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## Factors Affecting Deviant Behaviour At Workplace Among Young Public Sector Employees

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### Abstract

Deviant workplace behaviour phenomenon is increasingly becoming popular and this issue had attracted many researchers to study the phenomenon as its' impacts are huge on employees productivity and well-being. The purpose of this article is to identify factors that affect workplace deviant behaviour among young public sector employees. A review was conducted to obtain the data. The findings revealed that a number of factors and these factors could be further investigated among future researchers to understand and address the complexities associated with workplace deviant behaviour and to identify predictive factors that could explain the phenomenon of workplace deviant behaviour among young public sector employees.

**Keywords:** Deviant Behaviour, Employee, Framework, Workplace, Work Productivity

### Introduction

In the past decades, researchers and managers have constantly investigated the phenomenon of deviant behaviour at workplace. Basically, workplace deviant behaviour means misbehaviour in the workplace and it could be categorized into aggressive behaviour (sexual harassment, intimidation, or showing open hostility towards co-workers), unproductive behaviour (showing up late for work, taking extended lunch or coffee breaks, or sneaking out early), abuse of property, and organization politics (spreading false rumours or gossips) (Joseph, 2020). Workplace deviant behaviour is not a new issue to discuss. However, the resources which examined deviant behaviour at workplace are still growing and show many new dimensions to investigate within the parameters of time and circumstances. The literature review of various scholars has defined workplace deviant behaviour (Appelbaum et al., 2007) and clarified the outcomes of deviant workplace behaviours. But studies

regarding workplace deviant behaviours are still needed to be considered especially at different organizations (Yildiz et al., 2015). Workplace deviant behaviours, primarily that are destructive in nature, are among the important determinants affecting well-being of organizational norms and performance.

Almost all organizations face the phenomenon of deviant behaviour at workplace. Novallien (2017) states that issues pertaining to workplace deviant behaviour and attitude of workers are becoming prominent lately with emergence of new issues and the quest for higher productivity. Employees were found to display deviant behaviours at workplace due to a myriad of factors and this could be due to personal or organizational factors or a combination of both. Additionally, Robinson and Bennet (1995) mentioned that there are two perspectives to depict deviant behaviour and this could be categorized into organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. In line with this, deviant behaviour is recognized as a dual interaction between organizational affects as well as individual affects that would impact individuals to display behavioural deviance. Organizations that are able to tackle deviant workplace behaviour were able to identify strategies based on the recognition of relationship between organizational and interpersonal deviances (Robinson, Robertson & Curtis, 2012).

Past literature revealed that there are many definitions to explain workplace deviant behaviour. In fact, Robinson and Greenberg (1995) state that there is no common definition to describe workplace deviant behaviour. One of the popular definitions is the one provided by Robinson and Bennett (1955) that defined deviant workplace behaviour as “a voluntary behaviour engaged by employee that is contrary to the significant organizational norms and it is considered as a threat to the well-being of an organization and/or its members”. On the other hand, workplace deviant behaviour is described as any action or behaviour among individuals that lead to chaos, unrest and harm to other employees, concerned organization and its’ stakeholders (Henle, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2005; Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). In addition, Robinson and Bennet (1995) clarifies that workplace deviant behaviour is pictured as ‘voluntary behaviour of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization and/its members’. Thus, deviant workplace behaviour is perceived as a source that will have a negative impact towards employees and organization as a whole and this impact ranges from negligible to extremely significant.

Over the years, organizational workplace deviant behaviour has been studied extensively under different terms (Javed & Amjad, 2014). Among similar terms used in past research to describe workplace deviant behaviour are misbehaviour in organization, counterproductive workplace behaviour, retaliation, antisocial behaviour, employee resistance, non-compliant behaviour, negative behaviour in organization, and dysfunctional behaviour (Tepper, Duffy & Shaw, 2001). Past studies show that individuals display deviant behaviour as a result of superior abuse, or being unhappy at workplace and consequently deviances occur at the production department or on other resources in an organization (Hollinger, 1986).

A number of theories were used as the foundation in studies pertaining to workplace deviant behaviour. One of the most prominent theories is the Social Learning Theory (SLT) advocated by Bandura (1977). In this theory, ethics is deemed as the important predictor towards intention to practice deviant behaviour. The theory further postulates ethical leadership would enable leaders in

organizations to demonstrate apt behaviour that will be emulated by the subordinates as well as leaders learning via observation on employees' positive values, and embracing these values in the organization. Being a role model in organization, leaders are able to push employees with the reward-punishment mechanism and consequently employees will abide by the rules and regulations of the organization. Recent studies carried out by offer statistical evidence on the inverse relationship between ethical leadership and intention to practice deviant behaviour (Aryati et al., 2017; Sims, 2002). Moreover, SLT likewise emphasizes the importance of role modelling whereby good values practiced in organizations will have a chain effect on employees. Leaders are pictured as legitimate models for good values in organizations. Besides, since leaders have the authority to impose punishments as well as giving rewards for employees' behaviour that is unethical and ethical respectively, they have to demonstrate possessing exemplary virtues. SLT also sees organizations as a place of continuous learning and consequently employees must attain knowledge on organizational ethical behaviour via observing the environment besides their own experiences (Bandura, 1986).

