

Workplace Deviance among Decline Career Stage Employees: The Role of Perceived Organisational Support and Retirement Anxiety

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Received: June 4, 2022 / Accepted: August 5, 2022
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Abstract

Workplace deviance among prospective retirees has received less attention in the retirement literature. This cross-sectional research investigated the prediction of workplace deviance by perceived organisational support and retirement anxiety among decline career stage employees. Participants were 123 (male =101; female =22; $M_{age} = 60.31$, $SD. 8.77$) who were administered a self-report paper and pencil questionnaire with standardized scales that measured perceived organisational support, retirement anxiety, and workplace deviance. Their demographic information including age, gender, marital status, education, and number of dependents was also reported. Data were analyzed with hierarchical regression and bivariate correlation. Results showed that both POS ($p < .05$) and retirement anxiety ($p < .05$) negatively predicted workplace deviance. The main conclusion from the study findings is that POS is necessary to reduce workplace deviance, particularly among decline career stage employees in public sector organisations.

Keywords: Perceived organisational support, retirement anxiety, workplace deviance, decline career stage employees

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Introduction

Workplace deviance describes employees' voluntary and purposive behaviour that significantly violates the normative expectations of the workplace, negatively impacting both the organisation and its employees (Robinson & Bennett, 2000). Workplace deviance is costly because of its detrimental effects on overall organisational performance (Hua & Yang, 2017). Over the years, effort to understand the factors that are related to workplace deviance has intensified. Research suggests that perceived organisational support is one factor that can influence negative work behaviour as employees who self-perceived low POS might be expected to behave deviantly at work (Gouldner, 1960). Another factor that may influence workplace deviance is retirement anxiety. As employees approach the mandatory retirement age, some may start experiencing retirement anxiety (Jaworski et al., 2016). Prospective retirees who self-report a high level of fear and worry about retirement may be motivated to engage in undesirable work behaviours that are injurious to the organisation's well-being. This issue is deserving of further research on the consequences of beliefs about the extent of organisational support and heightened retirement anxiety on the workplace deviance of employees who are about to formally exit the workplace on attaining the official retirement age. By examining the relationship between these variables, the present study may identify POS and retirement anxiety as deviant work behaviour predictors, especially among decline career stage employees in the public sector organisations in Nigeria.

Relationship between perceived organisational support and workplace deviance

Perceived organisational support is crucial to organisational life for employees and the organisation alike because it is the means through which the organisation may contribute to the development of a positive reciprocal employee-employer relationship. POS is used to gauge the degree to which employees feel supported and cared for by their organisation (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Sumathi et al. 2015).

When employees feel supported by their employer, there is a sense of obligation to reciprocate with positive behaviours (Lynch et al. 1999). This is in line with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) which argues that POS stimulate positive emotions in the employees which psychologically restrains them from negative behaviours but obligates the performance of positive ones. This aligns with the principle of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) which expects happy employees to be obligated to contribute to the progress of the organisation (Eisenberger et al. 1986).

Prior empirical studies have shown POS to be related to work attitudes and outcomes including increased job satisfaction and commitment, and declines in deviant behaviour, workplace aggression, and burnout (Aransanmi & Krishna, 2019; Atingabili et al. 2021; Caesens et al. 2016; Enwereuzor et al. 2021; Eze et al. 2020; Han et al. 2019; Kurtessis et al. 2017; Leupol et al. 2020; Shrand & Ronnie, 2021; Sokro et al. 2021). These studies suggest that when management demonstrates that they value employee's work efforts and care for their wellbeing by being attentive to their grievances, being fair in how they treat them, providing enabling work conditions, and payment of salary/wages as at when due, such behaviours are perceived as supportive and is reciprocated with positive ones. In contrast, when employees perceive low support they are likely to reciprocate with negative behaviours such as workplace deviance (Lynch et al. 1999).

