

# Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress: A Systematic Review and Sectoral Analysis

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## Abstract

Employee performance and organizational outcomes are influenced by critical factors such as knowledge hiding and occupational stress across various sectors. A systematic review is conducted, and findings from 130 studies are synthesized to explore the interplay between knowledge hiding, occupational stress, and their impact on employees. Key antecedents of knowledge hiding, such as ethical leadership, workplace incivility, and organizational politics, are identified, and the role of occupational stress in mediating or moderating these relationships is examined. It is revealed that stress levels are exacerbated by knowledge hiding, resulting in reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. The negative effects are mitigated by ethical leadership and supportive work environments. Differences across sectors are highlighted, with knowledge hiding and stress being found to be more prevalent in high-pressure industries like IT, restaurant, and healthcare. A comprehensive framework for understanding these phenomena is provided, and practical recommendations are offered to organizations for fostering knowledge sharing and reducing stress.

**Keywords:** *Knowledge hiding, occupational stress, consequences, sectoral analysis, systematic review*

**JEL Classification:** C18, D83, I12, J28, J81, L20, O14

## Introduction

Rapid transformation is common at the modern workplace, driven by technological advancements, globalization, and increasing competition. Two critical issues have emerged as significant challenges for organizations during rapid transformation: knowledge hiding and occupational stress. The intentional concealment of information requested by others (Connelly & Zweig, 2015;

Haque, 2024) has been defined as knowledge hiding and has been found to undermine collaboration, innovation, and organizational performance. Common response to attack or disturbance of natural equilibrium (Haque, 2022). Burnout, absenteeism, and reduced productivity have been linked to occupational stress, which is caused by excessive job demands and inadequate resources (Kaur, 2023). Additionally, the independent study of these phenomena has been conducted, but their interplay has remained underexplored, particularly across different sectors. This gap in the literature limits our understanding of how knowledge hiding and occupational stress jointly affect employees and organizations, and how these effects may vary across industries.

The potential of this research to provide actionable insights for organizations striving to enhance employee well-being and performance highlights its significance. Knowledge hiding and occupational stress are not treated as isolated issues; instead, they are recognized as interconnected and often exacerbating one another. For instance, knowledge hiding may be resorted to by employees experiencing high levels of stress as a coping mechanism, while a toxic work environment may be created by a culture of knowledge hiding, further increasing stress levels (Haque, 2024). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions that address both issues simultaneously.

Several limitations have been identified despite researchers have shown more focus on knowledge hiding and occupational stress. First, these constructs have been examined in isolation, with their interplay largely neglected (Urbański et al., 2024). Second, the prevalence and impact of these phenomena across different sectors have remained under-explored. For example, higher levels of knowledge hiding and stress have been observed in high-pressure industries such as IT and healthcare compared to other sectors (Haque et al., 2016). Third, a comprehensive understanding of these issues has been hindered by the absence of systematic reviews that synthesize the existing literature.

The aim of this research is to investigate the interplay between knowledge hiding and occupational stress across different sectors, identifying key antecedents, consequences, and sector-specific differences.

By synthesizing the findings from 130 studies, this systematic review seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the primary antecedents and consequences of knowledge hiding?
- How does occupational stress influence knowledge-hiding behaviors?
- What sector-specific differences exist in the prevalence and impact of these phenomena?

A holistic framework for understanding the complex relationship between knowledge hiding and occupational stress is provided by this review as a contribution to the literature. Practical recommendations are also offered for organizations to foster knowledge sharing, reduce stress, and enhance employee performance. By addressing these issues, a more supportive and productive work environment can be created, ultimately allowing sustainable growth and competitiveness to be achieved.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review is organized into three main themes: (1) Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding, (2) Causes and Outcomes of Occupational Stress, and (3) The Interplay Between Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress. To provide a clear overview, Table 1

summarizes the key studies used in this review, their major findings, and references.

### *Knowledge Hiding: Antecedents and Consequences*

The act of withholding information requested by others is considered a deliberate one, and it is influenced by individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors (Haque, 2024). At the individual level, higher tendencies to hide knowledge have been linked to personality traits such as neuroticism and Machiavellianism (Demirkasımoğlu, 2015). Workplace incivility and lack of trust are found to exacerbate this behavior at the interpersonal level (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018). The role of organizational factors, including perceived politics and unethical leadership are evident to be significant (Abdullah et al., 2019).