Another prominent theory to understand employer behaviour is the Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzo & Mitchell, 2005) developed by Blau (1986). The theory states that there are two predictors of employees' behaviour, namely, organizational citizenship behaviour and perceived organizational support. In this theory, much importance is placed towards the cordial relationship between employer and employees' behaviour and attitude (Coyle, Shapiro & Conway, 2005). Hence, according to this theory, dissatisfaction among individuals or employees is a result of receiving poor treatment from superiors or leaders in organizations. Employees are prone to demonstrate disparaging behaviours if they have to face harsh and unpleasant working conditions in organizations.

General Strain Theory (GST) (Agnew, 2001) is another theory to explain deviant workplace behaviour. This theory implicates individuals' negative behaviours that can lead to deviant behaviour in the workplace. The main proponent of GST is Agnew (2001) and the strains as mentioned in this theory have three main components. The first component is about stimuli and goals whereby individuals could be affected due to not achieving the targeted goals, the existence of perilous stimuli or in the absence esteemed stimuli. Then, the second component is about the conditioning factors that have an influence on exhibiting behaviours that are either deviant or otherwise when one had to face strains. The last component expresses the notion that in the absence of positive adaptations and being overloaded with negative thoughts, individuals are prone to act defiantly to reduce the effect to the strain. This theory has been utilized by study involving various categories of sample such as government staff (Alias, 2013; Radzali, 2015) on various forms of workplace deviant behaviour research.

Another prominent theory that elucidates the workplace deviant behaviour is the social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). Subjective norms, especially family and religion, play a paramount role in this theory. The theory states that deviant behaviour could dramatically be reduced if family bondage and spirituality are emphasized among individuals. This theory can be used in examining the individuals' spiritual level towards their attitude and behaviour in the workplace. Deviation from social norms as explained by Hirschi (1969) is based on four specific concepts: *attachment*, *commitment*, *involvement*, and *belief* (Young & Bucklen, 2011). Attachment, meaning the extent that a person is socially bonded to parents, peers, teachers, religious leaders and other community members is the most important element of the social bond (Young & Bucklen, 2011). Commitment represents the social, professional and economic investment in conventional society. Involvement

refers to active participation in prosocial activities that leave less time for social deviance, based on the notion that “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” (Young & Bucklen, 2011). The fourth concept, belief, theorizes that the more someone believes in social norms, the less likely they are to behave contrary to them (Young & Bucklen, 2011).

Undeniably, public sector have many young staff yet not much research had been carried out to identify the level of workplace deviation in this sector and its’ influencing factors. Based on the theoretical understanding of deviant behaviour at workplace and past organizational research, this article aims to identify the dimensions that affect workplace deviant behaviour among young employees in the public sector.

### Workplace deviant behaviour and affecting factors

A review of the past studies showed that there are several dimensions that have an effect on deviant behaviour at workplace as in Table 1.

**Table 1: Studies on workplace deviant behaviour**

Dimensions	Supporting Studies
Stress	Wan Din (2015); Ibnu (2014); Farhadi (2011); Adeoti, Shamsudin and Wan (2017); Abdul Mutalib, Mohd Taib, Dina (2018); Omar, Halim, Zainah, Farhadi, Nasir, Khairuddin (2011); Farah Mardiana binti Radzali , (2015); Mohesn Golparvar. (2015); Yan_Hong Yao and Ying- Ying Fan, Yong-Xing Guo, Yuan Li. (2014)
Job Satisfaction	Hadi Farhadi (2011); Azlina Yassin, (2011); Mazni Alias , (2013); Aminah Ahmad, Zoharah Omar (2014); Misbah Nasir and Ambreen Bashir (2012); Muharrem Tuna, Issam Ghazzawi; Murat Yesiltas, Aysen Akbas Tuna and Siddik Arslan. (2014); Fatimah Omar, F. W. Halim, A.Z Zainah, H. Farhadi, R. Nasir, R. Khairuddin (2011)
Spirituality	Haldorai, Chang, Li (2020); Farah Mardiana binti Radzali.(2015); Aulia Maulana Septa, Nasrillah (2018); Abdul Mutalib Mohamad Azim, Mohd Taib Dora, Dina Syamilah Zaid.(2018) Augustine Acheampong & Kingsley Agyapong (2015); Michael Olalekan Adeoti, Faridahwati Mohd Shamsudin & Chong Yen Wan (2017); Abdul Rahman Abdul Rahim, Ahmad Shazeer Mohamed Thaheer, Alwi Shabudin, Abdul Rahman Abdul Wahab & Noorazmi Hashim (2014); Omar Khalid Bhatti, Muhammad Aftab Alam, Arif Hassan, & Mohamed Sulaiman (2016); Aminah Ahmad, Zoharah Omar (2014)

