

WORKPLACE DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES: THE ROLES OF PERCEIVED RELIGIOSITY AND JOB STATUS

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Abstract

Workplace deviant behavior has been linked to a number of organizational losses such as decreased employee morale, increased turnover and loss of legitimacy among important external stakeholders. Therefore, this paper investigated the relationships between religiosity, job status and workplace deviant behavior. Participants consisted of 351 (F=178; Mean age=39.2) employees of the Local Government Service Commission in Nigeria. Data which were sourced through the *Workplace Deviant Behavior Scale* and *Centrality of Religiosity Scale* were analyzed using multiple regression. Results revealed that religiosity negatively related to workplace deviant behavior, but no significant difference was found between junior and senior staff in their display of workplace deviant behavior. In addition, both religiosity and job status jointly influenced respondents' workplace deviant behavior. The findings imply that high religiosity among employees might reduce the risks of deviance and in turn create a better work environment.

Keywords: job status, religiously, workplace deviant behavior, public sector employees

Introduction

Workplace deviant behaviour describes the acts of employees in the workplace which are not only considered as being against the norm of work rules and behaviours but also damaging to the organisation (Robinson & Bennet, 1995). When the behaviour is targeted at the organisation (for example stealing, absenteeism or bribery), it may slow down the pace of work and reduce productivity, thereby affecting organisational profitability and loss of legitimacy among external stakeholders (Scott, 2015). In situations where fellow employees become targets of deviant behaviour, job dissatisfaction and fear are possible outcomes that may lead to loss of interest in the workplace and eventual decision to quit (Scott, 2015).

Deviant behaviour has been reported to constitute serious threat to service delivery in both public and private sector organisations (Alias & Mohd Rasdi, 2007; Olabimitan & Alausa, 2014), with a prevalence rate of 35% to 75% among workers in Nigeria (Fagbohunge, Akinbolade & Ayodeji, 2012). Specifically, wilful disobedience, coming late to work and using or taking company properties without authorization have been reported to have 65%, 40% and respectively 80% prevalence rates (Akikibofori (2013). Similarly, theft, fraud, sabotage, acting rudely and arguing are being considered as the fastest growing deviant workplace behaviours among Nigerian workgroups in recent times (Fagbohunge, Akinbode & Ayodeji, 2012; Otaotu, 2016). Such proliferation of workplace deviance in Nigeria becomes puzzling when considered in the light of the high levels of religiosity among

Nigerians (Huber & Huber, 2012).

Religiosity describes the extent to which a person adheres to his/her religious beliefs as a basis for action in daily life that is irrespective of religious denomination or religious affinity (Shukor & Jamal, 2013). An individual's religiosity does not consider whether the person practices Christianity, Islamic or traditional religion; rather it focuses on the person's devotion to such religion with a strong sense of commitment and belief system. Religiosity describes conformity to a given set of lifestyle practices which are considered important to the actor (Schwartz & Huismans, 1995).

Major religions of the world consider work in a positive light as strong positive ethics of work are preached and individuals are encouraged to be diligent at work, committed and not attempt to defraud their employers in any way (Parboteeah, Paik & Cullen, 2009). Religiosity significantly shapes the work attitudes and values of people-(Kitause & Achunkie, 2013). The influence of religiosity in Nigeria can be seen in the way individuals carry their daily activities at work.

Religiosity is considered as a motivating factor which makes people work harder and perform better in organisations (Ramlee, Osman, Salahudin, Yeng, Ling & Safizal, 2016). Individuals in highly religious countries and zones (e.g. India, & Nigeria) consider work as very important (Jagodzinski, 2009) and see it as a duty to society (Geser, 2009). The roles of religiosity in improving job attitudes such as engaging in organisational citizenship behaviour and moderating the relationship between job stressors and motivation, job satisfaction and organisational commitment have been reported (Ramlee et al., 2016). It is believed that religious role expectations, internalised as a religious self-identity can influence ethical behaviour or values of individuals (Osman-Gani, Hashim & Ismail, 2010). However, religiosity had been found to significantly moderate the relationship between workplace deviant behaviour and its antecedents, such as emotional stability (Radzali et al., 2013).