Team cohesion is undermined, innovation is stifled, and organizational performance is reduced by knowledge hiding (Labafi, 2017; Haque, 2024). Guilt and reduced job satisfaction are often experienced by employees who are engaged in the act of knowledge hiding, which can lead to further escalation of stress levels (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Urbański et al., 2024). Several studies found that employee creativity is negatively affected by knowledge hiding, particularly in highly politicized work environments (Malik et al., 2019; Faizan et al., 2022; Urbański et al., 2024).

### *Occupational Stress: Causes and Outcomes*

A mismatch between job demands and employees' ability to cope leads to the emergence of occupational stress (Haque, 2023; Kaur & Haque, 2024). Common stressors, such as excessive workloads, lack of autonomy, and poor work-life balance, are identified as contributing factors (Haque et al., 2018; Kaur, 2023; Haq et al., 2024). Mental health is negatively impacted by stress, leading to anxiety, depression, and burnout (Ofoegbu & Nwadiani, 2006). Organizational outcomes, including increased turnover and reduced productivity are resultants of by stress (Kumasey et al., 2014).

It has been evident in sector-specific studies that stress levels vary across industries (Faizan & Zehra, 2016; Zehra & Faizan, 2017; Jose et al., 2018). For instance, higher stress levels are reported by employees in the IT and healthcare sectors due to the demanding nature of their work (Haque et al., 2016; Faizan & Zehra, 2016; Zehra & Faizan, 2017;). Similarly, it was found by Faizan and Haque (2019) that stress levels are influenced by gender, with higher stress often experienced by women in male-dominated industries.

### *The Interplay Between Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress*

A bidirectional relationship between knowledge hiding and occupational stress is suggested by recent studies. On one hand, knowledge hiding is triggered by stress, as self-preservation is prioritized over collaboration (Haque, 2024). On the other hand, stress is exacerbated by knowledge hiding, which creates a toxic work environment characterized by mistrust and competition (Urbański et al., 2024). For example, Kaur (2023) found in her study that emotional exhaustion, a key component of burnout, is more likely to be experienced by employees who hide knowledge.

It has been indicated by sector-specific studies that these dynamics are particularly pronounced in high-pressure industries like IT, restaurant services, and healthcare (Haque et al., 2016; Zehra, Ather, & Zehra, 2017; Zehra et al., 2017; Jose & Kaur, 2023). Perhaps, it could be argued that in these sectors, a fertile ground for both knowledge hiding and occupational stress is created by the

combination of high job demands and a competitive work environment. Some of the prominent findings from the extracted literature are presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of Key Findings**

No.	Key Concepts	Reference
1.	Gender dynamics influences knowledge hiding and stress in high-pressure industries.	Urbański et al. (2024)
2.	Knowledge hiding is a deliberate act influenced by interpersonal and organizational factors in diverse sectors.	Connelly & Zweig (2015)
3.	Stress triggers knowledge hiding, and knowledge hiding worsens stress. They compete to impact employee performance negatively in distinct service sectors.	Haque (2024)
4.	Ethical leadership reduces knowledge hiding by fostering trust and relational capital.	Abdullah et al. (2019)
5.	Occupational stress reduces employee performance and increases burnout.	Kaur (2023).
6.	IT sector male employees in comparison to female employees experience higher stress due to job demands.	Haque et al. (2016)
7.	Workplace incivility increases knowledge hiding and employee cynicism.	Aljawarneh & Atan (2018)
8.	Knowledge hiding stifles innovation and reduces organizational performance.	Labafi (2017)
9.	Gender differences in stress levels are prevalent in male-dominated industries.	Faizan & Haque (2019)
10.	Knowledge hiding negatively impacts creativity in politicized work environments.	Malik et al. (2019)

Source: *authors' illustration based on secondary studies*

As evident in Table 1, knowledge hiding and stress significantly impact performances in different sectors. Thus, the literature at hand has confirmed that the consequences of knowledge hiding and occupational stress are often negatively affecting employees, their performance and their well-being.

## Research Methodology

This systematic review adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and rigor. The methodology is structured into four key phases: (1) Search Strategy, (2) Study Selection and Eligibility Criteria, (3) Data Extraction and Synthesis, and (4) Quality Assessment.

