

## Impact of Perceived Organizational Injustice on Moral Injury and Counterproductive Work Behavior among Teachers of Higher Education Institutes (HEI)

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### Abstract

The current study explored the impact of perceived organizational injustice on counterproductive work behavior and moral injury among teachers of higher education institutes. Based on organizational justice theory and moral injury frameworks, the research sought to investigate the relationships among perceived injustice, counterproductive work behavior, and moral injury. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was utilized, and data were gathered from 200 university teachers through standardized self-report instruments, including the Perceived Injustice Scale, the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C), and the Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES). Data was analyzed using SPSS. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between perceived organizational injustice, counterproductive work behavior, and moral injury, suggesting that higher perceptions of injustice were linked with increased engagement in counterproductive behaviors and greater experiences of moral injury. Regression analyses further showed that perceived organizational injustice was a significant predictor of both counterproductive work behavior and moral injury. The research adds to the growing literature on organizational injustice in educational contexts and contributes practical implications for university administrators to foster more equitable and supportive academic environments.

**Keywords:** perceived organizational injustice, counterproductive work behavior, moral injury, university students, organizational justice.

### Introduction

Higher education faces increasing pressures: accountability, performance metrics, funding constraints, and rapid organizational changes. Within this milieu, university teachers are both agents and targets of organizational processes that shape behavior and well-being (Kim & Kessel, 2020; Bright et al., 2022). Within higher education, university teachers operate under multifaceted pressures including performance metrics, administrative demands, and competing moral expectations that can broadly influence psychological well-being and behavioral responses. Two constructs that have emerged as central to understanding negative workplace outcomes in this context are perceived organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Increasingly, scholars have also begun to explore the related but distinct phenomenon of moral injury, a form of psychosocial harm arising from moral transgressions in work settings. Collectively, these constructs offer a critical lens for examining how fairness perceptions within

universities may lead to ethical dissonance, psychological distress, and behavioral deterioration among faculty.

### **Perceived Organizational Injustice**

Perceived Organizational Injustice (POI) is basically those organizational processes, relationships, and results that are unjust or inequitable. Grounded in organizational justice theory, perceptions of injustice emerge when faculty believe that rewards, recognition, decision making processes, or interpersonal treatment violate normative standards of fairness (e.g., distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) (Adams, 1963).

Subdimensions include distributive injustice (unfair outcomes), procedural injustice (unfair processes), and interactional injustice (disrespectful or demeaning treatment) (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001). Subsequent meta-analytic work (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990) demonstrates that each dimension uniquely relates to affective and behavioral outcomes, though distributive and procedural injustice consistently show robust links to negative work reactions. Majority of the previous studies found that organizational justice or fairness had important impact on employees' job satisfaction, performance, attitudes, and intention to stay with the organization (Fields, Pang, & Chiu, 2000; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Shan et al., 2015). Although there is rare recent literature available that investigates how organizational injustice impacts job outcomes and job dissatisfaction.

In higher education, POI manifests in distinct but interconnected forms: workload and reward distribution (distributive), opacity in policy implementation and criteria for tenure/promotion (procedural), and perceived disrespect or obliviousness in interactions with administrators, committee chairs, or senior faculty (interactional). These patterns align with the professional norms of academia, where merit, transparency, and collegial regard are central to identity and status. Empirical research demonstrates that higher perceived organizational justice is associated with positive attitudes and behaviors such as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), whereas perceived injustice is linked with adverse cognitive and emotional responses (e.g., job burnout, negative affect) that undermine workplace functioning. For instance, recent studies among educators show that low POJ correlates with greater burnout, which, in turn, reduces constructive workplace behaviors. (Hongjingli., 2025).

Besides this, perceived organizational support is found to be associated with higher engagement in counterproductive work behaviors. For example, according to a study by De Clercq, Kundi, and Sardar (2022), individuals who perceive organizational unfairness are more likely to engage in unproductive job behavior; this effect can be partially explained by organizational identity. In the correlation model, there was a statistically significant positive association between perceived injustice and CWB (De Clercq, Kundi, & Sardar, 2022).

