

A Study on the Impact of Socio-Demographic Factors on Diversity and Inclusion, Employee Engagement, Retention, and Performance in India's IT Sector

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of sociodemographic factors: gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, tenure, disability status, social category, and hierarchical level on workplace inclusion, employee engagement, retention, and performance in India's IT sector. Adopting a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 247 employees using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across demographic groups and organizational levels. Standardized, validated scales were employed to measure workplace inclusion, engagement, retention (burnout, loyalty, turnover intentions), and performance. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences in inclusion, engagement, loyalty, and performance across hierarchical levels, with leadership roles reporting higher scores and entry-level employees experiencing greater burnout and turnover intentions. Sexual orientation also emerged as a significant factor, with homosexual/bisexual employees reporting lower inclusion and engagement, though no meaningful differences were observed in retention or performance. Multiple regression further showed that age, gender, tenure, hierarchy, and sexual orientation significantly predicted workplace outcomes, with the exception of performance, which was not explained by demographic characteristics. These findings provide evidence that structural position, career stage, and minority identity strongly influence workplace experiences in the Indian IT industry. They highlight the need for organizations to design targeted interventions such as mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and diversity policies that address disparities and promote psychological safety, equity, and engagement. By integrating inclusion and retention strategies into organizational practices, IT firms, HR managers, and policymakers can strengthen employee well-being, improve retention, and enhance overall organizational performance.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Employee Performance, Hierarchical Levels, Indian IT Sector, Workplace Inclusion.

Introduction

Workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives are essential for fostering an equitable environment where employees, regardless of their background, feel valued and integrated into the organizational culture. It has been found that inclusive workplaces contribute to greater job satisfaction, higher commitment, and improved overall performance (1). It has been observed that employees with favourable perceptions of inclusion are more likely to remain with a company compared to those with less favourable views (2, 3). Inclusion has been defined as employees' perceptions of belongingness and fairness within the workplace, and it plays a critical role in shaping organizational culture and employee experiences (4-7). Globally, diversity management has been prioritized as a strategic advantage in enhancing innovation, financial outcomes, and social

legitimacy (8-10). Cross-country analyses have revealed that companies in the top quartile for gender and ethnic diversity are 25–36% more likely to outperform financially (11). It has been reported that inclusive leadership practices improve retention and reduce turnover across industries worldwide (12). Despite these efforts, persistent inequities have been documented, with women continuing to face leadership underrepresentation (13) and LGBTQ+ employees reporting exclusion and career barriers across cultural contexts (14). These international findings suggest that workplace inclusion is both a universal challenge and a context-dependent phenomenon. However, perceptions of inclusion have been shown to vary across sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, tenure, and disability status, influencing

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employees' engagement, retention, and productivity. Lower workplace inclusion among LGBTQ+ employees has been frequently reported, often attributed to implicit biases and structural inequalities (15). Early-career employees have been found to experience reduced inclusion due to limited decision-making authority and weaker professional networks (16-18). Understanding the interplay between inclusion and sociodemographic characteristics is crucial for designing effective policies that promote equal opportunities across diverse workforce segments. Employee engagement has been identified as a pivotal factor in organizational success, with engaged employees demonstrating higher motivation, job satisfaction, and discretionary effort (19, 20). Engagement has been conceptualized as multidimensional, encompassing intellectual, social, and affective aspects that shape employees' emotional investment in their work (21). It has been found that engagement is influenced by both individual and organizational factors, including leadership support, workplace culture, and opportunities for professional development (22, 23). Global surveys indicate that only 21% of employees worldwide report being engaged at work, highlighting the critical need for organizations to address barriers to engagement (24). Cross-national comparisons have suggested that cultural values shape engagement patterns, with collectivist societies emphasizing relational engagement and individualist societies emphasizing autonomy and achievement (25). Sociodemographic characteristics have also been found to play a role in engagement levels (26-29). For example, older employees often exhibit higher engagement due to greater job stability and intrinsic motivation (30), whereas individuals from underrepresented groups may experience disengagement due to workplace biases or lack of representation in leadership roles (31). Understanding these variations is essential for implementing targeted interventions that enhance engagement among diverse employee cohorts.