### *Search Strategy*

Relevant studies were identified through a comprehensive search conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Combinations of keywords such as were included in the search terms:

- “Knowledge withholding” OR “Knowledge hiding”
- “Workplace stress” OR “Occupational stress”
- “Organizational outcomes” OR “Employee performance”

- “Industry-specific” OR “Sector-specific differences”

### *Study Selection and Eligibility Criteria*

A total of 1,250 articles were yielded by the initial search, which were screened based on titles and abstracts. Duplicates and irrelevant studies were removed, and 350 articles were left for full-text review. Table 2 reflect inclusion and exclusion criteria employed in this study.

**Table 2:** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Empirical Studies - only studies with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs were included. Focus on Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress - studies had to explicitly examine knowledge hiding, occupational stress, or their interplay. Peer-Reviewed Journals - only articles published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals were considered. Clear Methodology and Findings - studies had to provide sufficient detail on their research design, sample, and results. Sector-Specific Insights - studies that explored sector-specific differences (e.g., IT, healthcare, education) were prioritized.	Non-Empirical Studies - editorials, opinion pieces, and theoretical papers were excluded. Non-English Publications - studies not published in English were excluded to ensure consistency in interpretation. Insufficient Methodological Rigor - studies with unclear methodologies or insufficient data were excluded. Irrelevant Topics - studies not related to knowledge hiding, occupational stress, or employee outcomes were excluded.

Source: *authors' illustration*

After applying these criteria, 130 studies were selected for inclusion in the review. The search was further refined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) function, and filters were applied to include only peer-reviewed articles published in English between 2010 and 2024. The inclusion of recent and relevant studies was ensured while it was ensured that scope remains manageable within this time frame.

### *Data Extraction and Synthesis*

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form that included the following fields:

- Study details: Author(s), year, journal, title
- Methodology: Research design, country, sample size, sector
- Key variables: Antecedents, outcomes, and consequences of knowledge hiding and occupational stress
- Major findings: Key insights and sector-specific differences

Thematic analysis was used to synthesize the extracted data and identify recurring themes and patterns. Three main themes were identified from the findings: (1) antecedents and consequences of knowledge hiding, (2) causes and outcomes of occupational stress, and (3) the interplay between knowledge hiding and occupational stress.

### *Bibliometric Analysis*

To provide a comprehensive overview of the included studies, a bibliometric analysis was conducted. Table 3 summarizes the key characteristics of the studies, including publication trends, geographical distribution, and sector-specific focus.

**Table 3: Bibliometric Analysis of Included Studies**

Category	Details	Number of Studies	Percentage
Publication Year	2010–2015	25	19.2%
	2016–2020	45	34.6%
	2021–2024	60	46.2%
Geographical Region	North America	40	30.8%
	Europe	35	26.9%
	Asia	30	23.1%
	Other (Africa, South America, Oceania)	25	19.2%
Sector Focus	IT and Technology	40	30.8%
	Healthcare	30	23.1%
	Education	20	15.4%
	Manufacturing	15	11.5%
	Other (Finance, Retail, etc.)	25	19.2%
Research Design	Quantitative	90	69.2%
	Qualitative	25	19.2%
	Mixed Methods	15	11.5%

Source: *authors' illustration based on secondary studies*

### *Quality Assessment*

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) designed to evaluate the methodological rigor of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research was used to evaluate the quality of the included studies. Analytical rigor, data collection techniques, and sampling strategy were among the factors used to score each study. Low-scoring studies were eliminated to guarantee the credibility, reliability, and validity of the results.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The findings of the systematic review are presented in this section. It is organized into three main themes: (1) Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding, (2) Causes and Outcomes of Occupational Stress, and (3) The Interplay Between Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress. The themes are supported by evidence from the included studies, and clarity is provided through summaries presented in tables.

#### *Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding*

A range of individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors influence knowledge hiding. The key antecedents and consequences identified in the literature are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4: Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding**

Category	Key Findings	Supporting Studies
Individual Antecedents	Personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, Machiavellianism) increase knowledge hiding.	Demirkasımoğlu (2015); Connelly & Zweig (2015)

Interpersonal Antecedents	Workplace incivility and lack of trust are significant predictors of knowledge hiding.	Aljawarneh & Atan (2018); Abdullah et al. (2019)
Organizational Antecedents	Perceived organizational politics and unethical leadership foster knowledge hiding.	Labafi (2017); Malik et al. (2019)
Consequences	Knowledge hiding reduces team cohesion, innovation, and organizational performance. Employees who hide knowledge experience guilt and reduce job satisfaction.	Connelly & Zweig (2015); Labafi (2017) Haque (2024); Urbański et al. (2024)

