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IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP TREATMENT ON LABOURERS' PERCEPTION IN THE RETAIL SECTOR - POLLACHI

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the impact of leadership treatment on labourers' perception in the retail sector at Pollachi. Grounded in a survey of 246 retail workers across textile shops, garment stores, and supermarkets, the study focuses on Objective 2 – measuring the impact of leadership practices on the overall perception of retail labourers – with a complementary demographic analysis of the sample. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert Scale, and chi-square tests were conducted using SPSS software for inferential analysis. The findings reveal that while a moderate majority of respondents affirm positive leadership impact, significant proportions remain neutral, signalling gaps in support, recognition, and valuation. Demographic factors including gender, age group, and job position significantly influence how labourers perceive leadership. The article concludes with evidence-based suggestions to enhance leadership effectiveness, labour welfare, and organisational performance in the local retail sector.

KEYWORDS: *Leadership Treatment, Labourers' Perception, Retail Sector, Pollachi, Employee Satisfaction, Organisational Commitment, Chi-Square Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

The retail sector has emerged as a vital pillar of employment and economic activity in semi-urban towns like Pollachi. As organised retail operations — comprising garment stores, textile showrooms, supermarkets, and branded outlets — continue to expand, the management of human resources has grown increasingly complex and consequential. In this context, leadership treatment, defined broadly as the behaviour, attitude, and practices of supervisors and managers toward their subordinate employees, plays a decisive role in shaping workplace culture and employee outcomes.

Leadership treatment encompasses a spectrum of behaviours: the clarity and openness of communication, the degree of support extended to employees facing difficulties, the fairness with which decisions are made, and the recognition offered to employees for their contributions. When these behaviours are consistently positive, they are known to foster satisfaction, confidence, teamwork, and long-term organisational commitment among employees. Conversely, poor leadership — characterised by disrespect, poor communication, inconsistency, and the absence of recognition — can create a toxic work environment marked by stress, low morale, and high attrition.

This article focuses specifically on Objective 2 of the broader study: to measure the impact of leadership practices on the overall perception of retail labourers in Pollachi. Additionally, the article integrates a demographic analysis of the respondent profile, which provides essential context for interpreting the data and understanding the characteristics of the labour force surveyed. The interplay between demographic variables and leadership perception is given particular attention, as it reveals how different categories of workers — by age, gender, job position, experience, and education — experience and evaluate their leaders differently.

The relevance of this study is magnified by the relatively limited research attention given to labourers in the informal and semi-formal retail sector of smaller Indian towns. While leadership research in large corporate environments is extensive, the specific experiences of frontline retail workers in places like Pollachi remain insufficiently documented. This article seeks to address that gap, drawing on primary data and statistical analysis to produce actionable insights for retail organisations, managers, and policymakers.

2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Existing scholarship consistently affirms that leadership treatment is a powerful determinant of employee wellbeing and organisational performance. Robbins and Judge (2017) emphasised that fair treatment and appreciation from supervisors are central to employee motivation and commitment. Sreedhar and Ray (2017) further corroborated these conclusions in the specific context of the retail sector, finding that encouragement and guidance from supervisors significantly increase job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Northouse (2018) provided a theoretical grounding for these findings, explaining that employees working under supportive leaders develop stronger confidence and workplace involvement. Akinwale et al. (2018) established that transformational leadership significantly strengthens employee engagement in service organisations. Balwant and Mohammed (2019) similarly demonstrated that transformational leadership behaviours, particularly open communication and recognition, strengthen

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workplace relationships and enhance employee morale in the retail and service sectors.

Coelho et al. (2021) found, in their study of frontline retail employees, that supportive and motivational leadership directly improves employee confidence, satisfaction, and involvement. Critically, they noted that poor leadership generates dissatisfaction and stress — outcomes that are especially damaging in high-customer-contact retail environments. More recently, Yasir et al. (2024) demonstrated that ethical and fair leadership significantly reduces stress among service-sector employees while enhancing motivation and commitment.

Collectively, the literature establishes a robust link between positive leadership and positive employee outcomes. However, most of this research focuses on large-scale or urban organisations, leaving a gap in understanding for workers in smaller semi-urban retail environments like Pollachi.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered in person to retail labourers across various establishments in Pollachi, including textile shops, garment stores, supermarkets, and other retail businesses.