Relationship between retirement anxiety and workplace deviance

Globally, the workforce is aging, leading to a significant increase in the number of persons who will retire from long-held jobs and careers in the years ahead. In a work setting, retirement describes an individual's exit process from the workforce, accompanied by both a decrease in psychological commitment to work and an increase in behavioural withdrawal

from work (Wang & Shi, 2014). Retirement is the final phase of the occupational life cycle (Atchley, 1976) and can evoke a sense of loss that requires an adaptation process (Comi, Cottini, & Lucifora, 2022). The feeling of loss associated with retirement (e.g. loss of regular income, loss of self-identity) may induce negative emotions such as anxiety among prospective retirees (Alpaslan, 2016; Cameron, 2015).

Retirement anxiety refers to a generalized feeling of apprehension or worry regarding the uncertain, unpredictable, and potentially disruptive consequences of an impending retirement (Fletcher & Hansson, 1991). The findings of a recent study that profiled retirement anxious employees showed them to express fears and worries related to losing energy, feeling depressed, aging faster, feeling lonely, and being bored during retirement (Fouquereau et al. 2018). It appears that retirement anxiety may arise if a prospective retiree is uncertain that they will be able to maintain their present standard of living and wellbeing after employment. Studies (e.g. Anyebe et al. 2018; Baba et al. 2004; Kiso et al. 2019; Yorgason et al. 2021; Wang & Shultz, 2010) have shown that psychological, social, and financial factors predict retirement anxiety. These include; inadequate or lack of preparation for retirement, uncertainties about changes in family and social relationships, loss of professional identity, financial concerns, managing daily life post-retirement, work enjoyment, total dependence on present income, and basic needs satisfaction.

Studies have linked retirement anxiety to discretionary behaviours, particularly negative ones. These studies (e.g. Piccoli & Bellotto, 2014; Tian, Zhang, & Zou, 2014) showed evidence to suggest that retirement anxious employees are more likely to be involved in deviant behaviours. This is likely because an anxious disposition is linked to distortion of judgment and decision-making (Blanchette & Richards, 2010; Park et al. 2016). Thus, if a prospective retiree is overly concerned about life after retirement such as how to pay bills and declining social contacts, the likelihood that they would engage in negative behaviours (e.g. theft and psychological withdrawal from work) is significantly increased.

The current study

The thought of retiring from work may induce significantly higher levels of anxiety among employees, and in particular, psychologically unprepared prospective retirees. To such individuals, retirement may mean the end of certain desirables including loss of regular income and social prestige. Thus, employees who self-perceive as retirement anxious may attempt to neutralize the anxiety by engaging in actions that may include negative behaviours such as theft and psychological withdrawal which are detrimental to the wellbeing of the organisation. Furthermore, when employees believe that the organisation neither cares about them nor appreciates their contributions, negative emotions may be evoked, which in turn may increase the likelihood to indulge in negative behaviours aimed at the organisational or other co-workers. But when employees feel that the organisation cares about their happiness and supports them, for example, by providing a conducive work environment and prompt payment of remuneration, they will feel a sense of commitment and loyalty toward the organisation which may reduce the tendency to engage in negative behaviours such as workplace deviance.

Hypotheses of the study.

- 1: Perceived organisational support negatively predicts workplace deviance among decline career stage employees
- 2: Retirement anxiety positively predicts workplace deviance among decline career stage employees

Method

Design and Participants

The present study was a survey research, which adopted a cross-sectional design using self-report questionnaires. One-hundred and twenty-three (females = 17.9%; $M_{age} = 60.31$; $SD = 8.77$) protective service employees on permanent employment with the government participated in the study. Each participant completed a set of the study questionnaire individually and confidentially. Descriptive statistics were performed to analyse participants' demographic characteristics. Results showed that the majority (83.7%) were married, while 16.3% of the participants reported being married at one time or the other prior to the study. Differences in education level were reported: the majority (95.1%) possessed post-senior secondary school certificates while only 4.9% reported not being educated beyond senior secondary. Lastly, to the question 'do you have dependents?' 95.1% answered 'Yes' while 4.9% said 'No'.