Employee retention has been recognized as vital for organizational stability and is influenced by factors such as workplace culture, leadership support, and career advancement opportunities (32-35). Longer tenure has been associated with stronger retention due to familiarity with

organizational structures and established professional networks, whereas entry-level employees often face higher turnover risks due to unclear career paths, workplace adaptation and satisfaction challenges (36). Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, has been identified as a significant driver of turnover, particularly among younger professionals and those in high-stress environments (37). At the global level, burnout has been formally recognized as an occupational phenomenon, underscoring its widespread impact on retention and productivity across industries and nations (38). Studies have further indicated that demographic diversity influences retention differently depending on cultural contexts, making cross-country insights essential (39). Gender and disability status have also been found to influence retention, with women and differently-abled employees facing greater career progression barriers, leading to dissatisfaction and higher attrition rates (40).

Employee performance is another key organizational outcome that varies across demographic groups. It has been suggested that employees with extensive tenure and experience demonstrate higher performance levels due to accumulated knowledge and strategic expertise (41). However, it has been observed that entry-level employees may require additional training and mentorship to enhance their productivity. Performance differences have also been reported based on gender and age, with mid-career professionals often demonstrating peak productivity, while younger employees may struggle with workplace adaptation and task efficiency (42). Age has been found to influence employee performance depending on the nature of work, with evidence indicating that it impacts learning and enhances performance (43, 44). Older employees have also been reported to outperform younger ones in productivity and output (45, 46). Longer tenure has been linked to enhanced performance, greater psychological empowerment, and increased feelings of empowerment (47). International research has confirmed these patterns, with meta-analyses across countries showing strong links between age, tenure, and performance, while cross-cultural studies highlight that labor market structures

influence productivity differently in developed versus developing economies (48).

Despite the increasing emphasis on workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives, disparities in employee experiences and outcomes persist across different sociodemographic groups. Although progress and challenges in fostering inclusive workplaces have been highlighted globally, Indian IT organizations face unique cultural, structural, and demographic complexities that remain underexplored.

Research in the Indian IT sector has often examined gender diversity or attrition trends in isolation, but multiple sociodemographic dimensions such as hierarchical level, sexual orientation, tenure, and disability status and their combined impact on engagement, retention, and performance have rarely been studied together. Limited attention has also been given to how hierarchical differences shape burnout and turnover intentions, or how LGBTQ+ employees perceive inclusion in Indian workplaces. By addressing these gaps, this study provides an integrated, multi-dimensional analysis of how sociodemographic variables influence workplace outcomes in the Indian IT sector. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on workplace diversity and informs organizational strategies for fostering an equitable, engaged, and high-performing workforce.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design to examine the influence of socio-demographic variables on workplace inclusion, employee engagement, retention, and performance within the Indian IT industry. A cross-sectional approach allows for the collection of data at a single point in time from employees across various sociodemographic backgrounds, enabling a comparative analysis of the effects of study variables on different employee groups. To operationalize the key constructs, well-established and validated instruments were employed as outlined below.

Instrumentation

Participants were required to provide demographic information, including gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, hierarchical position, tenure, location, differently-abled status, and

social category. These variables allowed for subgroup analyses and help assess how inclusion, employee engagement, employee retention, and employee performance impact various sociodemographic groups differently. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, standardized and previously validated instruments were used to measure the key variables. Workplace outcomes were then measured using standardized instruments with demonstrated reliability and validity.

Workplace Inclusion Scale; WIS: This scale assessed employees' perceived inclusiveness within the organization. The WIS is an eight-item measure designed to assess an individual's perception of inclusion within their organization (49). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with total scores ranging from 8 to 40, where higher scores indicate greater perceived inclusion. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91, indicating a high degree of reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the uni-dimensionality of the scale, with all items exhibiting high factor loadings ($>.62$) on a single factor. Evidence for construct validity was provided by significant correlations between the WIS and theoretically related measures, including job satisfaction ($r = .796, p < .000$), racial acceptance ($r = .622, p < .000$), working together toward a goal ($r = .673, p < .000$), and emotional distress ($r = -.246, p < .000$).