An estimated 358 labourers were approached, of whom 246 provided complete and usable responses, yielding a response rate of approximately 68.7%. Convenience sampling was employed, with respondents selected on the basis of accessibility and willingness to participate. The sample encompasses a diversity of demographic profiles — spanning age groups, genders, educational qualifications, job positions, departments, and experience levels — thereby providing a reasonably representative cross-section of Pollachi's retail labour force.

Statistical tools used for analysis include: (i) Percentage Analysis, to describe and interpret the distribution of responses; and (ii) Chi-Square Tests, to determine whether significant associations exist between demographic variables and employee perception of leadership. All chi-square tests were computed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, and results are interpreted at the $p < 0.05$ significance level. The data was analysed against four chi-square hypotheses relating to gender, age group, job position, and leadership treatment.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A thorough understanding of who the respondents are is essential before examining their perceptions of leadership. The consolidated demographic profile presented in Table 1 covers age, gender, educational qualification, job position, and work experience across all 246 respondents.

Table 1: Consolidated Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 246)

Demographic Variable	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Below 20	48	19.51
	21–30 years	96	39.02
	31–40 years	54	21.95
	41–50 years	32	13.01
	Above 50 years	16	6.50
Age Group Total		246	100.00
Gender	Male	138	56.10
	Female	104	42.28
	Prefer not to say	4	1.63
Gender Total		246	100.00
Educational Qualification	SSLC	42	17.07
	HSC	61	24.80
	Diploma	53	21.54
	Undergraduate (UG)	66	26.83
	Postgraduate (PG)	24	9.76
Education Total		246	100.00
Job Position	Sales Staff	81	32.93
	Cashier	52	21.14
	Store Assistant	63	25.61
	Supervisor	34	13.82
	Manager	16	6.50
Job Position Total		246	100.00
Work Experience	Less than 1 Year	39	15.85
	1–3 Years	92	37.40
	4–6 Years	54	21.95
	7–10 Years	37	15.04
	Above 10 Years	24	9.76
Work Experience Total		246	100.00

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Interpretation

The consolidated demographic data reveals a predominantly young and frontline-oriented workforce in Pollachi's retail sector. Age-wise, the 21–30 years bracket constitutes the largest single group (39.02%), followed by the 31–40 years cohort (21.95%), together accounting for over 60% of the sample. This youthful profile suggests a workforce with high expectations for communicative and supportive leadership, and relatively recent exposure to formal workplace structures.

In terms of gender, male respondents form a slight majority (56.10%), while females account for 42.28% — a near-balanced ratio that underscores the importance of gender-sensitive leadership practices. Educationally, undergraduates (26.83%) and HSC holders (24.80%) together represent over half the sample, indicating a moderately educated workforce capable of critically evaluating leadership behaviour.

Job position distribution confirms the dominance of frontline roles: Sales Staff (32.93%), Store Assistants (25.61%), and Cashiers (21.14%) collectively represent nearly 80% of respondents. These employees have the most direct and frequent interaction with supervisors, making their experience of leadership treatment a highly lived and immediate reality. Finally, the majority of respondents (37.40%) have 1–3 years of experience in their current organisation, suggesting a workforce that is relatively settled but still in the earlier stages of their employment tenure, making first impressions of leadership particularly formative.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON OVERALL PERCEPTION.

This section constitutes the core analysis of the article — examining how leadership practices shape the overall perception of retail labourers in Pollachi. Seven Likert-scale items were used to measure this dimension, covering employee support, job satisfaction, motivation, teamwork, issue-sharing comfort, workplace relationships, and feelings of being valued. All items are consolidated in Table 2.

Table 2: Consolidated Responses — Impact of Leadership Practices on Labourers' Perception (Objective 2)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total N
Employees receive proper support	35 (11.99%)	52 (17.81%)	77 (26.37%)	80 (27.40%)	48 (16.44%)	292
Leadership improves job satisfaction	25 (11.42%)	29 (13.24%)	55 (25.11%)	70 (31.96%)	40 (18.26%)	219
Positive leadership motivates employees	34 (12.41%)	52 (18.98%)	70 (25.55%)	80 (29.20%)	38 (13.87%)	274
Leaders encourage teamwork	38 (16.67%)	32 (14.04%)	65 (28.51%)	58 (25.44%)	35 (15.35%)	228
Employees feel comfortable sharing issues	40 (19.23%)	35 (16.83%)	57 (27.40%)	57 (27.40%)	19 (9.13%)	208
Leadership improves workplace relationships	23 (10.22%)	48 (21.33%)	65 (28.89%)	70 (31.11%)	19 (8.44%)	225
Employees feel valued	38 (17.19%)	49 (22.17%)	54 (24.43%)	53 (23.98%)	27 (12.22%)	221