Moreover, the positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior was illustrated in an empirical study on employees conducted by Amzulescu & Butucescu (2021) that offers a stronger proof that workplace alienation acted as a mediation factor in the relationship between organizational injustice and unproductive behavior (Amzulescu, G., & Butucescu, A. (2021).

Furthermore, a number of studies also report that a significant positive correlation exists between perceived organizational injustice and moral injury. For example, Nelson et al. (2022) presented mixed-method research on healthcare professionals to track the phenomena. Moral injury levels were found to be correlated with organizational perceptions. It offers empirical evidence that unfavorable organizational attitudes, such as injustice or betrayal by authority, are linked to higher moral injury ratings, although not reporting a straightforward bivariate correlation coefficient (Nelson et al., 2022).

Moreover, numerous studies support the contention that perceived organizational injustice is assumed to positively predict moral injury. For example, a study was reported by Khan et al., (2013) it used a sample of Pakistani employees to investigate the mediation function of discrete emotions in an association between perceived organizational injustice and CWB. The findings demonstrated that counterproductive work behaviors were significantly predicted by perceptions of injustice (Khan, Quratulain & Crawshaw., 2013). According to a second study by Carter, C. (2021) on frontline workers, moral injury can result from organizational injustice, treachery, and moral violation (Carter, C., 2021).

A diversity of studies is found to explore the impact of perceived organizational injustice on counter work productive work behavior. For example, a quantitative study on bank employees found that bank employees' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice have a significant impact on counterproductive work behaviors thus by confirming the predictive role of injustice for CWB (Aisha et al., 2022).

One more study by Qamar et al., (2023) further supported the hypothesis. This quantitative study in Pakistan's energy sector found a strong positive relationship between organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior, supporting the predictive effect of perceived injustice on CWB.

### **Moral injury**

Moral injury, originally studied in military settings, has emerged in civilian workplaces as a result of actions, or the absence of actions, that transgress deeply held moral beliefs (Litz et al., 2009; Gaylord et al., 2019). Moral injury is now recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon, a distressing psychological, social, and spiritual impact that happens when someone commits, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that violate deeply held moral beliefs and values, along with feelings of betrayal by an institution or authority figure. (Litz et al., 2009; English & Smith, 2020). The symptoms of moral injury include guilt, shame, a loss of trust, and existential conflict, which overlap with but are distinct from PTSD (Griffin et al., 2019).

In academia, moral injury can arise when institutional expectations clash with personal, professional, or ethical commitments (Lowe & Brown, 2020; Dean et al., 2021). In academia, moral injury may arise when resource scarcity, policy mandates, or leadership behavior force educators to compromise student welfare, integrity in research or pedagogy, or core scholarly commitments. The university environment often embeds high-stakes accountability student success metrics, publication expectations, grant pressures, and governance decisions that can clash with professional ethics (e.g., commitment to student care, rigorous oversight of research integrity, equitable treatment of colleagues). When institutional actions are perceived as misaligned with these professional values, moral distress and injury can emerge, contributing to cognitive dissonance, erosion of professional identity, and withdrawal from or deviation from desired professional conduct.

### **Counterproductive work behavior (CWB)**

Counterproductive work behavior, on the other hand, includes voluntary behaviors including diminished effort, tardiness, sabotage, dishonesty, and withdrawal that negatively impact the organization or its members (Sackett & DeVore, 2005; Suttcliffe et al., 2014).

In universities, CWB can take forms that are particularly consequential for teaching and learning: reduced teaching quality, neglect of mentoring responsibilities, plagiarism under pressure, resistance to curricular innovation, and undermining colleagues or departmental initiatives. These behaviors not only affect student outcomes and research integrity but also disrupt collegial

climates and reputational standing. CWB in higher education is not merely an individual flaw; it often reflects systemic constraints, misalignment between institutional expectations and educators' professional values, and perceived gaps in support, recognition, and fairness (Bennett & Irvine, 2020; Santos & Ferreira, 2023). Among university teachers, CWB can manifest as absenteeism, disengagement, poor mentoring, plagiarism under pressure, or resistance to change.

