

Green HRM practices and organizational sustainability in the sugar industry: Evidence from employee-based empirical analysis

Rajni¹, Dr Nisha Singh²

¹Research scholar; Faculty of Management and Commerce; Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, 250005; Email id: panwarrajni501@gmail.com; Orchid id: 0009-0005-3047-7779

²Associate professor ; Faculty of Management and Commerce; Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, 250005; Email id: nisha.su201600077@subharti.co; Orchid id: 0009-0000-1250-4247

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Green human resource management (Green HRM) has emerged as a central mechanism through which industrial organizations translate environmental commitments into workforce-level action, yet empirical evidence from resource- and energy-intensive agro-industrial settings such as the sugar industry remains limited. This study examined the relationship between institute-level green practices, Green HRM practices, and organizational sustainability outcomes among 400 employees drawn from sugar-industry organizations. A cross-sectional survey design was used, and data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire measuring institute green practices, Green HRM practices, sustainability outcomes, and demographic characteristics. Data were analyzed using reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparisons, and hierarchical multiple regression. Green HRM practices were strongly and positively associated with organizational sustainability outcomes ($r = .830$, $p < .001$) and remained the dominant predictor in the regression model ($\beta = .834$, $p < .001$), explaining an additional 68.7% of variance beyond demographic controls. Institute-level green practices showed no significant association with sustainability outcomes. Gender, age, education, and experience produced selective, construct-specific differences. The findings indicate that employee-facing Green HRM functions, rather than institute-level infrastructure alone, are the primary lever for organizational sustainability in the sugar industry.

Keywords: Green HRM, organizational sustainability, sugar industry, sustainable HRM, green practices, environmental sustainability

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Introduction

Green human resource management is a practice of HRM in which human resource management policies and practices are integrated with the

environment goals of the organization and the responsibility of environment is made a part of HRM policies such as recruitment, training,

performance management and reward systems (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). Due to the increasing pressure on organizations to prove their environmental friendly policies besides economic performance, Green HRM has evolved from a peripheral to a strategic function influencing employees' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability (Jabbour & Santos, 2008). The sustainability of the organization, based on the three pillars of the triple-bottom-line (TBL) (Elkington, 1998) which consist of environmental, social and economic dimensions, is highly dependent on whether the green values are internalized and practised in the daily work of the workforce.

The theoretical basis between Green HRM and sustainability is based on the premise that HR systems influence employee capability, motivation and opportunity to engage in environmentally responsible behavior (Ren, Tang, & Jackson, 2018). The combination of an environment where recruitment is focused on sustainable-oriented candidates, training to develop green competencies, and appraisal and reward mechanisms to reinforce green behavior leads to more sustainable oriented workforce (Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017). In the industrial organization, Green HRM can consist of four main components: green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management, green rewards and employee involvement mechanisms (Tang, Chen, Jiang, Paillé, & Jia, 2018). These practices, in manufacturing and agro-processing companies like the sugar sector, interface with the physical infrastructure of environmental management, which includes institutes-level infrastructure recycling programs, energy-saving equipment and IT/electronic equipment maintenance policies (Yong, Yusliza, & Fawehinmi, 2020).

The sugar industry has high water and energy consumption, has significant waste by-products (bagasse, molasses, effluent) and has seasonal, labor-intensive operations, which translates to specific opportunities and constraints to embed Green HRM (Roscoe, Subramanian, Jabbour, & Chong, 2019). If sustainability is only pursued at the institute level, it will not result in sustainability consequences without HR practices that directly involve employees. Sugar processing organizations face environmental pressures such as effluent

management, energy intensity and disposal of waste, as well as social sustainability issues, such as safety in the workplace, the instability of seasonal employment and community relations (Zaid, Jaaron, & Bon, 2018).

Organizational sustainability in this context thus demands attention to resource efficiency, employee's well-being and long term organizational sustainability and resilience (Amrutha & Geetha, 2020). There is increasing evidence of the relationship between the implementation of Green HRM practices and the improvements in environmental performance (Kim et al., 2019; Paillé et al., 2014), employees' green behavior (Kim et al., 2019), and organizational outcomes (Paillé et al., 2014). Guerci, Longoni and Luzzini (2016) discovered that Green HRM acts as a mediator between external stakeholder pressure and actual environmental performance and Pham, Tučková and Jabbour (2019) uncovered that Green HRM can influence employees' discretionary pro-environmental behaviour.

