaction	.658**	.423**	.449**	1

*Pearson Correlation <.01\*\*; p<.05\**

Correlation analysis was conducted to test the linear relationships between the study variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to assess the strength and direction of these relationships. A positive and substantial correlation was found, according to the table, between job autonomy and job crafting (r = .523, p < .001), job engagement (r = .599, p < .001), and job satisfaction (r = .658, p < .001). In line with this job crafting significantly and positively correlate with job engagement (r=.659, p<.001) and job satisfaction (r=.423, p<.001). Current research showed that job engagement significantly correlates with job satisfaction (r=.449, p<.001).

### Regression Analysis

H1: Job autonomy positively and significantly impact on employee's job engagement.

H2: Job autonomy positively and significantly impact on employee's job satisfaction

**Table 8. Regression Analysis (Direct Path)**

Hypotheses	Relationship	$\beta$	R2	P-Value	Result
H1	JA → JE	.275	.055	.000	Accepted
H2	JA → JC	.283	.054	.000	Accepted

The model's direct relationship hypotheses were tested using regression analysis. This involved evaluating how nurse's autonomy impact on their engagement and satisfaction at workplace. A significant and positive correlation between professional quality of life and emotional intelligence is shown in Table 4.9 ( $\beta = .275$ , p < .001). Furthermore, social conduct is strongly predicted by it ( $\beta = .283$ , p < .001). These observations support hypotheses 1 and 2.

### Mediation Analysis

**H3(a): Job crafting is a mediator, between the relationship of autonomy to the employment engagement of nurses.**

**Table 9: Mediation Analysis**

Sr.No	Path	$\beta$	SE	P-Value	UPCI	LLCI	Accepted / Rejected
H3	JA $\rightarrow$ JC $\rightarrow$ JE						
	Direct Effect						
	JA $\rightarrow$ JE	.275	.047	.000	.1669	.3849	
	Indirect Effect						
	JA $\rightarrow$ JC $\rightarrow$ JE	.373	.049	.000	.2692	.4639	
	Total Effect						
	Direct + Indirect Effect	.639	.043	.000	.5535	.7244	Accepted

**Note:** JA =Job autonomy, JC = Job crafting, JE =Job engagement, JS =Job satisfaction. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 5000. LL = Lower Limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit. n = 286, \*p <.05; \*\*p <.01.

Above the table 9, the calculated mediation showed that job crafting partially mediates the relationship between job autonomy and job engagement. Both the direct ( $\beta=0.275$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the indirect ( $\beta=0.373$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) are significant. The overall effect ( $\beta=0.639$ ) verifies a strong correlation between the two, thus verifying the proposed hypothesis (H3a).

**H3(b): Job crafting act as a mediator between job autonomy and job satisfaction.**

**Table 10: Mediation Analysis**

Sr.No	Path	$\beta$	SE	P-Value	UPCI	LLCI	Accepted / Rejected
H3b	EI $\rightarrow$ IL $\rightarrow$ SB						
	Direct Effect						
	EI $\rightarrow$ SB	.283	.054	.000	.1755	.3908	
	Indirect Effect						
	EI $\rightarrow$ IL $\rightarrow$ SB	.306	.051	.000	.2004	.4055	
	Total Effect						
	Direct + Indirect Effect	.589	.041	.000	.5081	.6717	Accepted

**Note:** JA =Job autonomy, JC = Job crafting, JE =Job engagement, JS =Job satisfaction. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size 5000. LL = Lower Limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit. n = 286, \*p <.05; \*\*p <.01.

The above table 10 measured mediation and suggests that job crafting partially mediates relationships between job autonomy and job satisfaction, both direct ( $\beta = .283$ ,  $p <0.001$ ) and indirect ( $\beta = .306$ ,  $p = .000$ ) are significant. The total effect ( $\beta = .589$ ) confirms a strong overall relationship, supporting the proposed hypothesis (H3b).

## Discussion

This study also examined the role of nurses' job autonomy on work engagement and job satisfaction as mediated by the role of job crafting. The results of this research study show that job autonomy is significant in driving the work engagement and job satisfaction of nurses working in Azad Kashmir. Research studies similar to it were also reviewed in this research work. Work engagement is perceived as the absence of vigor, dedication, and absorption to work, which is a long-term and fairly general affective-cognitive condition that is not targeted to particular object or behavior (Suryowibowo & Syakarofath, 2024). Various research studies have successfully unveiled that higher job autonomy is significantly related to higher work engagement among varied types of occupational categories and varied regions. This revealed that when more authority is provided to work, to the method of work, and to working hours, stronger affinity to work is developed, as a consequence of which work engagement is improved (Wu & Lin, 2024). Research conducted on technology-based SMEs located in Guangdong Province of China among 385 participants found that job autonomy significantly and positively influences work engagement, sharing significant amount of variance to engagement levels of participants (Malinowska, Tokarz, & Wardzichowska, 2018). These research findings aligned with current research study and statistical result support current theory.