### **Rationale**

For university teachers, the risk of moral injury may stem from systemic issues such as inequitable policies, lack of participatory governance, performance evaluation criteria that conflict with professional integrity, and workplace cultures that tacitly endorse unfair treatment. When faculty members consistently encounter situations that transgress their professional values such as perceived exploitation, procedural bias in promotions, or administrative decisions that contradict academic norms they may experience moral disorientation. This moral distress can accumulate over time, leading to long-term psychological harm and behavioral consequences that overlap with but are distinct from burnout and CWB. Moral injury's emotional sequelae (e.g., mistrust, alienation) may drive faculty to withdraw effort, disengage from institutional goals, or engage in subversive behaviors that compromise organizational health.

Given the competitive, performance-oriented climate of modern universities, understanding the interplay between perceived organizational injustice, moral injury, and counterproductive work behavior is essential for both theory and practice. Investigating these relationships can advance organizational psychology by clarifying how ethical and justice perceptions influence faculty well-being and conduct. Moreover, such research carries significant implications for university administrators seeking to foster equitable workplaces, support teacher well-being, and mitigate the behavioral costs of perceived unfairness. By articulating the moral and behavioral consequences of injustice, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of faculty work experiences and to inform interventions that promote fairness, ethical alignment, and positive institutional outcomes. Yet, research in academic contexts remains comparatively limited, with existing studies focused more on justice and positive behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship) than on moral injury and deviance.

This study posits that moral injury is a key psychological pathway through which perceived organizational injustice leads to counterproductive work behaviors. Therefore, CWB may not just be a simple reaction to unfairness, but a behavioral symptom of a deeper moral wound.

An integrated framework that links POI, moral injury, and CWB in higher education advances theory by bridging justice, ethics, and organizational behavior literatures within a domain where fairness, professional identity, and moral commitments are central to daily practice. In conclusion, this research seeks to bridge a critical gap in the literature by examining the role of moral injury as a mediator in the relationship between perceived organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior among university teachers.

The social exchange and fairness literature posits that unfair treatment erodes trust, commitment, and organizational citizenship, increasing CWB as a defensive or retaliatory response (Colquitt et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2011).

The theoretical foundations underpinning the relationships among perceived organizational injustice, moral injury, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among university teachers are presented. The purpose is to establish a coherent theoretical basis for the proposed conceptual model by integrating established organizational theories with emerging perspectives on moral injury. The framework is primarily grounded in organizational justice theory, social exchange theory, fairness heuristic theory, and moral injury theory, each of which offers complementary

explanations for how perceptions of unfairness translate into psychological distress and maladaptive workplace behavior.

In the context of Pakistani higher education, where organizational hierarchies, power distance, and institutional constraints shape faculty experiences, these theoretical perspectives collectively explain not only behavioral reactions to injustice but also the deeper moral and ethical consequences of sustained unfair treatment.

#### Equity and Social Exchange Theories

The foundational equity theory posits that perceived imbalances between employee contributions and organizational rewards ignite psychological distress. Individuals strive to restore equity; when legitimate avenues to restore fairness fail, they may resort to deviant strategies including CWBs to rebalance perceived inequity (Grace, 2024).

Empirical research consistently finds that lower perceptions of distributive and procedural justice predict higher levels of CWBs via negative affective processes. Negative emotions elicited by unfair treatment (frustration, anger, resentment) serve as mediators between injustice perceptions and deviant responses. Numerous studies have established a strong link between perceived injustice and CWB. When employees feel unfairly treated, they may lash out at the organization as a form of retaliation or to vent their frustration (Aubé et al., 2009). For instance, a meta-analysis by Hershcovis et al. (2007) found that injustice was a significant predictor of workplace aggression.

Meta-analytic evidence further supports these pathways: mistreatment and perceptions of injustice provoked negative reciprocity behaviors that constitute CWBs, corroborating social exchange and justice mechanisms as central explanatory frameworks. (Liang, 2022).