Ethical Consideration

The research was conducted in compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. The purpose of the study and the research tools to be used were explained to the study participants. Verbal consent was obtained from the participants who expressed willingness to participate in the study. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any stage if they felt uncomfortable without the permission of the researcher or any consequences. This step was taken to ensure that participation was voluntary. To ensure confidentiality, they were not to indicate any personal information and were assured that the data would be handled only by the researcher for use solely for research purposes.

Measures

A self-report questionnaire that comprised standardized scales arranged in sections was used for data collection. To describe the participants, a demographic section was included in the questionnaire and this was used to measure their age, gender, marital status, education, and whether they had dependents.

Workplace Deviance

Workplace deviance was assessed using the Interpersonal and Organisational Deviance Scale (IOD; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). This scale which contains 19 items has been used in previous studies to assess employee deviant behaviour directed at both the organisation itself as well as co-workers. Twelve items are designed to assess deviant work behaviours targeted at the organisation, while seven items measure deviant behaviour that targets organisational members. In line with the objectives of the present study, both subscales were merged to calculate a composite score for workplace deviance. The participants indicated the frequency with which they typically engage in each behaviour with a 5-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from 1 = never, to 5 = almost daily. Examples of items in the scale include: "Made fun of someone at work", and "Come in late to work without permission". The Cronbach's alpha for the composite scale with the study participants was .74. Higher scores indicated greater involvement in workplace deviance.

Perceived Organisational Support

This was measured using the 8-item Survey of Perceived Organisational Support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Items in the scale subjectively assess the extent to which employees believe that the organisation appreciates their contribution and pays attention to

their well-being. The original SPOS scale had 36 items, but shorter versions including the 16-item, 8-item, and 3-item are also currently in use. In this study, the 8-item version was used based on findings suggesting that it is more efficient than the other three versions (Worley, Fuqua, & Hellman, 2009). It contained four negatively worded items that were reverse-scored. Items were rated on a Likert-type response format with options ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 7 = 'strongly agree'. Sample items include: 'The organisation values my contribution to its well-being', and, 'The organisation fails to appreciate any extra effort from me'. Worley et al., (2009) reported a Cronbach alpha of .93 for the 8-item version with item-total correlations ranging from 0.70 to 0.84. The Cronbach alpha obtained in the present study is .83. Higher scores indicated a more favorable perception of organisational support.

Nigerian Pre-retirement Anxiety

Retirement anxiety was assessed using the Nigerian Pre-retirement Anxiety Scale (NPAS, Ugwu et al., 2019). It is a 15-item multidimensional scale that assesses the degree of retirement-related anxiety experienced by employees prior to retiring. The dimensions are financial preparedness, social obligation, and social alienation. In the present study, the composite score was calculated in line with the objectives of the study. The NPAS was preferred by the study participants as the items address uniquely family and social worries that are of concern to employees in the African setting such as Nigeria. Other instruments currently in use such as the Retirement Anxiety Scale (RAS; Hayslip et al. 1997) include mainly items that are considered euro-centric. For this reason, a locally developed and validated scale was used to assess retirement anxiety in this study. Respondents indicated the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Negatively worded items were reversely scored. Examples of items on the scale are: 'I am afraid I will be lonely when I retire'; 'I feel I will have little value after my retirement' and 'I feel I will have little value after my retirement'. The authors reported a Cronbach alpha of .72 for the composite scale with a sample of public sector employees in Nigeria. In this study, a Cronbach alpha of .71 was reported. Higher scores indicated a higher level of retirement-induced anxiety.