The implication of this is that Green HRM serves as a means by which the organization's intent for the environment becomes a reality, which is organizational sustainability. Even with the above literature, there is a low level of empirical evidence from the sugar industry and comparative studies and few studies differentiate the effect of institute level green infrastructure from Green HRM practices that face the employees (Ahmad, 2015). This study tries to fill such a void by conducting an empirical comparison of both dimensions in the same sample from the sugar industry and provides a theoretical interpretation as to which lever is more likely to predict sustainability, and gives a practical guidance to sugar industry's managers when designing green HR interventions.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The study pursued four objectives:

To evaluate the implementation of institute level Green practices, Green HRM practices and Organizational Sustainability of the employees in sugar industry

To explore the links between these constructs to make a comparison of Green HRM practices and sustainability outcomes between the demographic groups

to evaluate the contribution of the Green HRM

practices, controlling for demographic characteristics, towards the prediction of organizational sustainability

Based on the study objectives and the theoretical relationship between Green HRM practices and organizational sustainability, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Institute-level green practices are positively and significantly associated with organizational sustainability outcomes in the sugar industry.

H2: Green HRM practices are positively and significantly associated with organizational sustainability outcomes in the sugar industry.

H3: Green practices and organizational sustainability outcomes differ significantly according to gender.

H4: Green practices and organizational sustainability outcomes differ significantly across age groups.

H5: Green HRM practices and organizational sustainability outcomes differ significantly according to educational qualification.

H6: Green HRM practices and organizational sustainability outcomes differ significantly across levels of industry experience.

H7: Green HRM practices significantly predict organizational sustainability outcomes beyond the contribution of demographic characteristics.

2. Materials and Methods

A cross sectional, quantity research design, within sugar industry organisations, was used. Employees in operational, administrative and managerial positions were included in the study population of which 400 respondents were selected by using a structured survey which was conducted on-site. The participants were selected by convenience and stratified sampling based on their departments and experience, where an effort was made to get the participants across the age, gender, education and tenure groups.

The data was gathered through a structured and self-administered questionnaire that included four sections: general and background data (age, gender, education, industry experience, knowledge on environmental sustainability, and readiness and participation towards Green HRM); a five item scale on Institute level green practices (e.g. recycling, use of energy saving products, use of IT/electronic

equipment maintenance policy); a twenty item scale on Green HRM practices from an executive perspective (green recruitment, training, performance management, rewards and employee involvement) and a twenty item scale on organizational sustainability outcomes (financial, environmental and social).

For all the construct items, 5-point scales were used. Assessment of content validity was done by expert and internal consistency was carried out using Cronbach's alpha. Ethical concerns were informed consent, voluntary participation and assurance of the confidentiality of responses. The analysis of the statistics was carried out sequentially. Data screening was done on completeness as well as outlier data with standardized (z) scores. The sample was described using frequencies and descriptive analysis. Internal consistency of each scale was performed using reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha). The factor structure underlying the data was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis (principal component extraction, varimax rotation, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test).

The scores for the composite constructs were described and normality was tested using skewness, kurtosis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Pearson Correlations were used to investigate the bivariate relationships between the institute level green practices, Green HRM practices and organisational sustainability. Demographic differences were explored using independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA (Tukey post-hoc). Finally, incremental predictive value of Green HRM practices and institute-level green practices was tested by performing hierarchical multiple regression analysis, which was then followed by the collinearity and residual diagnostics. IBM SPSS Statistics was used for all analyses with a level of significance of $\alpha = .05$.