#### Organizational Context: Higher Education

Within Pakistani universities, justice perceptions are particularly salient due to centralized decision-making structures and limited faculty participation in governance. When university teachers perceive injustice in these areas, it can lead to feelings of resentment, frustration, and a breach of the psychological contract between the employee and the institution (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001).

Although much CWB research has centered on general organizational populations (business and healthcare), studies in *higher education* have begun to emerge. For example, investigations in Egyptian universities link perceptions of organizational injustice (including unfair leadership and biased processes) to increased CWBs among academic employees. Organizational cynicism also mediated this relationship, suggesting that injustice erodes trust and fosters deviant behaviors (Omer Ahmed, 2025).

Other literature specific to higher education indicates that work ethics and cultural norms significantly moderate the justice–CWB relationship: where institutional culture promotes fairness and ethical standards, CWBs are less prevalent. Conversely, perceived injustice within academic settings is associated with higher rates of absenteeism, reduced engagement, and informal resistance to institutional goals. (Norashikin Misnan, 2024).

#### Social Exchange Theory and the Injustice–Behavior Link

Social exchange theory further explains how perceived organizational injustice influences employee behavior. According to this theory, the employment relationship is based on reciprocal exchanges of resources, respect, and obligation. When organizations treat employees fairly, employees feel morally and socially obligated to reciprocate through positive attitudes and

behaviors. Conversely, when employees perceive unfair treatment, they interpret it as a breach of the social exchange relationship.

This breach weakens employees' sense of obligation toward the organization and increases the likelihood of withdrawal or retaliatory behaviors. In academic institutions, where professional commitment and intrinsic motivation are critical, violations of social exchange expectations can be especially damaging. Faculty members who perceive injustice may reduce effort, disengage from institutional goals, or engage in counterproductive work behavior as a form of negative reciprocity.

### Affective Events Theory (AET)

AET suggests that workplace events trigger emotional reactions, which in turn influence attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). An unjust act is a negative event that can provoke anger, frustration, and a sense of betrayal, emotions that can fuel both moral distress and the desire to engage in CWB.

### Fairness Heuristic Theory and Trust in Authority

Fairness heuristic theory complements social exchange explanations by emphasizing the role of justice perceptions in shaping trust in authority figures. According to this theory, employees use fairness judgments as cognitive shortcuts to determine whether organizational authorities are trustworthy and whether the organization can be relied upon to act ethically in the future. In Pakistani universities, where power distance discourages open dissent, fairness heuristics may play an even stronger role. Faculty members may refrain from overt confrontation but internally disengage, reinforcing the relevance of fairness heuristic theory in explaining hidden or passive forms of counterproductive work behavior.

### Moral Injury Theory in Organizational Contexts

Moral injury is the psychological distress that results from actions, or the lack thereof, which violate one's moral or ethical code (Litz et al., 2009). Moral injury theory represents a relatively new but increasingly influential framework for understanding the ethical and psychological consequences of workplace experiences. Moral injury occurs when individuals experience events that violate their deeply held moral beliefs, values, or expectations, particularly when such violations involve betrayal by legitimate authority figures.

For university teachers, moral injury may arise when organizational practices conflict with academic values such as fairness, meritocracy, intellectual honesty, and respect for students and colleagues. Repeated exposure to organizational injustice can create moral dissonance, leading to emotions such as guilt, shame, anger, and moral disengagement.

The integration of moral injury theory with organizational justice perspectives forms the core theoretical contribution of the proposed framework. While justice theories explain *why* injustice provokes negative reactions, moral injury theory explains *how* injustice becomes internalized as a moral and ethical wound.

Thus, moral injury functions as a mediating mechanism that links perceived injustice with counterproductive work behavior, offering a deeper explanatory pathway than affect-based models alone. When teachers perceive that the institution has violated core values (e.g., academic integrity, student care), moral injury can undermine professional identity and ethical conduct, paradoxically increasing CWB as an adaptive, albeit maladaptive, coping mechanism (Cheng et al., 2022).