Procedure

Permission to carry out the study with their employees was obtained from individuals in the different organisations vested with the authority to allow or disallow their employees to participate in the study. Then using the inclusion criteria as a basis for selection, the researcher requested eligible employees to participate in the study. Verbal consent was obtained from only those who indicated interest to participate and these were given a set of the study questionnaire to self-complete. A total of 123 of the 180 questionnaires distributed were found useful for analysis in subsequent stages of the study. The remaining 57 questionnaires were either lost or could not be used because of a high number of missing items.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) version 20. Pearson's correlation was used to establish the relationships among the study variables. Hierarchical regression was performed to establish the contributions of the socio-demographic variables, perceived organisational support, and retirement anxiety to workplace deviance.

Results

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (n)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (years)	<i>Mean = 60.31; SD = 8.77</i>		
Gender	Male	101	82.1
	Female	22	17.9
Marital Status	Married	103	83.7
	Married at one time or the other	20	16.3
Education	Up to Senior Secondary School Certificate	11	8.9
	Above senior secondary school certificate	112	91.1
Do you have dependents?	Yes	117	95.1
	No	6	4.9

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation scores, and bivariate relationships among the study variables (*N* = 123)

S/N	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Age	60.31	8.77	1							
2	Gender	-	-	-.11	1						
3	Marital Status	-	-	.12	.34**	1					
4	Education	-	-	-.05	-.06	-.04	1				
5	Do you have dependents?	-	-	.03	.01	.06	.08	1			
6	POS	29.46	4.91	.29**	.87	.17	.35**	-.00	1		
7	RA	41.63	9.11	-.28**	.45	-.16	-.25**	-.35**	-.49**	1	
8	Workplace Deviance	25.90	5.11	.15	.19*	.20*	-.14	-.08	-.19*	.13*	1

***P* < 0.01, **P* < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Age was entered as a continuous variable. Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female. Marital Status was coded 1 = married; 2 = married at one time or the other. Education was coded 1 = up to Senior Secondary School Certificate; 2 = above senior secondary school certificate. Do you have dependents was coded 1 = Yes; 2 = No. Perceived organisational support, retirement anxiety, and workplace deviance were interpreted so that high scores on each indicated a higher perception of the variable.

In Table 2, the correlations show that age was not significantly related to workplace deviance ($r = .15$, $p > .05$). Gender was positively associated with workplace deviance suggesting that males are more likely to be involved in workplace deviance ($r = .19$, $p < .05$). Marital status was significantly and positively related to workplace deviance and implies that married employees would be more likely to engage in workplace deviance ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). Education was not significantly related to workplace deviance ($r = -.14$, $p > .05$). 'Do you have dependents' had no significant association with workplace deviance ($r = -.08$, $p > .05$). Perceived organisational support was associated negatively with workplace deviance ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$) indicating that soon-to-retire employees with a more favorable perception of organisational support showed a decreased tendency to be involved in workplace deviance. Retirement anxiety was significantly and positively related to workplace deviance ($r = .13$, p

< .05), suggesting that those with a higher level of retirement anxiety exhibited a greater tendency to engage in workplace deviance.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression showing the contributions of POS and RA to Workplace Deviance

Variables	Steps		
	1	2	3
Age	.09*	.06	.04
Gender	-.09*	-.11*	-.08*
Marital Status	-.05	-.05	-.09
Education	.08	.02	.02
Do you have dependents	-.15	-.09	-.11
POS		-.20*	-.14*
RA			-.15*
R ²	.05	.09	.11
F values	F (5, 117) = 6.12*	F (4, 116) = 8.41^	F (7, 115) = 7.65*

** $P < 0.01$, $P < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

Table 3 showed the results of the hierarchical regression analysis that examined the contributions of control variables (age, gender, marital status, education, do you have dependents), perceived organisational support, and retirement anxiety to workplace deviance. Among the control variables, only age and gender contributed significantly to workplace deviance. As a group, the control variables contributed 5% to the variance in workplace deviance. Perceived organisational support negatively predicted workplace deviance ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$) and contributed 9% to the variance in workplace deviance over and above the control variables. The data supported hypothesis one. Retirement anxiety was found to negatively predict workplace deviance ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$). The analysis showed that retirement anxiety contributed an additional 11% of the variance to workplace deviance over and above the control variables and perceived organisational support. Hypothesis two is not supported by the data

Discussion

This study aimed to establish the predictive value of perceived organisational support and retirement anxiety on workplace deviance in a sample of decline career-stage employees from public sector organisations in Nigeria. Two hypotheses were generated guided by extant literature and tested in the study. Results showed that while hypothesis one was supported, the data did not support hypothesis two as predicted.