Moreover, research has explored that There have been compelling findings and empirical validations that have supported such an optimistic relationship, which has found that those workers who have more freedom and subjective experiences of autonomy in performing their job roles have recorded relatively high levels of job satisfaction (Mohite and James, 2024). This occurs in several ways, whereby job autonomy enables workers to have the freedom and autonomy of decision-making and performing their work, which has both psychological and positive impacts related to workers' well-being and feelings of satisfaction and pleasure (Sharifah et al., 2024). Furthermore, the empowerment of job autonomy occurs in several settings and contexts, such as delegation of control and power, provision of information, and job self-autonomy and freedom in job task performance, which uniquely impacts the satisfaction derived from the job role (AbuHazeem and Albloush, 2024). As suggested in these findings, the current research showed that it statistically correlated with previous empirical findings that have been proven and supported by hypothesis 2. Further, the present study also tested whether job crafting acts as a mediator for the relationship between job autonomy and employee workplace outcomes. This present study on job crafting acts as a significant mediating factor that bridges the relationship between job autonomy and increased work engagement since job autonomy translates into proactive changes. Through the lens of the Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) Model, this mediation clearly states that workers who have been granted the autonomy to work in the work environment possess the capability to modify the aspects and parameters of the job according to their abilities and preferences (Ahsan et al., 2019). This job autonomy-driven job crafting appears in different forms seeking structural and social resource methods, challenging job demands, and efficiently structuring tasks that all require autonomy and latitude provided through job autonomy (Garca-Merino et al., 2023). Researchers have found that job autonomy strongly and positively predicts job crafting and that employees who enjoy freedom at the decision-making level are more likely to make proactive changes to their job characteristics (Doblinger, 2023). All such research supports H3a.

Autonomy at work provides employees with the discretion of choosing how, when, and where the tasks will be accomplished, establishing positive conditions for the emergence of job crafting activities, such as changing the boundaries of tasks, social interactions, or cognitive perceptions. For employees with increased autonomy, they are likely to undertake job crafting activities in line with their personal capabilities and preferences, thus increasing the meaningfulness and control of the job. The self-directed initiatives, in turn, boost job satisfaction levels, as the employees perceive an upgraded person-job fit and satisfaction for their psychological needs. This hypothetical mediation has been supported by recent research evidence, underscoring the fact that job crafting exerts a significant mediating effect between the positive outcomes of job autonomy and increased levels of job satisfaction (Wang, Zhang, & Parker, 2023). The preceding

discussion justified the postulate proposed under H3b.

## Conclusion

This research tested the effect of job autonomy within the framework of job engagement and job satisfaction with job crafting as a mediator for nurses working in healthcare institutions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Based on data collected from 286 nurses, the findings confirm the proposed relationships with full force. The findings confirm that there are significant and positive associations between job autonomy and job engagement and between job autonomy and job satisfaction, thus establishing the increased autonomy and control over the working process, timings, and decision-making procedures for the nurses energize and involve them and make them satisfied with their job.

More importantly, this research extends the existing literature by showing how job crafting mediates the relationships between job autonomy and the two important job outcomes. These findings indicate that job autonomy impels nurses to proactively change their tasks, relationships, and perceptions about work, which enhances their levels of engagement and satisfaction. Full acceptance of all the hypotheses asserts the robustness of the theory framework, and it was evident that job crafting is recognized as a crucial behavioral mediator between autonomy and positive work-related outcomes.

In terms of practical applications, there are implications for healthcare administrators on the importance of nursing autonomy support and job crafting. This will enable them to address critical challenges currently facing the nursing profession, including burnout, disengagement, and turnover. This study will inform them on different ways healthcare employers can empower their nursing staff and give them a responsibility for their job, redesigning aspects of it. In turn, this will enable healthcare employers to have more motivated, engaged, and satisfied nursing staff, resulting in improved patient care.

Lastly, the research conducted in this study has made notable additions to the prevailing knowledge base on autonomy in the workplace, job crafting, and worker wellness. The above-mentioned details are sector-specific and have been drawn from the health care sector. With the possible applications of the research, the only drawback to the research conducted in the study is the cross-sectional approach in the research. Future research can make notable improvements in their study through the use of longitudinal research methods. In addition to that, further research can make notable improvements to the research model through investigating more moderators. However, the research conducted in the study has made notable additions to the prevailing knowledge on the pivotal role of autonomy and positive in-work behaviors.

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