

## **Abstract**

Occupational stigma is society's stigmatization of certain occupations as disgusting, degrading, or demeaning (Hughes, 1951). Certain characteristics of occupations make dirt central to their image and identity as well as of their members. Such stigmatized perception from the society that considers these occupational members as flawed, deviant, and inferior brands them as 'dirty workers' and significantly threatens personal and social identity. This stigmatized identity develops the need to undertake the challenging task of re-establishing a sense of self-worth and dignity while being engaged in these occupations. To achieve these objectives, occupational members employ coping strategies individually, socially, or collectively. To understand these intricate coping mechanisms to deal with occupational stigma, this thesis explores novel approaches to coping through four studies.

While there is now a substantial body of literature on the coping strategies employed by workers in stigmatized dirty work, there is insufficient knowledge about what resources they use while employing these strategies, what factors impact resource availability and utilization for coping, and how the utilization of resources leads to differential coping. My first essay addresses these gaps. First, using the meta-synthesis of 39 qualitative studies, I consolidate the resources these workers use to cope into six categories. Second, the study discusses what factors impact resource availability and utilization by proposing the role of occupational prestige as a determining factor. Third, borrowing from the conservation of resources theory and self-affirmation theory, this study proposes resources as facilitators of self-

affirmations leading to differential coping. Finally, I propose a conceptual framework along with propositions depicting how dissonance caused by inconsistency in self-integrity leads to the use of various resources for differential coping.

The second essay emphasizes the importance of self and work affirmations as coping mechanisms against occupational stigma. Borrowing from self-affirmation theory and identity process theory, I propose an affirmation-assimilation-accommodation framework of coping that explains how affirmations prevent threatening information from entering the identity processing and aid in achieving a positive coping outcome. Also, the study underscores the role of organizations in the individual coping process by evaluating a moderated mediation effect of organizational culture. I test the research model using a sample of hospital nurses in India. My analysis showed empirical support for the conceptual framework. This study contributes to the coping literature by suggesting two new coping methods: (a) self and work affirmations; (b) building clarity in self and work.

While occupational stigma literature mainly focuses on individual-level coping, essay three examines how social support networks can aid the coping process. Through this study, I expand the dirty work and stigma-coping literature in three ways. First, I examine the influence of two cognitive levels of stigma, i.e., occupational stigma consciousness and self-stigma, to identify their different and similar impacts on coping processes. Second, I move beyond the individual coping mechanisms and suggest a new approach to coping using *affirmational support ties* provided by the occupational group members. Third, I develop an understanding of

how cognitive dissonance plays a crucial role in the coping process. I test the research model using social network analysis and structural equation modeling using the sample of hospital nurses. My analysis showed that self-stigma plays an intermediary role in enhancing stigma consciousness effect on occupational identification. Also, *affirmational support ties* effectively reduce the impact of stigma consciousness on self-stigma and occupational identification, suggesting it as an important social support resource.

By questioning the fundamental nature of the occupation and targeting the occupational members as 'dirty' and 'immoral,' occupational stigma is a big concern plaguing our employment landscape worldwide. It threatens employees' identity, develops the feeling of being unvalued, and lowers their dignity. However, existing studies fail to offer a solution to the issue by focusing only on coping rather than stigma removal. In essay four, I address this research gap by proposing how destigmatization of the occupation can be achieved by changing the existing societal narratives about occupation through occupational branding and collective identity work. I empirically explore this idea by conducting a qualitative study on the Indian beauty occupation to understand how they have achieved the destigmatization of their occupation. I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) as it helps understand the discourses of social wrong and unravels various means of eliminating the social wrong. Accordingly, I propose that by using collective identity work, occupational members brand the 3Ps of the occupation, i.e., people, process, and purpose, to achieve destigmatization. My study contributes by exploring how the prominent

discourses of stigma on the professions get modified into stigma-free legitimate discourses with the help of occupational branding.

Taken together, this thesis contributes to the dirty work and coping literature by exploring various ways in which occupational members engaged in dirty work regain their lost sense of self-worth.