The central contribution of the proposed model lies in the inclusion of moral injury as a mediating variable. Moral injury is therefore positioned as a psychological pathway through which injustice exerts its deeper and more enduring effects on behavior. While the relationship between injustice

and CWB is clear, the psychological mechanisms that drive this connection are still being explored. Research by Mantzouridis and Vourtsis (2022) supports this, finding that organizational injustice can lead to moral disengagement, a precursor to unethical behavior.

In Pakistani universities, cultural norms emphasizing respect for authority may suppress overt deviance, resulting in covert or passive CWBs. The proposed framework captures these culturally specific manifestations by emphasizing moral injury and justice perceptions rather than overt aggression alone. The link between organizational injustice and CWB is well-established in the literature, with studies consistently showing that employees who feel unfairly treated are more likely to engage in such behaviors as a way to retaliate or restore a sense of equity (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

In summary, the proposed theoretical framework integrates organizational justice theory, social exchange theory, fairness heuristic theory, and moral injury theory to explain the relationships among perceived organizational injustice, moral injury, and counterproductive work behavior among university teachers.

This integrated framework provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining faculty behavior in Pakistani universities and offers a novel contribution by positioning moral injury as a central explanatory mechanism in organizational research. Moral injury emerging from organizational injustice may act as both a psychological and behavioral mediator in the pathway to CWBs.

Perceived organizational injustice constitutes a structural threat to deep moral and professional values particularly in professions with strong ethical commitments like teaching. When faculty perceive betrayals of justice by leadership (e.g., opaque decision processes, inequitable resource distribution), their moral expectations are violated, leading to internal conflict and distress consistent with moral injury constructs observed in broader settings.

In university settings, this could manifest as reduced teaching quality, withdrawal from collegial activities, cynicism toward institutional missions, and increased involvement in CWBs as coping or defensive strategies. These behaviors can include refusal to cooperate with institutional initiatives, covert resistance, and undermining departmental goals.

## Method

### Objectives

1. To find out the relationship between perceived organizational injustice, moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes.
2. To investigate the impact of perceived organizational injustice on moral injury among teachers of higher education institutes.
3. To investigate the impact of perceived organizational injustice on counter productive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes.

### Hypotheses

H1: There will be a positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice, moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes.

H2: Perceived organizational injustice will positively predict moral injury among teachers of higher education institutes.

H3: Perceived organizational injustice will positively predict counter productive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes.

### Operational definitions

The operational definitions of variables are as follow;

### Perceived Organizational Injustice

Perceived organizational injustice indicates employees' evaluations about the fairness of organizational policies, procedures, and social interactions within the work environment (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). The Perceived Injustice Scale (PIS) created by Hodson et al., (1994) will be used to evaluate perceived organizational injustice. Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of perceived organizational injustice.

### Counterproductive Work Behavior

Counterproductive work behavior includes voluntary actions that negatively impact the organization or its members, such as reduced effort, lateness, sabotage, dishonesty, and withdrawal (Sackett & DeVore, 2005; Suttcliffe et al., 2014). It is assessed using the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) created by Spector et al. (2006). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of counterproductive work behavior.

### Moral Injury

Moral injury is a distressing psychological, social, and spiritual effect that arise when an individual commits, fails to prevent, or observe acts that violates deeply held moral beliefs and values, along with the feelings of betrayal from an authority figure or institution (Litz et al., 2009). Moral injury is assessed through the Moral Injury Events Scale – Civilian Version (MIES-C). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of moral injury.

### Research Design

Cross-sectional correlational research design was used to investigate the impact of perceived organizational injustice on moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes. Data was gathered using standardized, self-report questionnaires that were distributed both physical and online via google forms.

### Sample

The sample comprises 200 university faculty members from private and public universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad aged between years 20 to 65 selected through convenient sampling techniques.

### Research Instruments

For the purpose of data collection, the tools used were:

#### Demographics

Basic demographic information of the subjects in relation to age, gender, educational level, designation, marital status, structure of organization, monthly income, job status and teaching experience were collected.