3. Results

3.1 Data Screening and Respondent Characteristics

There were no missing values for any of the 400 individual observations for any of the demographic or item-level variables. Multivariate outliers were not found to justify removing them from the data set since none of the standardized scores exceeded ($|z| > 3.29$). The majority of the sample were male

(74.5%), graduate (85.0%), and aged between 29-38 (45.8%), with 6-10 years of work experience in the industry being the largest group (39.5%) as shown in Table 1. While the majority of respondents (59.5%) knew the concept of environmental

sustainability, only 16.3% said that they engage in Green HRM “sometimes” with the remaining 83.8% engaging rarely indicating that there is a gap between the environmental sustainability concept and actively engaging in it through Green HRM.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics, Environmental Awareness, and Green HRM Readiness of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age Group	18–28 years	55	13.8
	29–38 years	183	45.8
	39–48 years	108	27.0
	49–58 years	30	7.5
	58 years and above	24	6.0
Gender	Male	298	74.5
	Female	102	25.5
Education Qualification	Graduate	340	85.0
	Postgraduate	60	15.0
Industry Experience	0–5 years	50	12.5
	6–10 years	158	39.5
	11–15 years	132	33.0
	16–20 years	60	15.0
Environmental Sustainability Awareness	Yes	238	59.5
	No	162	40.5
Readiness / Participation toward Green HRM	Sometimes	65	16.3
	Rarely	335	83.8

3.2 Measurement Properties and Descriptive Statistics

All scales had very good internal consistency: the 5 item institute-level green practices ($\alpha = .795$), the 20 item Green HRM practices (viewed from executives) ($\alpha = .969$), and the 20 item organizational sustainability outcomes ($\alpha = .935$); and the 40 item full pool ($\alpha = .974$). The 5 item institute-green-practices scale was appropriate for exploratory factor analysis (KMO = .675; Bartlett's $\chi^2(10) = 763.97$, $p < .001$) and two factors were extracted which accounted for 76.02% of variance.

The 40 item pool (combined Green HRM and sustainability) yielded 9 components with eigenvalues over 1.0 which explained 93.98% of variance, but the varimax rotation did not converge; thus, composite mean scores were used for subsequent analysis, based on the a priori item blocks (Green HRM practices and sustainability outcomes).

The composite descriptive statistics with 5-point scale is found in Table 2, which indicated that Green HRM Practices had the highest mean ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.14$), Institute-level Green Practices (M

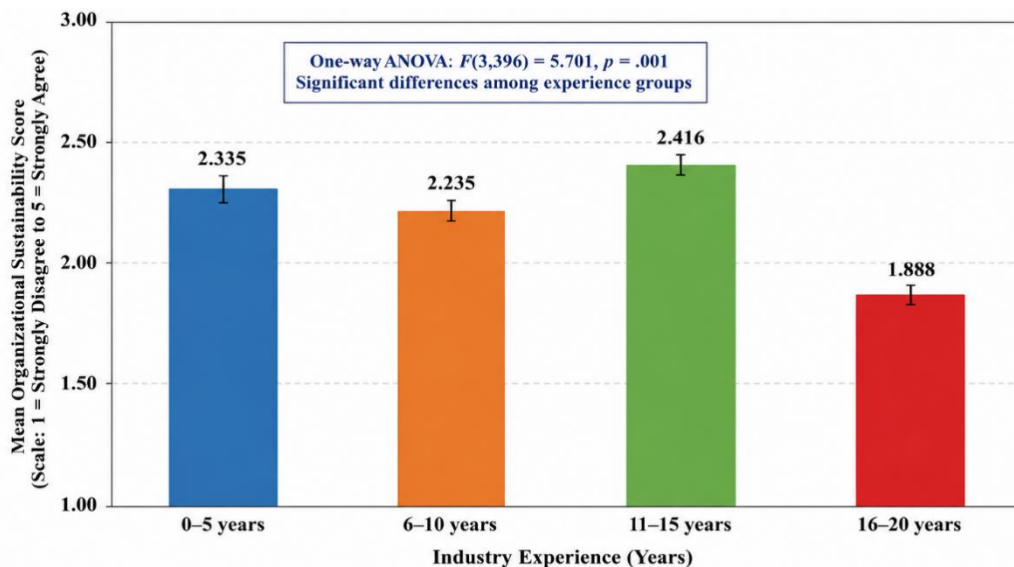
= 2.60, SD = 1.01) and Organizational Sustainability Outcomes ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.85$) showing moderate to low level of overall engagement. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were significant for each of the three composites, suggesting lack of strict normality which is not unusual in composite scores based

upon Likert items at this sample size and is also reasonably robust to the large N , while normality diagnostics showed mild skewness and kurtosis ($|values| < 1$) for all three composites. Figure 1 displays the distribution of the three principal constructs.