ISA Engagement Scale: The Intellectual, Social, Affective (ISA) Engagement scale assessed employees' intellectual, social and affective engagement levels within the workplace (21). It is a 9-item measure designed to assess employee engagement across three dimensions: intellectual, social, and affective engagement. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with total scores ranging from 9 to 45. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91 for the overall scale, and .90, .92, and .94 for the intellectual, social, and affective engagement subscales, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the second-order structure of the scale, with the three facets loading strongly on a higher-order engagement factor (standardized factor loadings of .73 for intellectual engagement, .60 for social engagement, and .98 for affective

engagement). Evidence for construct validity was provided by significant correlations between the ISA Engagement Scale and theoretically related measures, including task performance ($r = .38, p < .01$), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) ($r = .31, p < .01$), and turnover intentions ($r = -.49, p < .01$).

Employee Motivation and Retention Scale:

Employee retention was assessed using the Employee Motivation and Retention Scale (34). For the purpose of this study, three dimensions of the scale were chosen to represent employee retention: burnout, loyalty, and turnover intention. Burnout, a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, was measured using a 10-item subscale. Items were negatively scored, such that responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree), with higher scores indicating lower levels of burnout (and thus higher retention). Loyalty, reflecting an employee's sense of commitment and attachment to the organization, was assessed with a 4-item subscale. Items were positively scored, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting greater employee loyalty and higher retention. Turnover intention, the likelihood that an employee will leave the organization, was measured using a 4-item subscale. Items were negatively scored, such that responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree), with higher scores indicating lower turnover intention and higher retention. The subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .91, .90, .92, and .94 for the Burnout, Turnover Intention, and Loyalty subscales. Evidence for construct validity was supported by significant correlations between the dimensions and theoretically related measures. Specifically, Burnout was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.796, p < .000$), Loyalty was positively correlated with organizational commitment ($r = .622, p < .000$), and Turnover Intention was negatively correlated with employee engagement ($r = -.49, p < .01$).

Employee Performance Scale: This scale assesses employee performance across three

dimensions: task performance, adaptive performance, and contextual performance (42). The scale comprises 23 items, with responses rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Task Performance (6 items) subscale measures an employee's proficiency in performing core job duties and responsibilities. Adaptive Performance (7 items) subscale assesses an employee's ability to adjust to changes in the workplace and handle non-routine situations. Contextual Performance (10 items) subscale measures an employee's contributions to the organizational environment that go beyond task requirements. The researchers reported strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .80 for the total scale, and subscale alphas ranging from .80 to .91 (46). Confirmatory factor analysis supported the three-factor structure of the scale. The scale also demonstrated adequate convergent and discriminant validity.

Participant Selection and Sampling

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across sociodemographic categories. Participants were recruited from IT companies across India, including multinational corporations, mid-sized firms, and startups. The inclusion criteria were employees working in the IT sector for at least one year, employees who have been exposed to D&I initiatives within their organizations and employees from various hierarchical levels, including entry-level, mid-management, and senior leadership. Data was collected via an online survey administered through secure survey platforms. The survey link was distributed through organizational HR departments, professional networks, and online forums. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary participation before providing consent. The target sample size was determined using power analysis to ensure statistical robustness. A total of 247 participants were surveyed. The demographic distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N = 247)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	119	48.2
	Female	127	51.4
	Missing	1	0.4
Age	21-29	72	29.1
	30-39	75	30.4
	40-49	54	21.9
	50-59	28	11.3
	60+	18	7.3
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	243	98.4
	Homosexual/Bisexual	4	1.6
Religion	Hinduism	213	86.2
	Sikhism	8	3.2
	Islam	7	2.8
	Jainism	6	2.4
	Christianity	3	1.2
	Humanity	4	1.6
	None	2	0.8
	Atheist	1	0.4
	Buddhism	1	0.4
	NOTA	1	0.4
	Spiritual	1	0.4
Hierarchy Level	Entry Level	36	14.6
	Junior Management	35	14.2
	Middle Management	72	29.1
	Senior Management	54	21.9
	Leadership & Executive	50	20.2
Differently Abled Status	Yes	6	2.4
	No	241	97.6
Tenure	Less than 5 years	155	62.8
	6-15 years	53	21.5
	16-25 years	18	7.3
	More than 25 years	21	8.5
Category	General	234	94.7
	OBC	9	3.6
	SC	2	0.8
	ST	2	0.8