#### Perceived Injustice scale (Hodson et al.,1994)

The Perceived Injustice scale created by Hodson et al. (1994), describes the degree to which employees perceive their employer treats them unfairly. The measure requests employees to describe the degree of unfairness through four specific questions instead generalized evaluations of injustice at their workplaces. The Perceived Injustice Scale includes item on a 4-point Likerttype scale, where participants express their level of agreement with each statement using a response scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores reflect greater perceptions of injustice. Prior studies have indicated that the scale possess acceptable to good internal consistency reliability, typically showing Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally reported around .70.

### Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (Spector et al., 2006)

Counterproductive work behavior was assessed using the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) designed by Spector et al., (2006). The CWB-C is a self-report tool intended to evaluate intentional behaviors that harm organizations or individuals within organizations. Participants report how frequently they have engaged in each behavior using a 5-point Likert response scale that ranges from never to every day. Higher scores indicate greater engagement in counterproductive work behaviors. The scale is commonly used in organizational and occupational psychology research and is appropriate for measuring counterproductive behaviors in various work settings. Previous research has reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .85 to .95

### Moral Injury Events Scale- Civilian (MIES-C) (Nash et al., 2013)

Moral injury was measured by using the Moral Injury Events Scale – Civilian version (MIES-C). The Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES) was originally created by Nash et al. (2013) to evaluate exposure to potentially morally injurious events. The MIES-C is a self-report instrument designed to measure exposure to potentially morally injurious events among civilian populations. The MIES-C consists of items rated on a Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores specify greater exposure to morally injurious experiences. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency reliability, with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients that range from approximately .80 to .90.

### Procedure

The data was gathered from various higher education institutes of Pakistan. Participants provided signed informed consent. Perceived organizational injustice was assessed through Perceived Injustice Scale (PIS) created by Hodson et al. (1994), moral injury was evaluated using Moral Injury Events Scale- Civilian version (MIES-C) developed by Nash et al. (2013) to measure moral injury. Additionally, the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) established by Spector et al., (2006) was used to analyze the counterproductive work behavior. Data was collected through standardized, self-report questionnaires distributed physical and online via google forms.

### Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis of the results was conducted using SPSS version 25.0 for data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to determine means, standard deviation and frequencies of the demographic sheet. The Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between organizational injustice, counterproductive work behavior, and moral injury. Lastly, regression analysis was conducted to determine organizational injustice was a statistically significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior and moral injury.

### Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality.
- Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment without facing any consequences.
- Permissions were obtained from the authors of each questionnaire prior to administering them.

## Results

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of perceived organizational injustice on counterproductive work behavior and moral injury among teachers of higher education institutes. The research designed to assess the predictive role of perceived organizational injustice in explaining variations in counterproductive work behavior and moral injury. The results of the research in form of analysis, as done in SPSS, are presented in tables below. Along with description that clarifies the patterns and associations observed within the sample.

**Table 1**

*Demographic details of the participants (n= 200), Frequencies (f) & Percentages (%).*

|                                  | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| <b>Age (Years)</b>               |          |          |
| 20–35                            | 122      | 61.0     |
| 36–50                            | 52       | 26.0     |
| 51 and above                     | 26       | 13.0     |
| <b>Gender</b>                    |          |          |
| Male                             | 84       | 47.0     |
| Female                           | 116      | 53.0     |
| <b>Education</b>                 |          |          |
| MS/MPhil                         | 138      | 69.0     |
| PhD                              | 62       | 31.0     |
| <b>Designation</b>               |          |          |
| Lecturer                         | 165      | 82.5     |
| Assistant Professor              | 19       | 9.5      |
| Associate Professor              | 9        | 4.5      |
| Professor                        | 7        | 3.5      |
| <b>Marital Status</b>            |          |          |
| Single                           | 111      | 55.5     |
| Married                          | 89       | 44.5     |
| <b>Job Status</b>                |          |          |
| Visiting                         | 50       | 25.0     |
| Contract                         | 109      | 54.5     |
| Regular                          | 41       | 20.5     |
| <b>Monthly Income (PKR)</b>      |          |          |
| 50,000–100,000                   | 55       | 27.5     |
| 100,000–200,000                  | 124      | 62.0     |
| Above 200,000                    | 21       | 10.5     |
| <b>Structure of Organization</b> |          |          |
| Public                           | 88       | 44.0     |
| Private                          | 40       | 20.0     |
| Semi-Government                  | 72       | 36.0     |
| <b>Teaching Experience</b>       |          |          |
| 1–5 years                        | 126      | 63.0     |
| 6–10 years                       | 51       | 25.5     |
| 11–15 years                      | 18       | 9.0      |