Table 2. Reliability, Factor-Analytic Indicators, and Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs

Construct	Items	α	M	SD	Skew / Kurt
Institute-level Green Practices	5	.795	2.60	1.01	.36 / $-.81$
Green HRM Practices (Executive)	20	.969	2.74	1.14	.15 / $-.98$
Organizational Sustainability Outcomes	20	.935	2.26	0.85	.31 / $-.83$
Overall 40-item scale	40	.974	—	—	—

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. KMO/Bartlett computed for the 5-item institute-green-practices scale ($KMO = .675$, $\chi^2(10) = 763.97$, $p < .001$).



Note. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error of the mean.

Organizational Sustainability measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Figure 1. Mean Organizational Sustainability Scores by Industry Experience

3.3 Correlation Between Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability

Green HRM practices were strongly positively correlated to sustainability outcomes of the organization ($r = .830$, $p < .001$), meaning that the

more Green HRM activity that is done with employees, the more sustainability outcomes are achieved. However, institute level green practices was not significantly related to Green HRM practices ($r = -.026$, $p = .601$) and organizational

sustainability outcomes ($r = -.043$, $p = .387$). This pattern indicates that, within this sample, physical/infrastructural green measures and employee facing Green HRM practices are largely

independent from each other and that sustainability outcomes are related to HR practice rather than just infrastructure. Inter-correlations of the three composite constructs are given in

Table 3. Correlations Among the Principal Study Constructs

Construct	1	2	3
1. Institute-level Green Practices	—	-.026	-.043
2. Green HRM Practices (Executive)		—	.830**
3. Organizational Sustainability Outcomes			—

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

3.4 Comparative Analysis Across Demographic Groups

One-way ANOVA (Table 4) and independent-samples t-tests showed some selective demographic differences. Green HRM practices were found to be significantly different between male and female employees ($M = 2.26$ vs. 2.20 ; $t(398) = 1.02$, $p = .011$), while institute-level green practices were found to be significantly higher for female employees than male employees ($M = 2.79$ vs. 2.54 ; $t(398) = -2.13$, $p = .033$). Overall differences across the institutes by age were significant in green practices, $F(4,395) = 2.47$, $p = .044$ (Tukey post hoc comparisons revealed that the 58 and above group

was significantly higher than the 18-28 group and 49-58 group) and in organisational sustainability, $F(4,395) = 2.88$, $p = .023$, but no pairwise comparison was significant after correction.

Education was the only factor that differed in the Green HRM practices, as the postgraduates scored higher than graduates ($M = 3.04$ vs. 2.69), $F(1, 398) = 4.68$, $p = .031$. There was a significant difference in organizational sustainability by industry experience, $F(3, 396) = 5.70$, $p = .001$, with the 16-20 year group having the lowest scores, which were significantly lower than the 0-5, 6-10 and 11-15 year groups.

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Green HRM Practices and Organizational Sustainability Across Demographic Groups

Demographic Variable	Institute-Level Green Practices	Green HRM Practices (Executive)	Organizational Sustainability
Gender (t , $df = 398$)	$t = -2.13$, $p = .033^*$ ($F > M$)	$t = 0.83$, $p = .410$	$t = 2.55$, $p = .011^*$ ($M > F$)
Age (F , $df = 4,395$)	$F = 2.47$, $p = .044^*$	$F = 1.50$, $p = .201$	$F = 2.88$, $p = .023^*$
Education (F , $df = 1,398$)	$F = 2.35$, $p = .126$	$F = 4.68$, $p = .031^*$ ($PG > Grad$)	$F = 0.56$, $p = .454$
Experience (F , $df = 3,396$)	$F = 0.57$, $p = .638$	$F = 2.46$, $p = .062$	$F = 5.70$, $p = .001^{**}$ (16–20 yrs lowest)