Dimensions	Supporting Studies
Perceived Organizational Support	Lim Li Chen, Benjamin Chan Yin Fah, Teh Choon Jin (2016). Mazni Alias, Roziah Mohd. Rasdi. (2015); Saira Iqbal Khan, Atif Mahmood, Sara Kanwal,(2015); Na-Ting Liu a & Cherng G. Ding (2011); Amanda Shantz, Kerstin Alfes, And Gary P. Latha. (2014)
Ethical climate	Obalade & Arogundade (2019; Leweherilla Novalien C. (2017); Azlina Yassin (2011); Muhammad Yasir, Amran Rasli (2018); Ana Sofia Aryati , Achmad Sudiro, Djumilah Hadiwidjaja and Noermijati Noermijati (2017)
Leadership	Muhammad Yasir, Amran Rasli (2018); Suzanne van Gils, Niel Van Quaakebeke, Daan Van Knippenberg, Marius Van Dijke, David De Cremer. (2013); Yan_Hong Yao and Ying- Ying Fan, Yong-Xing Guo,Yuan Li. (2014); Ozgur Demirtas(2015); Arif Masih Khokhar, Muhammad Zia-ur-Rehman, (2017); Shenjiang Mo,Junqi Shi.(2015);.Mohammad Harisur Rahman Howladar, Sahidur Rahman, Aftab Uddin. (2018); Ana Sofia Aryati , Achmad Sudiro,Djumilah Hadiwidjaja and Noermijati Noermijati, (2017); Yan Liu, , Long W. "Rico" Lam, , Raymond Loi. (2015); Aida Abdullah & Sabitha Marican. (2017); Hongyan Jiang, Yang Chen, Peizhen Sun and Jun Yang. (2016)

Novalien (2017) conducted a study on deviant behaviour in Maluku, Indonesia and found that the workplace environmental and ethical culture played an important role as a triggering factor of deviant behaviour. Some of the deviant behaviours are coming late into the workplace, early departure, unauthorized exit, truancy, and hang out during working hours. There are even more serious deviant behaviours such as cases of sexual harassment and destructive behaviour of organizations such as breach of trust and corruption. This study concurs with the findings of the study engaged by Yassin (2011), where environmental ethics is one of the major factors affecting the increase of deviant behaviour among manufacturing industry workers. In addition to environmental ethics, job satisfaction and self-esteem also are the causes of the deviant behaviour demonstrated by the workers.

Among the recent studies that examined deviant behaviour at the workplace is a study conducted by Aryati et al., (2017) that investigated the influence of leadership ethics on the behaviour of workers in the organization. The detailed focus of the study is on the ethical environment and the loyalty to the organization. The negative relationship between ethical

leadership with workplace deviant behaviour became an evidence of the study and consequently, the study showed that ethical leadership can create a positive atmosphere and environment. The result of this study had also shown that ethical leadership had a significant impact on overcoming the deviant behaviour cases in organizations.

There is also a study that identifies leadership factor as a cause of deviant behaviour among workers. Gils et al., (2013) explained that leadership is a factor that can encourage or can reduce the incident of workplace deviant behaviour. The findings of the study agreed that low ethical leadership was a factor of encouragement to deviant behaviour among high performing employees compared to low-performing employees.

A study by Yilditz and Alpan (2015) found that employees' perceptions about the organization were a predictor of their attitudes, which eventually turned into the cause of negative behaviours including deviant behaviour. In this study, the deviant behaviour shown by the workers is the result of negative attitudes and negative perceptions of workers toward the organization. The researchers also look at the effect of previous studies and found that deviant behaviour at work is increasingly becoming a threat to the organization, especially in terms of social and economic costs. In addition, employee perceptions about organizational support towards their work performance can also affect their attitudes and behaviours.

Workplace deviant behaviour had also been studied by Alias (2013) to determine the predictors of workplace deviant behaviour in which job satisfaction was investigated as the mediator in the framework. The results showed there exists a significant relationship between employee perceptions on organizational support with workplace deviant behaviour. In addition, the result showed that job satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support, and job autonomy on workplace deviant behaviour. The perception of the worker is one of the sensitive factors to job satisfaction. When employees made an impression that the organization does not support their efforts, this will cause their job satisfaction to decline and they tend to exhibit it through deviant behaviour.