15–20 years

5

2.5

*f*=Frequency, %= percentage

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants ( $N = 200$ ) using frequencies and percentages. The sample consisted of respondents aged 20 to 35 years (61%), with those aged 36 to 50 years making up 26%, while a smaller percentage were 51 years and above (13%). Regarding gender, the sample comprised of 53% females and 47% males, reflecting a relatively balanced gender distribution. In terms of educational qualification, most of the participants held an MS/MPhil degree (69%), while 31% had completed a PhD. Concerning their designation, most participants were Lecturers (82.5%), while fewer were Assistant Professors (9.5%), Associate Professors (4.5%), and Professors (3.5%). Regarding marital status, slightly more than half of the respondents were single (55%), while 44% were married. Regarding job status, most of the participants were regular employees ( $f = 124$ , 62.0%), followed by contract employees ( $f = 55$ , 27.5%), and visiting faculty ( $f = 21$ , 10.5%). In terms of monthly income, 44.0% ( $f = 88$ ) earned between PKR 50,000–100,000, 20.0% ( $f = 40$ ) earned PKR 100,000–200,000, and 36.0% ( $f = 72$ ) reported an income of PKR 200,000 and above. In terms of structure of organization, most participants were employed in public sector institutions ( $f = 126$ , 63.0%), followed by private institutions ( $f = 51$ , 25.5%) and semi-government organizations ( $f = 18$ , 7.0%). Lastly, regarding teaching experience, the largest group had 1–5 years of experience ( $f = 111$ , 55.0%), followed by those with 6–10 years ( $f = 89$ , 44.5%), 11–15 years ( $f = 50$ , 25.0%), 15–20 years ( $f = 41$ , 20.5%), and a small proportion with more than 20 years of experience ( $f = 5$ , 2.5%).

**Table 2**

*Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient of Perceived Injustice scale (PIS), Moral Injury Events Scale- Civilian (MIS) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CPWB) (n=200).*

| Variables | K  | $\alpha$ | M     | SD   | Range  |           | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-----------|----|----------|-------|------|--------|-----------|----------|----------|
|           |    |          |       |      | Actual | Potential |          |          |
| CWB       | 32 | .81      | 38.47 | 5.10 | 33-59  | 32-160    | 2.38     | .503     |
| MIS       | 10 | .84      | 30.37 | 9.60 | 10-46  | 10-60     | -.481    | -.493    |
| PIS       | 4  | .80      | 12.17 | 2.73 | 4-16   | 4 -16     | -1.16    | 1.17     |

*Note.*  $\alpha$  =Cronbach Alpha; M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation; K= Number of Items

Table 2 presents an overview of the psychometric properties of the major study variables, including reliability coefficients, descriptive statistics, and distribution indices. The CWB scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ), MIS scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and PIS scale ( $\alpha = .80$ ) all showed mean scores and standard deviations indicative of moderate variability among participants. The skewness and kurtosis values for all three variables suggested approximately normal distributions, showing only minimal deviations. Overall, these findings confirm that all measures used in the study have sound psychometric properties suitable for further statistical analyses.