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

3.5 Hierarchical Regression and Regression Diagnostics

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to see if Green HRM practices and institute-level green practices were able to predict organisational

sustainability over and above the demographic factors (Table 5, Figure 2). However, none of the demographic variables (age, gender, education, experience) in Model 1 were significant predictors of organizational sustainability, $R = .137$, $R^2 = .019$,

adjusted $R^2 = .009$, $F(4, 395) = 1.88$, $p = .113$. Adding Green HRM practices and institute-level green practices in Model 2 produced a substantial and significant improvement, $R = .840$, $R^2 = .706$, adjusted $R^2 = .701$, $\Delta R^2 = .687$, $F \text{ change}(2, 393) = 458.39$, $p < .001$. In the final model, Green HRM practices emerged as the dominant predictor ($B = .622$, $\beta = .834$, $t = 30.26$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.582, .662]), while institute-level green practices remained non-significant ($\beta = -.015$, $p = .577$). In Model 2, none of the other demographic controls were significant except for education, which had a positive effect ($\beta = .105$; $p = .007$). To check the multicollinearity, the tolerance and VIF of the substantive predictors were checked in the regression diagnostics, which indicated that

there was no multicollinearity concern, though age and experience had comparatively higher VIF values (7.54 and 7.66, respectively), as expected to show some overlap between age and tenure. The Durbin-Watson statistic (0.106) was well outside of the conventional range, suggesting that there was positive autocorrelation between the residuals, which most plausibly could be due to the fact that the survey was administered in a structured (blocked) fashion and not necessarily to any real time-series dependence; special caution should be used in interpreting the standard errors. Standardised Residuals were between -2.42 and 2.31, and did not suggest any extreme influential cases.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Organizational Sustainability

Predictor	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 1 β	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 2 β [95% CI]
(Constant)	2.563 (.416)	—	.153 (.245)	—
Age	-.114 (.114)	-.136	-.095 (.063)	-.114 [-.22, .03]
Gender	-.205 (.159)	-.105	-.125 (.088)	-.064 [-.30, .05]
Education	-.016 (.165)	-.007	.249 (.091)**	.105 [.07, .43]
Experience	.110 (.130)	.116	.044 (.072)	.046 [-.10, .19]
Green HRM Practices	—	—	.622 (.021)***	.834 [.58, .66]
Institute Green Practices	—	—	-.013 (.023)	-.015 [-.06, .03]
R^2 / Adj. R^2	.019 / .009		.706 / .701	
ΔR^2 / F change	.019 / 1.88		.687*** / 458.39	

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Model 2 predictors entered simultaneously after demographic controls.