The sample comprised 247 employees from the Indian IT industry, with a nearly equal gender distribution of 119 males (48.2%) and 127 females (51.4%), while one participant (0.4%) did not specify their gender. Participants represented diverse age groups, with 29.1% aged 21–29 years, 30.4% aged 30–39 years, 21.9% aged 40–49 years, 11.3% aged 50–59 years, and 7.3% aged 60 years or older. In terms of sexual orientation, 98.4%

identified as heterosexual, while 1.6% identified as homosexual or bisexual. The majority of participants adhered to Hinduism (86.2%), followed by Sikhism (3.2%), Islam (2.8%), Jainism (2.4%), and Christianity (1.2%), with smaller representations from Buddhism, atheism, spiritual affiliations, and those selecting "None" or "Humanity." Hierarchical distribution indicated that 14.6% were at the entry level, 14.2% in junior

management, 29.1% in middle management, 21.9% in senior management, and 20.2% in leadership or executive positions. The majority (62.8%) had less than five years of tenure, while 21.5% had 6–15 years, 7.3% had 16–25 years, and 8.5% had more than 25 years of experience. Participants were geographically distributed across various Indian states, with the highest representation from Haryana (39.3%) and Delhi (22.7%), followed by Karnataka (8.1%), Maharashtra (6.5%), and Uttar Pradesh (6.5%), among others. Regarding social category, 94.7% belonged to the general category, 3.6% to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 0.8% each to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and scale scores. To examine group differences, ANOVA was conducted to test mean differences across sociodemographic categories, followed by multiple regression to identify predictors of workplace outcomes. This combination of analyses enabled both comparative and predictive insights into how demographic factors shape inclusion, engagement, retention, and performance.

Results

The significant findings are reported in the results section below.

Analysis of Variance across Hierarchical Levels

The ANOVA results found significant differences across hierarchical levels and how they influence employee perceptions of inclusion, engagement, retention, and performance in the Indian IT industry (Table 2). By analysing differences across entry-level, junior management, middle

management, senior management, and leadership roles, the research seeks to understand how organizational position influences workplace inclusion, engagement, retention and performance. The one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences across hierarchical levels for all study variables. Inclusion scores significantly differed across groups, $F(4, 242) = 11.16, p < .001$, with mean scores increasing progressively from entry-level employees ($M = 27.86, SD = 6.15$) to leadership roles ($M = 35.48, SD = 4.57$). Employee engagement also varied significantly, $F(4, 242) = 8.95, p < .001$, with employees in leadership roles reporting the highest engagement levels ($M = 31.70, SD = 3.59$) and entry-level employees the lowest ($M = 26.83, SD = 3.52$). Employee retention measured with sub-dimension of burnout was significantly different across levels, $F(4, 242) = 3.19, p = .014$, with senior management reporting the least burnout ($M = 16.09, SD = 7.56$) compared to entry-level employees ($M = 21.31, SD = 8.89$). Turnover intention, the sub-dimension of employee retention, also significantly differed, $F(4, 242) = 16.18, p < .001$, with a decreasing trend from entry-level ($M = 14.08, SD = 2.83$) to leadership positions ($M = 8.38, SD = 4.16$). Employee loyalty scores of employee retention scale significantly increased with hierarchical level, $F(4, 242) = 8.20, p < .001$, with leadership employees scoring the highest ($M = 17.10, SD = 3.45$). Finally, Employee performance was significantly higher in leadership roles ($M = 105.86, SD = 9.09$) compared to entry-level employees ($M = 89.69, SD = 10.55$), $F(4, 242) = 12.55, p < .001$. Summarizing, employees at higher hierarchical levels experience greater inclusion, engagement, loyalty, and performance, while those at lower levels report higher burnout and turnover intentions.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA Results for Inclusion, Employee Engagement, Retention, and Performance across Hierarchical Levels

Variable	Hierarchical Level	N	M	SD	F	p
Workplace Inclusion	Entry Level	36	27.86	6.15	11.16	.000
	Junior Management	35	30.54	5.87		
	Middle Management	72	32.04	5.93		
	Senior Management	54	34.02	6.22		
	Leadership & Executive	50	35.48	4.57		
Employee Engagement	Entry Level	36	26.83	3.52	8.95	.000
	Junior Management	35	29.14	4.10		