Source: *authors' illustration-based research findings*

Excessive workloads and a lack of work-life balance are the most reported causes of occupational stress, which is a widespread problem in many industries (Kaur, 2023; Haque et al., 2018; Zaidi, 2022). Stress is particularly experienced by employees in high-pressure industries, such as IT and healthcare, due to the demanding nature of their work (Haque et al., 2016; Zehra et al., 2017). Severe outcomes of stress are observed, affecting both mental health and organizational performance. Burnout, anxiety, and depression are caused by stress, which not only harms employees but also results in increased absenteeism and turnover (Kaur & Haque, 2024; Faizan & Zehra, 2016; Zaidi, 2022). The need for stress management programs to be implemented by organizations and the promotion of work-life balance is underscored by these findings.

### *The Interplay Between Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress*

Knowledge hiding and occupational stress have a complicated and reciprocal relationship. The key findings of this interplay are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Interplay Between Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress

<b>Category</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Supporting Studies</b>
Stress as a Trigger	High stress levels increase knowledge hiding as a coping mechanism	Haque (2024); Urbański et al. (2024)
Knowledge Hiding as a Stressor	Knowledge hiding creates a toxic work environment, exacerbating stress.	Connelly & Zweig (2015); Labafi (2017)
Sector-Specific Differences	High-pressure sectors (e.g., IT, healthcare) experience stronger effects.	Haque et al. (2016); Kaur (2023)

Source: *authors' illustration based-research findings*

The results show that 'knowledge hiding' and 'occupational stress' are correlated in both directions. Employees who are under stress may conceal information because they are more concerned with protecting themselves than collaborating and prioritizing work to be effective and efficient (Haque, 2024). However, by creating a hostile and toxic workplace resulting from professional rivalry, and mistrust. Additionally, knowledge hiding makes stress worse (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). In high-pressure industries like IT, restaurant business and healthcare, where work expectations are high and resources are frequently few, such phenomenon i.e., knowledge hiding and occupational stress more noticeable (Haque et al., 2016; Zehra et al., 2017; Jose & Kaur, 2023). Gender dynamics, for instance, significantly exacerbate this linkage by women in male-dominated businesses. There are reports that higher levels of stress and knowledge hiding (Urbański et al., 2024).

### Sector-Specific Insights

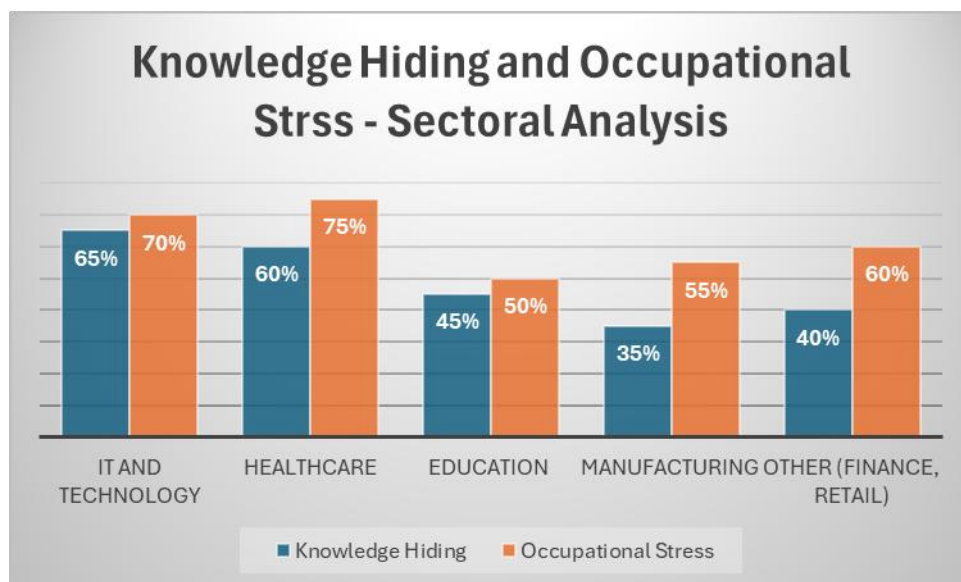
Knowledge hiding and occupational stress were found to have significant sector-specific differences in the prevalence and impact. These findings are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Sector-Specific Insights