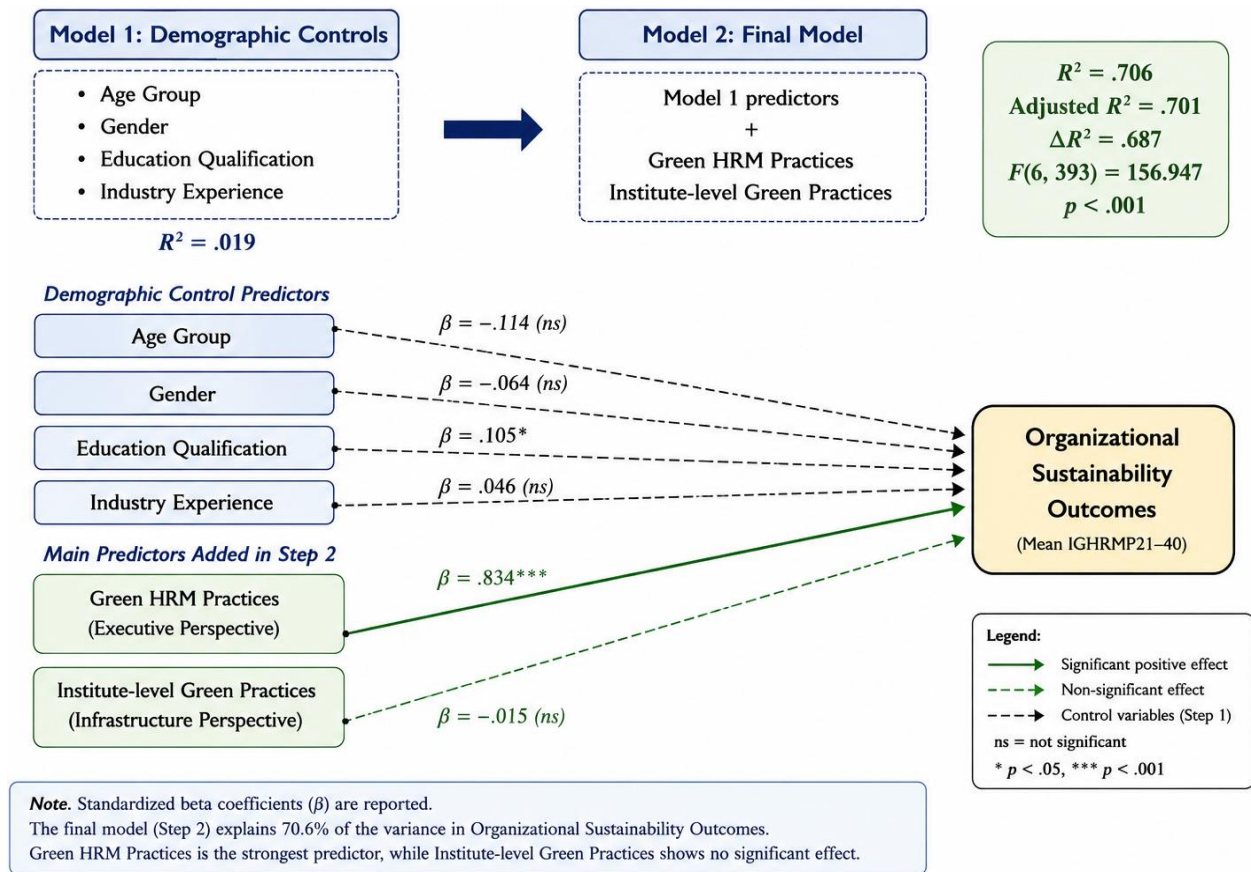


Figure 2. Final Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Organizational Sustainability

3.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 summarizes the results of the statistical tests of the seven hypotheses of this study. Overall, the pattern of results strongly supports the central hypothesis that the key to organizational sustainability outcomes is the Green HRM practices employed and not the level of infrastructure provided in an institution, and that the demographic-difference hypotheses received partial (construct-specific) support.

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

H	Hypothesis	Result
H1	Institute-level green practices are positively related to organizational sustainability.	Not supported
H2	Green HRM practices are positively related to organizational sustainability.	Supported
H3	Gender differences exist in green practices and sustainability outcomes.	Partially supported
H4	Age differences exist in green practices and sustainability outcomes.	Partially supported
H5	Education differences exist in Green HRM practices and sustainability outcomes.	Partially supported
H6	Industry-experience differences exist in Green HRM practices and sustainability outcomes.	Partially supported

H7	Green HRM practices significantly predict organizational sustainability beyond demographic controls.	Supported
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4.

Discussion

4.1 Principal Findings and Status of Green HRM

In general, the mean scores for the institute-level green practices, Green HRM practices and sustainability outcomes were relatively around the mid-point of the response scale, while majority of the respondents indicated their level of involvement with Green HRM as "rare", even though a majority of the respondents said they had general awareness of the environment. Such a disconnect between awareness and actual practice has been found in other contexts in the Green HRM literature, and indicates that awareness alone is not enough to directly bring about sustainability if measures are not taken in HR system design (Yong et al., 2020).