Few studies that have examined the influence of religiosity on workplace deviant behaviour, indicated that highly religious people are more ethical at work and less likely to engage in workplace deviant behaviour as compared to non-religious people (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner 2014; Cheung & Yeung, 2011; Radzali, Ahmad & Omar, 2013;). However, Weaver and Agle (2002) found no difference in cheating and dishonesty in business ethics between religious and non-religious people, while Ugwu (2009) and Sharabi (2012) reported the absence of relationship between religiosity and unethical work behaviour. These studies have not sufficiently provided explanation for the influence of religiosity on workplace deviant behaviour.

Another important factor of interest in examining workplace deviant behaviour among Nigerian civil servants is the influence of employees' job status. Job status is a socio-economic concept that refers to how an individual ranks in the workplace in comparison with others within the same organisation (Burgard & Stewart, 2003). In Nigeria, individuals in the civil service are on a continuous upward scale and people seek to advance their work careers over time. Higher positions at work mean higher responsibilities and equally more access to official properties, which can be either used or abused.

Higher level employees tend to believe more in organisational goals and values, higher readiness to contribute to the organisation and a strong desire to maintain organisational membership (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2014). They are less likely to engage in theft and other deviant acts (Rogojan, 2009). Individuals who occupied higher status at work were not found to engage in counterproductive work behaviours when they perceived the ethical climate of their organisation to be of low quality whereas those in the intermediate and low levels reported more counterproductive work behaviour in the presence of perceived low quality of organisational ethical climate (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2014). However, individuals in higher

occupational status are more likely to engage in bullying behaviour (Drabek & Merecz, 2013).

The public service (local government system in Nigeria) has been reported to have a record of low effectiveness and efficiency (Abass, 2012). Rather corruption, mismanagement and low employee morale were practices that are more prevalent. Others include absenteeism, requesting kickback from those who need their service and several idle practices like gossiping and rumour mongering. These have earned the local Nigerian government the label of an inefficient system that many would rather ignore (Abass, 2012). Our study investigated the relationship between religiosity and job status on workplace deviant behaviour among employees of public service sector.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Participants for the study were 351 (F=178; mean age=39.2) civil servants selected conveniently from the Local Government Areas in Osun state, Nigeria. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination (Yamane, 1967).

The number of respondents selected from each council was eventually determined by dividing the 390 expected respondents by 15 local government councils, which approximately gives 26 respondents per local government council. Two major religious groups participated in the study. These are Christianity (64.7%) and Islamic (35.3%) religions. The distribution of participants' job status showed that 89 (25.4%) of the respondents were junior staff while 262 (74.6%) were senior staff. Ethical approval was secured from the Academic and Research Committee of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and the offices of the Director of Administration and Personnel in each of the local government secretariats. Respondents were requested to append their signature on the informed consent forms and assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Eventually, a total of 351 out of the 380 copies of questionnaire representing a 92.3% response rate were retained and consequently utilized for the analyses.

Measures

Job status: Information about the respondents' job status was assessed with a single item. This helped provide information about the characteristics of the respondents to the study.

Workplace deviant behaviour: Workplace deviant behaviour was measured using the *Workplace Deviant Behaviour Scale* developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000). The scale measures two dimensions of workplace deviant behaviour, organisational deviance and interpersonal deviance. Each of these dimensions has two further sub-dimensions. The organisational deviance scale (12 items) was further divided into property deviance and production deviance, while the interpersonal deviance (7 items) was further divided into political deviance and personal aggression. These scales assess the frequency workplace deviance along a seven-point scale (1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = a few times, 4 = weekly, 5 = several times, 6 = daily). The individual's score in each item was summed and the final score indicated the level of such person's workplace deviance. The higher the score, the higher the level of deviance of the respective respondent. The scale was reported to have Cronbach's alpha of .86 by both Fox and Spector (1999) and Amazue, Onyishi and Amazue (2014); while Uwannah (2015) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .79. The data for the current study showed a mean deviance score of 27.8 (s.d. = 11.9) and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