Employee Retention (Burnout)	Middle Management	72	29.58	4.70	3.19	.014
	Senior Management	54	31.02	3.93		
	Leadership & Executive	50	31.70	3.59		
	Entry Level	36	21.31	8.89		
	Junior Management	35	20.43	10.17		
Employee Retention (Turnover intention)	Middle Management	72	20.71	9.08	16.18	.000
	Senior Management	54	16.09	7.56		
	Leadership & Executive	50	17.82	8.63		
	Entry Level	36	14.08	2.83		
	Junior Management	35	14.34	3.76		
Employee Retention (Loyalty)	Middle Management	72	11.85	4.57	8.20	.000
	Senior Management	54	10.59	4.07		
	Leadership & Executive	50	8.38	4.16		
	Entry Level	36	13.11	3.10		
	Junior Management	35	14.43	2.78		
Employee Performance	Middle Management	72	15.07	3.14	12.55	.000
	Senior Management	54	15.43	3.86		
	Leadership & Executive	50	17.10	3.45		
	Entry Level	36	89.69	10.55		
	Junior Management	35	100.09	9.92		
	Middle Management	72	99.50	11.44		
	Senior Management	54	100.91	10.94		
	Leadership & Executive	50	105.86	9.09		

Analysis of Variance across Sexual Orientation

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in workplace outcomes based on sexual orientation. This study found that sexual orientation significantly influences workplace inclusion and engagement, with homosexual/bisexual employees experiencing lower levels of both (Table 3). However, no significant differences were found in burnout, turnover intentions, loyalty or performance. The results indicate that workplace inclusion was significantly lower among individuals identifying as homosexual or bisexual ($M = 25.50$, $SD = 11.27$) compared to heterosexual employees ($M = 32.46$, $SD = 6.09$), $F(1, 246) = 4.99$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .020$.

Similarly, employee engagement was significantly lower for homosexual/bisexual employees ($M = 25.00$, $SD = 11.34$) than for their heterosexual counterparts ($M = 29.94$, $SD = 4.13$), $F(1, 246) = 5.21$, $p = .023$, $\eta^2 = .021$. However, despite these statistically significant differences, the results should be interpreted with caution due to the highly unequal sample sizes ($N = 243$ for heterosexuals, $N = 4$ for homosexual/bisexual individuals). The small sample size in the homosexual/bisexual group likely inflates variability, reducing the robustness of findings and increasing the risk of Type I errors. Additionally, effect sizes ($\eta^2 < .03$) suggest only small practical significance, further limiting the generalizability of these results.

Table 3: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Variables by Sexual Orientation

Variable	Sexual Orientation	N	M	SD	F	p
Workplace Inclusion	Heterosexual	243	32.46	6.09	4.99	.026*
	Homosexual/Bisexual	4	25.50	11.27		
Employee Engagement	Heterosexual	243	29.94	4.13	5.21	.023*
	Homosexual/Bisexual	4	25.00	11.34		

Multiple Regression Analyses across Demographic Variables

Multiple regression analyses (Table 4) were conducted to examine the predictive role of demographic factors (gender, age, tenure, hierarchical level, and sexual orientation) on workplace outcomes. For workplace inclusion, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .287$, $F(5, 241) = 19.40$, $p < .001$, indicating that demographic variables explained 28.7% of the variance. Gender ($B = 6.22$, $SE = 0.99$, $t = 6.32$, $p < .001$), age ($B = 2.34$, $SE = 0.54$, $t = 4.33$, $p < .001$), and hierarchy ($B = -0.85$, $SE = 0.38$, $t = -2.28$, $p = .02$) significantly predicted inclusion. For employee engagement, the model was also significant, $R^2 = .111$, $F(5, 241) = 5.99$, $p < .001$. Tenure positively predicted engagement ($B = 0.26$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 2.28$, $p = .02$), whereas sexual orientation negatively predicted engagement ($B = -1.71$, $SE = 0.67$, $t = -2.55$, $p = .01$). For employee loyalty (retention sub

dimension), the regression was significant, $R^2 = .156$, $F(5, 241) = 8.90$, $p < .001$. Age was a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.28$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 2.38$, $p = .02$), while tenure showed a marginal positive effect ($B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 1.80$, $p = .07$). For turnover intention, the model reached significance, $R^2 = .061$, $F(5, 241) = 3.16$, $p = .01$. Age negatively predicted turnover ($B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -3.23$, $p < .001$), indicating younger employees reported stronger intentions to leave. For burnout, the regression was significant, $R^2 = .106$, $F(5, 241) = 5.71$, $p < .001$. Hierarchy negatively predicted burnout ($B = -0.52$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -3.66$, $p < .001$), suggesting that lower-level employees experienced greater burnout than those at higher levels. In contrast, the regression model for employee performance was not significant, $R^2 = .028$, $F(5, 241) = 1.39$, $p = .229$, indicating that demographic factors did not significantly predict performance.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Workplace Outcomes from Demographic Variables (N = 247)