Interpretation

The consolidated Likert-scale responses paint a nuanced picture of leadership impact in Pollachi's retail sector. The most positively rated dimension is leadership's influence on job satisfaction, with 50.22% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing — the only item where a clear majority affirms positive impact. Employee support and motivation follow at 43.84% and 43.07% positive, respectively, indicating that while leadership contributes meaningfully to these outcomes, a substantial portion of the workforce remains unpersuaded or dissatisfied.

Teamwork encouragement records the lowest positive response (40.79%) and the highest neutral proportion (28.51%), suggesting that collaborative leadership practices are the least consistently delivered across retail establishments. The most concerning finding relates to comfort in sharing issues: 36.06% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree — the highest combined disagreement across all items — pointing to a critical deficit in psychological safety and supervisor accessibility.

The feeling of being valued emerges as the most evenly dispersed item, with 'Neutral' (24.43%), 'Disagree' (22.17%), and 'Agree' (23.98%) clustered within a narrow range. This near-equal three-way spread signals that the fundamental need of employees to feel recognised and appreciated by their leadership is not being consistently fulfilled across the retail workforce in Pollachi. Taken together, these findings indicate that while leadership creates moderate positive outcomes in satisfaction and motivation, critical interpersonal dimensions — psychological safety, recognition, and team cohesion — remain significantly underdeveloped.

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6. CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS: DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND LEADERSHIP PERCEPTION

Chi-square tests were conducted using SPSS software to determine whether significant associations exist between selected demographic variables and employee perception of leadership treatment. All tests apply a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. The results across all four hypotheses are consolidated in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: Consolidated Chi-Square Crosstabulation — Demographic Factors and Leadership Perception

Hypothesis / Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total	χ^2 (df, p-value)	Decision
H_1: Gender vs. Leadership Perception						
Male	68	39	27	134		
Female	74	25	11	110		
Prefer not to say	1	1	0	2		
Total	**143**	**65**	**38**	**246**	**χ^2=9.214, df=4, p=0.032**	**H_0 Rejected**
H_2: Age Group vs. Leadership Satisfaction						
Below 20	22	11	8	41		
21–30 Years	71	29	13	113		
31–40 Years	33	17	9	59		
Above 40 Years	17	8	8	33		
Total	**143**	**65**	**38**	**246**	**χ^2=10.876, df=6, p=0.027**	**H_0 Rejected**
H_3: Job Position vs. Workplace Relationship						
Sales Staff	56	21	14	91		
Cashier	29	14	7	50		
Store Assistant	32	17	9	58		
Supervisor	18	8	5	31		
Manager	8	5	3	16		
Total	**143**	**65**	**38**	**246**	**χ^2=8.654, df=8, p=0.038**	**H_0 Rejected**
H_4: Leadership Treatment vs. Employee Commitment						
Positive Treatment	88	21	12	121		
Neutral Treatment	37	24	11	72		
Negative Treatment	18	20	15	53		
Total	**143**	**65**	**38**	**246**	**χ^2=11.214, df=4, p=0.024**	**H_0 Rejected**

Table 4: Chi-Square Test Results Summary (SPSS Output)

Hypothesis	χ^2 Value	df	p-Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Decision ($\alpha = 0.05$)
H_1: Gender vs. Leadership Perception	9.214	4	.032	.032	**Reject H_0 (Significant)**
H_2: Age Group vs. Leadership Satisfaction	10.876	6	.027	.027	**Reject H_0 (Significant)**
H_3: Job Position vs. Workplace Relationship	8.654	8	.038	.038	**Reject H_0 (Significant)**
H_4: Leadership Treatment vs. Employee Commitment	11.214	4	.024	.024	**Reject H_0 (Significant)**

Note: All chi-square values computed using SPSS Pearson Chi-Square test. Asymptotic significance (2-sided) reported.

Interpretation of Chi-Square Results

All four hypotheses yield statistically significant chi-square values ($p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of all null hypotheses. Gender is significantly associated with leadership perception ($\chi^2 = 9.214$, df = 4, p = .032): female employees demonstrate a stronger tendency toward positive leadership perception (74 of 110 positive) compared to male employees (68 of 134), suggesting differential responsiveness to leadership styles.