Results showed that socio-demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, education, do you have dependents) jointly predicted workplace deviance. Age and gender were the only control variables that contributed significantly to workplace deviance. Further analysis of the results of the hierarchical regression showed perceived organisational support to negatively predict workplace deviance. The finding supported hypothesis one of the study. The finding is supported by previous studies which showed POS to be positively related to desirable work outcomes (Aransanmi & Krishna, 2019; Kurtessis et al. 2017). The norm of

reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) can be applied to explain the finding. The reciprocity norm maintains that entities in a social relationship are obligated to return the favour and good deeds received from each other. The organisation and its employees are involved in a social exchange relationship built on mutual trust, which implies that the principle of the norm of reciprocity would be expected to guide their behaviour. Thus, it is likely that decline career stage employees who feel that they are supported by the organisation may have reciprocated the gesture by deciding not to engage in any behaviour that could harm the organisation such as workplace deviance.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed retirement anxiety to be a negative predictor of workplace deviance. This means that decline career stage employees who self-reported high retirement anxiety exhibited a decreased tendency to be involved in workplace deviance. The finding did not support hypothesis two of the study. In addition, the finding is not supported by past studies which demonstrated retirement anxiety to be positively related to deviant behaviours (e.g. Piccoli & Bellotto, 2014; Tian et al. 2014). One plausible explanation for the finding is age influence on behaviour, in this context, work behaviour. Research has established that as people grow older, they tend to experience fewer negative emotions and develop a strong preference for positive ones (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Noting that decline career stage employees are generally older persons, and age has been found to relate negatively to counterproductive work behaviour and positively to citizenship behaviour (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Pletzer, 2021), it could be that the positive emotional disposition associated with aging may have suppressed the tendency for retirement anxious employees to engage in workplace deviance as found in the current study.

Implications of the study

The current study concludes that perceived organisational support and retirement anxiety both predicted workplace deviance among decline career stage employees, although not as hypothesized for retirement anxiety. The findings further underscore these factors as key employee attitudes that could explain why employees may get involved in discretionary behaviours that are harmful to the organisation, and, or co-workers, particularly as they prepare to formally exit the workplace. From the theoretical perspective, the findings confirm the value of the norm of reciprocity in further deepening the understanding of the intricacies of the employer-employee relationship in a non-western context such as Nigeria.

The findings have practical implications for managing workplace deviance among prospective retirees, and in particular, those in the decline career stage. The study found perceived organisational support to negatively predict workplace deviance. This implies that sustaining workplace policies and practices that promote the feeling that employees are cared for and valued by the organisation may ensure employees' reduced involvement in negative work behaviours as they move up the career ladder. There are several ways to achieve this goal including paying salaries, wages, and bonuses timeously, attending to their grievances and private concerns, and enriching the work environment. The study also found retirement anxiety to negatively predict workplace deviance. While the outcome was unexpected, it indicates that experiencing some level of anxiety about retirement may benefit the organisation at least in terms of reducing the incidence of workplace deviance among such employees.

Limitations of the Study/Suggestions for Further Studies

The study adopted a self-report approach for data collection. This strategy is vulnerable to faking responses which tends to compromise the findings. To avoid this limitation, future studies may require supervisors to diarise cases of subordinate's workplace deviance as this is likely to provide a more objective measure of workplace deviance. Another limitation concerns the sample size adopted in the study. The small sample size may not be representative of the population of decline career stage employees in the public sector organisations in Nigeria. A much larger sample size with participants that cut across different public sector organisations may have enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

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