Dependent Variable	Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Workplace Inclusion	Intercept	-0.25	4.61	-0.06	0.96
	Gender	6.22	0.99	6.32	<.001
	Age	2.34	0.54	4.33	<.001
	Hierarchy	-0.85	0.38	-2.28	0.02
	Model Fit	$R^2 = .287$	$F(5,241)=19.40$	—	<.001
Employee Engagement	Intercept	8.64	0.79	10.99	<.001
	Tenure	0.26	0.12	2.28	0.02
	Sexual Orientation	-1.71	0.67	-2.55	0.01
	Model Fit	$R^2 = .111$	$F(5,241) = 5.99$	—	<.001
Employee Retention (Loyalty)	Intercept	9.31	1.07	8.68	<.001
	Age	0.28	0.12	2.38	0.02
	Tenure	0.31	0.17	1.8	0.07
	Model Fit	$R^2 = .156$	$F(5,241) = 8.90$	—	<.001
Employee Retention (Turnover intention)	Intercept	12.45	0.65	19.23	<.001
	Age	-0.23	0.07	-3.23	0
	Tenure	-0.14	0.09	-1.56	0.12
	Model Fit	$R^2 = .061$	$F(5,241) = 3.16$	—	0.01
Employee Retention (Burnout)	Intercept	20.22	1.42	14.2	<.001
	Hierarchy	-0.52	0.14	-3.66	<.001
	Model Fit	$R^2 = .106$	$F(5,241) = 5.71$	—	<.001

Discussion

The results highlight the substantial impact of hierarchical levels on key workplace outcomes such as inclusion, engagement, burnout, turnover intentions, and performance in the Indian IT

sector. Senior employees reported significantly higher levels of inclusion, engagement, and performance, whereas entry-level professionals experienced greater burnout and turnover risk. These disparities align with existing literature, which underscores the influence of workplace

structures, autonomy, and career progression on employee well-being and organizational commitment (36). Regression findings further supported this pattern, showing that hierarchical level significantly predicted inclusion and burnout, with lower-level employees reporting less inclusion and more burnout than their senior counterparts.

Higher workplace inclusion at senior hierarchical levels suggests that leadership roles offer greater psychological safety, decision-making authority, and mentorship opportunities, which in turn foster a stronger sense of belonging (16). This finding supports social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive self-esteem from their organizational roles and status (50). Conversely, lower inclusion at junior levels indicates a lack of empowerment and limited strategic involvement, leading to diminished workplace belonging and disengagement. Employee engagement followed a similar trend, consistent with self-determination theory (51), which argues that autonomy and competence enhance intrinsic motivation. As employees progress hierarchically, they gain increased control over their tasks and responsibilities, leading to greater engagement and job satisfaction. These patterns can also be interpreted through Hofstede's cultural dimensions, particularly power distance, which is pronounced in Indian workplaces (52, 53). Employees at lower hierarchical levels may accept unequal power distribution as a cultural norm, but this simultaneously limits their sense of inclusion and engagement. In contrast, those in senior roles benefit from authority and recognition, which align with higher engagement and performance outcomes. The regression analysis reinforced this interpretation: hierarchy significantly predicted both engagement and burnout, underlining how structural position shapes both positive and negative workplace experiences.

The findings on burnout and turnover intentions underscore the structural and cultural challenges prevalent in the Indian IT industry. Elevated burnout at entry-level positions is often associated with high workloads, job insecurity, and career ambiguity, factors commonly reported in IT workplaces (54). High turnover intentions among junior employees suggest that early-career professionals struggle with workplace expectations, job satisfaction, and professional

growth opportunities, which contributes to disengagement and attrition (19). Regression results corroborated this, showing that age was a significant negative predictor of turnover intention, with younger employees more likely to report leaving intentions, while loyalty was positively associated with age. In contrast, the significant reduction in turnover intentions at senior levels suggests that long-term commitment strengthens as employees gain stability, recognition, and strategic influence within the organization. Equity Theory further explains these dynamics: employees compare their inputs (effort, skills) with outcomes (recognition, growth, rewards) (55). Entry-level employees may perceive inequity when their high workloads are not matched by rewards or autonomy, resulting in burnout and higher turnover intentions. Conversely, senior employees often perceive fairness in the balance between their contributions and organizational rewards, leading to stronger retention and commitment.