4.2 Green HRM and Organizational Sustainability

The study's main empirical finding is that there is a strong positive correlation between the Green HRM practices and the organisational sustainability outcomes ($r = .830$). This resonates with theoretical explanations where Green HRM is seen as a means to the end, the end being the actual employee behaviour, which in turn is expected to have an impact on the organisation's performance (Ren et al., 2018; Dumont et al., 2017). Interestingly, the strength of the association in the current sample is significant compared to many previous studies and in the sugar industry context (where infrastructure at institute level is relatively underdeveloped) HR-driven mechanisms might have disproportionate influence in achieving sustainability.

4.3 Institute-Level Green Practices and Demographic Differences

The result of no significant relationship with institute level green practices and green HRM practices or sustainability outcomes was unexpected but informative: it means that none of the infra-structural or physical green practices automatically lead to perceiving green HRM practices or sustainability outcomes. Differences by demographics were evident and not widespread. The lowest scores for sustainability perceptions

were found for longer-tenured employees (16–20 years), which could indicate a build-up of scepticism or perhaps a greater exposure to lack of sustainability promises over time, while postgraduates had higher scores for Green HRM practice which is consistent with the role of education in fostering environmental literacy (Ahmad, 2015).

4.4 Predictive Role of Green HRM

The results of hierarchical regression confirm the correlational results: the explained variance for the model with demographic factors is less than 2%, while the model with Green HRM and institute-level green practices is over 70% and most of this is contributed by the Green HRM practices. This pattern sees Green HRM not as just one of among several organizational levers but as the key one to achieve sustainability in this context.

4.5 Comparison With Previous Literature and Theoretical Implications

The findings extend previous research by both Guerci et al. (2016) and Kim et al. (2019) which showed that Green HRM can play a positive role in the conversion of stakeholder pressure and employee's pro-ecological behavior, by demonstrating this relationship is robust in an agro-industrial, resource-intensive environment, which has not been explored in the Green HRM literature. The results, in fact, point towards an ability-motivation-opportunity approach to Green HRM (Ren et al., 2018) where HR practices beyond infrastructure contribute to developing the abilities and motivation needed for sustainability.

4.6 Managerial and Practical Implications

The results indicate for the sugar industry managers that they need to focus on the investment in green recruitment, training, performance appraisal and reward system rather than only on infrastructure investment. Focusing on environmental aspects in selection and induction procedures, providing training on green skills, tying performance evaluation to green behavior and rewarding employees for their innovative green solutions are likely to have better sustainability returns. Targeted

communication and participatory mechanisms feedback systems, workshops and employee involvement in green goal-setting may be beneficial to translate awareness to active involvement (as participation was low overall, although it was comparatively low among longer tenured employees who were less likely to perceive the situation as being sustainable).

5. Conclusion

This study explored the institute level green practices, the Green HRM practices and their relationship with organizational sustainability with 400 employees of sugar industry. Green HRM practices were strongly associated with and the dominant statistical predictor of sustainability outcomes while Institute-level infrastructure was not meaningfully associated with either Green HRM or sustainability. The results indicate that in this sector, HR mechanisms aimed at employees are the mechanisms that actually work towards achieving an organisation's sustainability. The study offers a hierarchy of Green HRM effects over demographic characteristics, a direct empirical comparison of the effects of both infrastructural and HR-based green levers, and industry-specific empirical evidence from a relatively scant agro-industrial context. There is a call for the sugar industry groups to formalize

the 'green' criteria for recruiting candidates, increase the 'green' training and induction programmes, introduce 'green' indicator in performance appraisal, enhance the 'green' reward system and introduce structures for employee participation in the sustainability programme especially for re-engaging the long-term employees of the industry. The cross sectional design rules out causal explanations, the sample was from one industry, and self reported measures are susceptible to common method bias as there was a large percentage of males in the sample. The factor structure was comprised of 40 items which failed to produce a converged rotated solution and also produced some residual autocorrelations in the regression diagnostics which means that the standard errors need to be interpreted with caution. These restrictions must be used to temper generalization to contexts outside those sampled. Future research in this field should be longitudinal or multi-industry/multi-region in design to test for causal and generalizable relationships, include objective environmental performance measures as well as subjective measures, and should examine mediating and moderating processes like green organizational culture or green employee values between Green HRM and sustainability results.

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