Sector	Key Findings	Supporting Studies
IT and Technology	High levels of stress and knowledge hiding due to competitive work environments.	Haque et al. (2016); Labafi (2017)
Healthcare	Stress and knowledge hiding are prevalent due to high job demands and emotional labor.	Kaur (2023); Faizan & Haque (2019)
Education	Moderate levels of stress and knowledge hiding, often linked to bureaucratic pressures.	Ofoegbu & Nwadiani (2006); Demirkasımoğlu (2015)
Manufacturing	Stress is driven by physical demands, while knowledge hiding is less prevalent.	Kumasey et al. (2014); Abdullah et al. (2019)

Source: authors' illustration-based research findings

The need for tailored interventions is highlighted by sector-specific differences. For example, knowledge hiding and stress may be reduced in the IT industry by promoting a collaborative culture and providing stress management resources (Haque et al., 2016; Faizan & Zehra, 2016). Improving work-life balance and addressing emotional labor are crucial in the healthcare industry (Zehra et al., 2017; Zaidi, 2022; Kaur, 2023). These findings highlight how crucial context-specific tactics are used to successfully addressing these problems.



**Figure 1:** Comparison of Knowledge Hiding and Occupational Stress - Sectoral Analysis.

The graph compares knowledge hiding and occupational stress across different sectors (Figure 1). It reveals that sectors such as IT and technology, healthcare, and others (finance, retail) experience higher occupational stress rather than knowledge hiding. The education sector has less difference between that is only 5% (as knowledge hiding is 45% while occupational stress is 50%).



Manufacturing has the lowest, indicating more openness and a less stressful work environment.

It could be argued based on the evidence at hand that in comparison to knowledge hiding, occupational stress has severe more impact and visibility across distinct sectors. Interestingly, recent studies of Haque (2024) and Urbański et al. (2024) found that stress could be a biggest contributor towards developing knowledge hiding tendencies. Overall, the trend shows that higher occupational stress may contribute to increased knowledge hiding.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To investigate the relationship between knowledge hiding and occupational stress across various industries, this systematic review synthesized data from 130 studies. In addition to highlighting the negative impacts of knowledge hiding on employee well-being and organizational performance, the review identified key antecedents of this behavior. As evident, organizational politics, unethical leadership, and workplace toxic environment.

Our study concluded that occupational stress identified as both a cause and an effect of knowledge hiding as it creates a vicious cycle, particularly noticeable in high-pressure industries such as IT, financial sector, restaurants, and healthcare. Based on sector-specific differences, interventions must be customized to address the unique challenges faced by workers in different industries and sectors. This study also concludes that to reduce stress and knowledge hiding, organizations must promote a culture of trust, ethical leadership, and work-life balance.

This review has several limitations despite its significant contributions. First, relevant research published in other languages have been excluded, as only English-language studies were included. Those excluded studies might have something critical and invaluable that has been omitted. Second, bias may have been introduced, as many of the included studies rely on self-reported data. Third, the systematic review may have missed important insights from industry reports, white papers, or grey literature, as it primarily focused on peer-reviewed academic publications. Lastly, most of the studies are cross-sectional, which limits our ability to make causal conclusions about the relationship between knowledge hiding and occupational stress. Perhaps, longitudinal studies might have given more in-depth insight about magnitude of relationship.

Based on the research limitations, the following recommendations are made:

- Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to explore the causal relationships between knowledge hiding and occupational stress.
- Cross-cultural comparisons are needed to understand how these phenomena vary across different cultural and organizational contexts.
- Research should investigate the role of emerging technologies, such as AI, in mitigating or exacerbating knowledge hiding and stress.

For practitioners, the following recommendations are made:

- To reduce knowledge hiding and foster collaboration, organizations should prioritize relational social capital and ethical leadership.
- stress management initiatives like mindfulness training and flexible work schedules, particularly in high-pressure industries like IT, restaurant, healthcare, and financial sectors should be the prime focus
- To address certain difficulties, sector-specific measures should be created, such as

tackling emotional labor in healthcare and lowering bureaucratic demands in education.

For policymakers, the following is recommended:

- At the organizational and national levels, policies supporting mental health and work-life balance should be promoted.
- Sector-specific guidelines should be developed to address the unique stressors faced by employees in different industries.

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