Performance differences across hierarchical levels align with human capital theory, which posits that experience, expertise, and role complexity contribute to higher productivity (41). Senior employees, who possess greater industry knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and strategic oversight, naturally exhibit higher performance levels (36). Entry-level employees, on the other hand, may still be in the process of navigating organizational demands and developing competencies essential for high performance. Interestingly, the regression model predicting performance was not significant, suggesting that demographic factors such as age, gender, tenure, hierarchy, and sexual orientation did not explain performance variance. This reinforces the possibility that performance is better accounted for by job-related skills and role expectations rather than demographic characteristics.

Additionally, the findings indicate that workplace inclusion and employee engagement significantly differ based on sexual orientation, with homosexual/bisexual employees reporting lower levels of both. These results align with previous research suggesting that LGBTQ+ employees often experience reduced workplace belonging due to implicit biases, exclusionary practices, or lack of representation in leadership (15). Regression

analyses supported this vulnerability, with sexual orientation emerging as a significant negative predictor of engagement. However, the lack of significant differences in burnout, turnover intentions, and performance suggests that while LGBTQ+ employees may feel less included and engaged, their retention rates and job performance remain comparable to their heterosexual counterparts. From a cultural lens, Hofstede's masculinity-femininity dimension may also be relevant, as Indian workplaces are often characterized by competitive, performance-driven environments that may not fully support minority identities (53). This contrasts with findings from more egalitarian cultures, suggesting the need for cross-cultural comparative research. These finding contrasts with some international studies, which have documented higher turnover rates and performance barriers for LGBTQ+ employees (31), suggesting that further research is needed to understand the unique workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ professionals in India.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of sociodemographic factors in shaping workplace experiences within the Indian IT sector. Hierarchical level emerged as a strong determinant, with senior employees reporting higher inclusion, engagement, loyalty, and performance, while entry-level professionals faced greater burnout and turnover intentions. Regression analyses further confirmed that hierarchy predicted inclusion and burnout, age predicted loyalty and reduced turnover intentions, and sexual orientation negatively predicted engagement, though performance was not explained by demographic factors. Together, these results suggest that structural position, career stage, and minority identity critically shape perceptions of fairness, belonging, and well-being at work, consistent with Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Equity Theory. While limited by unequal group sizes, especially among LGBTQ+ employees, the study underscores the need for organizations to strengthen inclusive practices, mentorship structures, and equity-driven policies to reduce disparities, enhance engagement, and build resilient, high-performing workplaces.

Practical Implications

The findings carry important implications for IT firms, HR managers, and policymakers. For organizations, structured mentorship and leadership development initiatives can help reduce burnout and turnover at junior levels by fostering career clarity and psychological safety. HR managers should design evidence-based diversity and inclusion programs that specifically target vulnerable groups, including entry-level professionals and LGBTQ+ employees, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and recognition. Legislators and policymakers can also use these insights to strengthen labor regulations and encourage industry-wide adoption of fair appraisal systems, inclusive hiring, and anti-discrimination safeguards. By aligning organizational practices with the study's evidence, stakeholders can foster more engaged, loyal, and productive workforces that contribute to both business competitiveness and broader social equity.

Abbreviations

D&I: Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, HR: Human Resource managers, ISA Scale: Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale, IT: Information Technology firms, LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, OCB: Organizational Citizenship Behavior, WIS: Workplace Inclusion Scale.

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Author Contributions

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

Help of AI has been taken in improving the language of the paper, paraphrasing and matching

the referencing. All the references have been and cited with original resources.

Ethics Approval

Ethical review and approval were not applicable. All participants provided informed consent, and their data have been anonymized entirely. The ethical letter was issued by the office of doctoral programs to collect the data via letter number CDP/MRIIRS/SLM/2019/E-018.

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