Religiosity: Religiosity of the respondents was measured using the *Centrality of Religiosity Scale* (CRS) developed by Huber and Huber (2012). The scale assessed the centrality, importance or salience of religious meanings in personality. Three versions of the scale exist,

containing 5, 10 and 15 items; however, for the purpose of this study the 15-item version was used. The contents of the scale can be divided into three sections. The first section contains items that measured the importance of personal and obligatory religious activities such as prayer, meditation and religious services to the individual on a five-point scale as very much so = 5, quite a bit = 4, moderately = 3, not very much = 2 and not at all = 1. Next are items that measure the frequency of participation in religious services. These are scored on a six-point scale as follows: more than once a week = 6, once a week = 5, once or three times a month = 4, a few times a year = 3, less often = 2 and never = 1. Responses of more than once a week (6) and once a week (5) were scored as 5, while the remaining items received their corresponding scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1. It is presented on a seven-point scale of several times a day = 7, more than once a week = 6, once a week = 5, one to three times a month = 4, few times a year = 3, less often = 2 never = 1. In scoring these items, the 7-point scale was recoded into 5 levels as follows: option 7 was recoded as 5, option 6 was recoded as 4, options 5 and 4 were recoded as 3, options 3 and 2 were recoded as 2, while option 1 remained as 1. The religiosity scale has been translated into 20 languages and tested in 21 countries. Nigeria had the highest mean score of 4.58 (s.d. = 0.38) among the 21 countries sampled, earning the possible rank of being the most religious nation ahead of Guatemala and Brazil (Huber & Huber, 2012). Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 (Huber, 2007) and 0.94 (Zarzycka and Rydz, 2014) have been reported for the CRS. In the present study, there was a mean religiosity score of 4.60 (s.d. = 0.33) which is quite similar to the value reported by Huber and Huber (2012). Also, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 based on all the 15 items in the scale was reported in the present study.

Data Analysis

Prior to statistical analysis of the data, an exploratory examination was carried out to ensure that the responses were valid. Incomplete and outlying entries (especially with regards to the primary variables of interest) were discarded in order to ensure accurate statistical analyses. The data generated from the questionnaire were analysed using both linear regression and independent samples *t*-test.

Results

Table 1: Regression model of religiosity and workplace deviant behaviour

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	33.532	2.845	11.785	.000
Religiosity	-1.555	.654	-2.380	.018

r = -.126; *r*² = .016; *adj. r*² = .013; *F* = 5.665; *p* < .05

The result in Table 1 showed that there was a negative correlation of .126 between religiosity and workplace deviant behaviour, while *r*-square = .016, implying that there was a weak correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable and that the independent variable explained only 1.6% of the variation in the dependent variable. The result further showed that the model significantly predicted the dependent variable [*F* (1, 350) = 5.665; *p* < 0.05]; and that religiosity significantly related to workplace deviance among the respondents [β = -1.555; *t* = -2.380; *p* < 0.05]. Further examination of the result showed a negative influence of religiosity on workplace deviant behaviour indicating that higher levels of religiosity implied lower levels of workplace deviance.

With the above, a regression model can be constructed to show the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

This is fitted therefore as:

$$\text{WDB} = 33.532 - 1.555R + \varepsilon$$

Where: WDB = Workplace Deviant Behaviour (the dependent variable)
 R = Religiosity
 ε = Error term (to indicate the unexplained variance that were not accounted for by the model)

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test of Workplace Deviant Behaviour between Junior and Senior Staff

<i>Job Status</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Mean Diff.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Junior Staff	89	27.53	8.69	0.910	0.86	349	0.392
Senior Staff	262	26.62	8.64				

The result showed that there was no significant difference in workplace deviant behaviour between junior staff (mean = 27.53, S.D. = 8.69) and senior staff (mean = 26.62, S.D. = 8.64) [$t(349) = 0.86$; $p > 0.05$]. Thus, job status did not significantly influence workplace deviant behaviour. This implied that Junior and Senior staff employees show similar levels of workplace deviance.