In addition, the research by Nasir and Bashir (2012) on workplace deviance in public sector organizations in Pakistan found that job satisfaction is significantly strongly correlated with deviant workplace behaviour. In addition, job satisfaction contributes to the increased occurrence of behaviour-related cases that violate the values and norms of the organization.

Another research in this area was conducted on workplace spirituality and its relationship with workplace deviant behaviour by Ahmad and Omar (2014). The research suggested that workplace spirituality can be a potential element to reduce deviant behaviour through job satisfaction. Radzali (2015) also studied the element of religiosity or spirituality as a moderating role in the relationship between emotional stability, workload, job stress, and workplace deviant behaviour. The study showed that religiosity or spirituality plays a moderating role in the relationship between emotional stability and workplace deviant behaviour but does not moderate the relationship to job stress and workload.

Bhatti, Alam, Hassan and Sulaiman (2016) had a study on Islamic spirituality and Islamic social responsibility in reducing workplace deviant behaviour and found that these two elements can influence an employees' in reducing their deviant behaviour at the workplace.

The study by Ahmad (2014) concluded that the organization should pay attention to the role conflict among the workers. This is because role conflict is an element that has the potential to contribute to the improvement of workplace deviant behaviour in the organization. In addition, work pressure, workload, and unclear job description also have significant relationship with workplace deviant behaviour.

The study by Wan (2015) that focussed on employees in the customer service division found that there was significant relationship between work stress and deviant behaviour in the workplace. The findings can lead to a new study that should examine different contexts and different populations as well as other factors that may potentially constitute a source of employee deviant behaviour in the workplace.

Moreover, previous studies by Farhadi (2011) showed that there is a positive relationship between work stress and workplace deviant behaviour. In the findings, there is a difference between deviant behaviour based on demographic factors. This shows that individual differences also influence the form of workplace deviant behaviour among employees.

### **Future outlook of deviant behaviour at workplace**

The study on deviant behaviour at workplace is widely discussed by researchers on employees in different organizations. However, to date studies on workplace deviant behaviour had been carried out on limited population despite its' importance. In the Malaysian context, for instance, studies on workplace deviant behaviour focused on manufacturing employees (Abdul, 2008; Azlina, 2011), staff in Malaysian Local Council (Mazni, 2014), workers in Education Ministry (Hadi, 2011) and officers in public enforcement organization (Malini, 2016). There is a dire need to expand the population to young employees as well as expanding the scope to government servants since they are the main group of employees in many countries. Moreover, researchers like Alias (2013); Farhadi (2011); and Radzali (2015) have studied workplace deviant behaviour on government employees but the focus group is not determined by job position and young staff. Lately, workplace deviant behaviour is becoming an issue not only on the lower-grade staff but also those at the top management group. Without a doubt, each category will have its unique contributing factors as displayed in the past studies. Thus, it is mandatory for more research to be carried out based on specific population of the public sector to enrich the knowledge on workplace deviant behaviour.

Theoretically and past models reviewed show that the construct of workplace deviant behaviour could be specified into two main dimensions, namely, organization and individual. Further analysis showed that the organization dimension constitutes factors like organization climate, ethical leadership, and perceived organization support. On the other hand, the individual dimension would have factors such as job satisfaction, work stress, and spirituality. Future studies could investigate the workplace deviant behaviour among young workers in the public sector by giving due attention to the dimension of organization and individual. This would propel towards finding more effective solutions to reduce the problems associated with workplace deviant behaviour.

The eight goals of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for decent work and economic growth especially among young people. Undoubtedly, lesser workplace deviant behaviour will lead towards higher productivity as well as economic growth. Thus, more efforts should be placed among researchers and policy makers to identify issues and seek solutions to bring workplace deviant behaviour under control especially among young employees at the public sector. Regulating



workplace deviant behaviour will definitely boost government resources to be utilized effectively to bring growth and prosperity to the society as a whole.

### Conclusion

Undoubtedly, workplace deviant behaviour is one of the problems that exist in every organization and it requires the attention and action of all parties to cope with it. The cause of the deviant behaviour can weaken the overall performance of the organization and will tarnish the image and give a bad impression to the organization. The various factors of workplace deviant behaviour among workers in an organization are employee personality, stress and workload, job satisfaction, employee perceptions of organizational support, leadership ethics, environment and work culture as well as the spiritual level of the employee itself. The study implies that the construct of workplace deviant behaviour has a huge impact on sustainable development goals as well effective utilization of government resources. Thus, it is recommended that more studies on workplace deviant behaviour should be conducted, particularly among young employees in the government sector, to ensure optimization of quality and integrity at workplace as well as overcoming the malaise of corruption.

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