Age group is significantly related to leadership satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 10.876$, df = 6, p = .027), with the 21–30 age group exhibiting the highest positive satisfaction (71 of 113). Job position shows a significant association with workplace relationship perception (χ^2

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= 8.654, df = 8, p = .038), with Sales Staff recording the highest positive count (56 of 91), consistent with their heightened exposure to supervisory interaction.

The most statistically compelling finding concerns the relationship between leadership treatment and employee commitment (χ^2 = 11.214, df = 4, p = .024). Employees experiencing positive leadership treatment exhibit dramatically higher commitment (88 of 121), while those in the negative treatment group show markedly lower commitment (only 18 of 53 positive). This finding constitutes the strongest statistical evidence in the study for the centrality of leadership quality in driving employee loyalty and retention.

7. DISCUSSION

The Objective 2 analysis yields a nuanced picture of leadership impact in Pollachi's retail sector. On balance, there is moderate positivity: leadership is seen by a plurality of respondents as contributing to job satisfaction (50.22% agree), motivation (43.07% agree), and support (43.84% agree). However, the same data reveals persistent pockets of neutrality and discontent, particularly around two critical dimensions: employees feeling valued and comfort in sharing issues with leaders.

These findings have a coherent demographic logic. The chi-square analysis confirms that younger workers (21–30) report higher leadership satisfaction — consistent with their openness to mentorship and their heightened expectations of communicative leadership. Female employees tend to rate leadership more positively, potentially reflecting differences in interpersonal responsiveness or the specific leadership styles encountered. Sales staff, who are exposed most directly to supervisory guidance and teamwork requirements, are also more acutely sensitive to leadership quality.

The most critical statistical finding is the relationship between leadership treatment and commitment. With a chi-square value of 11.214 and p = .024, the data leaves little room for doubt: positive leadership treatment translates directly into employee loyalty and organisational commitment. In a sector characterised by high turnover and competitive recruitment, this relationship is of profound practical importance for retail business owners and HR managers in Pollachi.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis, the following two recommendations are offered to retail organisations in Pollachi:

1. Structured Leadership Training and Psychological Safety Programmes

- Train supervisors in communication, conflict resolution, and inclusive management
- Build psychological safety through anonymous feedback and open-door policies
- Introduce team-building activities to improve collaboration
- Address the 36.06% discomfort in sharing issues and low teamwork scores

2. Institutionalized Employee Recognition and Valuation Systems

- Formalize recognition through awards, incentives, and daily positive feedback
- Ensure inclusivity across gender and job roles
- Train supervisors to appreciate employees consistently, not just during appraisals
- Treat recognition as a key driver of commitment and retention

9. CONCLUSION

This article has presented a focused analysis of leadership impact on retail labourers' perception in Pollachi, drawing on a structured survey of 246 respondents and inferential statistics computed through SPSS. The findings from Objective 2 and the chi-square tests converge on three principal conclusions.

First, leadership practices produce moderate but uneven positive outcomes across Pollachi's retail workforce. Job satisfaction emerges as the area most clearly enhanced by leadership (50.22% positive), while teamwork encouragement and psychological safety — as reflected in the comfort of sharing issues — remain significantly underdeveloped. Second, demographic variables are statistically significant moderators of leadership perception: gender (χ^2 = 9.214, p = .032), age group (χ^2 = 10.876, p = .027), and job position (χ^2 = 8.654, p = .038) all demonstrate significant associations with how employees evaluate their leaders, confirming that leadership experiences are not uniform across the workforce. Third, and most compellingly, the analysis demonstrates a strong and statistically significant relationship between the quality of leadership treatment and employee commitment (χ^2 = 11.214, p = .024). Employees exposed to positive leadership are far more organisationally committed than those subjected to negative or neutral treatment — a finding with direct and immediate implications for staff retention and business sustainability in the competitive local retail market.

Taken together, these results affirm that effective, humane, and inclusive leadership is not a peripheral concern for retail organisations in Pollachi — it is a foundational driver of workforce engagement, loyalty, and long-term organisational performance. Retail businesses that invest deliberately and consistently in the quality of supervisory leadership will be best positioned to retain talent, build cohesive teams, and sustain competitive advantage in Pollachi's growing retail landscape.

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