Table 3: Regression Model of religiosity and job status on workplace deviant behaviour

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	33.208	2.885	11.509	.000
Religiosity	-1.523	.656	-2.323	.021
Job status (Junior staff = 1)	.737	1.057	.697	.486

r = .132; r² = .017; adj. r² = .012; F = 3.071; p < .05

Given that there were only two levels of job status (Junior and Senior staff), dummy coding was used in order to make it possible to test the hypothesis using linear regression. Hence, job status was dummy coded as Junior staff = 1 and Senior staff = 0. The dependent variable (workplace deviant behaviour) was measured on a continuous scale. Results showed that there was a correlation of 0.132 between the independent variables and the dependent variable, while the r-square was .017. This showed that there was a weak correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variables and that the independent variables only accounted for 1.7% of the variation in the dependent variable. The result also showed that the model significantly predicted the dependent variable state [$F(2, 350) = 3.071$; $p < 0.05$]. This implied that religiosity and job status have significant joint influence on workplace deviant behaviour.

Furthermore, the result showed that religiosity significantly predicted workplace deviant behaviour ($\beta = -1.523$; $t = -2.323$; $p < 0.05$); whereas job status did not ($\beta = .737$; $t = .037$; $p > 0.05$). The model equation was thus as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

This is fitted therefore as:

$$\text{WDB} = 33.208 - 1.523R + 0.737JS + \varepsilon$$

Where: WDB = Workplace Deviant Behaviour (the dependent variable)
 R = Religiosity
 JS = Job Status
 ε = Error term (to indicate the unexplained variance that were not

accounted for by the model

We then concluded that religiosity and job status jointly influenced workplace deviant behaviour among local government employees in Osun State, Nigeria.

Discussion

This paper investigated the relationship between religiosity and workplace deviant behaviour among public servants. Our findings revealed that religiosity was negatively associated with workplace deviant behaviour among the respondents. This is similar to the assertion of O'Neill and Hastings (2011), who reported an influence of religiosity on workplace deviant behaviour. This implied that higher levels of religiosity led to lower levels of workplace deviance among the respondents. This lends support to the report of Cheung et al (2011), who indicated that workplace deviant behaviour was found to correlate more with constructive rather than destructive behaviour.

Furthermore, Kitause et al (2013) elucidated on the importance of religion in shaping the work attitudes and values of people. The findings of the study showed that high religiosity predicted lower levels of workplace deviance. The religious employee is less likely to be deviant at work. This implies that high religiosity then bodes good outcomes for organisations as employers can rest assured that their highly religious employees will not cause challenges for the organisation in terms of productivity.

Our findings also revealed no significant difference in workplace deviant behaviour between junior or senior staff employees. This implied that both junior and senior staff exhibit similar levels of workplace deviant behaviour. This contradicts the findings of Chernyak-Hai et al. (2014) and Rogoan (2009) who indicated that individuals who occupied higher work status are less likely to engage in unacceptable work behaviour when compared to those in lower job status. That is minimal workplace deviance should be expected from senior staff when compared to the junior staff. Expectation of possible differences in workplace deviant behaviour between junior and senior staff can be linked with the responsibility placed on senior staff as occupants of various managerial and leadership positions, as well as their better remuneration when compared to their junior counterparts. They would be expected to play exemplary roles of setting positive work examples for the junior staff.

We also found that both religiosity and job status jointly influenced workplace deviant behaviour among local government employees in Osun State. This supports the reports of Chernyak-Hai et al. (2014) and Rogoan (2009) who stated that individuals in higher work status are less likely to engage in unethical work behaviour. While an initial analysis showed no main effect of job status on workplace deviant behaviour, an interaction with religiosity brought this out, showing a moderating effect of religiosity on job status and workplace deviant behaviour.

Implications of the study

The significance of religiosity in influencing workplace deviant behaviour and the interaction of religiosity and job status show that employers need to give attention to the importance of their employees' religious values at the workplace. Workplace deviant behaviour has been shown in this study to have impact on the productivity of both the organisation and its members; high religiosity among employees will imply lesser risks of deviance and in turn implying a more conducive work environment.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the data collected and interpretation of the results, the study

concluded that religiosity and job status influenced workplace deviant behaviour. It further showed that religiosity had more influence among junior staff employees in comparison with senior staff employees. However, due to time and methodological constraints, the study focused only on overall scores on workplace deviant behaviour and an ordinal categorisation of religiosity. The study did not cover the dimensions of workplace deviance such as property, production, political or personal aggression, nor was organisational and interpersonal deviance considered. Furthermore, other dimensions of religiosity such as cognitive interest, ideology, prayer, experience or worship were not considered in the study, hence, more studies are needed in this regards.

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