**Table 3**

*Pearson's correlation among the scales of Perceived Injustice scale (PIS), Moral Injury Events Scale- Civilian (MIS) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CPWB) (n=200)*

| Variables |      | PIS | MIS    | CPWB  |
|-----------|------|-----|--------|-------|
| 1         | PIS  | -   | .497** | .153* |
| 2         | MIS  |     | -      | .064  |
| 3         | CPWB |     |        | -     |

*Note; CPWB=Counterproductive Work Behavior; MIS = Moral Injury Scale; PIS=Perceived Injustice Scale \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$*

Table 3 displays the correlation matrix. It shows the relationship between perceived organizational injustice, counterproductive work behavior, and moral injury among university teachers. It demonstrated a strong and significant positive relationship between perceived organization injustice and counterproductive work behavior ( $r=.153^*$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) indicating that increased levels of perceived organizational injustice are associated with greater involvement in counterproductive work behaviors. It also indicated a significant positive correlation between perceived organizational injustice and moral injury among university teachers ( $r=.497^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) suggesting that as employees perceive higher levels of unfairness in organizational practices, they are more likely to experience moral injury.

**Table 4**

*Simple Linear Regression among Perceived Injustice scale (PIS) and Moral Injury Events Scale- Civilian (MIS) (n=200)*

| Moral Injury                           |      |      |         |      |        |      |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|---------|------|--------|------|
| Variable                               | B    | S. E | $\beta$ | t    | 95% CI |      |
|                                        |      |      |         |      | LL     | UL   |
| Perceived Organizational Injustice     | 1.74 | .217 | .497    | 8.05 | 1.31   | 2.17 |
| R=.497, $R^2=.247$ , $\Delta R^2=.243$ |      |      |         |      |        |      |

*Note: CI=Confidence Interval, UL=Upper Limit, LL= Lower limit \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$*

The table 4 shows the findings of the regression analysis conducted between the predictor variable, perceived organizational injustice, and the outcome variable counterproductive work behavior. The results showed that perceived organizational injustice significantly predicts ( $p < 0.001$ ) the scores on the moral injury scale. The positive sign shows direct relation among the two

variables.  $B = 1.74$ ,  $SE = .217$ ,  $\beta = .497$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that higher perceived organizational injustice was associated with higher counterproductive work behavior. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval further supporting the finding that perceived organizational injustice was a significant predictor of moral injury. These results support the study hypothesis that perceived organizational injustice leads to greater moral injury.

**Table 5**

*Simple Linear Regression among Perceived Injustice scale (PIS) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CPWB) (n=200)*

| <b>Counterproductive Work Behavior</b>    |          |            |                           |          |                      |           |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------|
| <b>Variable</b>                           | <b>B</b> | <b>S.E</b> | <b><math>\beta</math></b> | <b>t</b> | <b><u>95% CI</u></b> |           |
|                                           |          |            |                           |          | <b>LL</b>            | <b>UL</b> |
| Perceived Organizational Injustice        | .286     | .131       | .153                      | 2.17     | .027                 | .544      |
| $R=.153$ , $R^2=.023$ , $\Delta R^2=.018$ |          |            |                           |          |                      |           |

*Note: CI=Confidence Interval, UL=Upper Limit, LL= Lower limit \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$*

The table 5 shows the findings of the regression analysis conducted between the predictor variable, perceived organizational injustice, and the outcome variable counterproductive work behavior. The results showed that perceived organizational injustice significantly predicts ( $p < 0.001$ ) the scores on the counterproductive work behavior scale. The positive sign shows direct relation among the two variables.  $B = .286$ ,  $SE = .131$ ,  $\beta = .153$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that higher perceived organizational injustice was associated with higher counterproductive work behavior. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval further supporting the result that perceived organizational injustice was a significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior. These findings support the study hypothesis that perceived organizational injustice leads to increased counterproductive work behavior.

## Discussion

The present study was aimed to find out the impact of perceived organizational injustice on moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers of higher education institutes (HEI). Perceived Organizational Injustice is basically those organizational processes, relationships, and results are that are unjust or inequitable. Moral injury is recognized is a multifaceted phenomenon, a distressing psychological, social, and spiritual impact that happens when someone commits, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that violate deeply held moral beliefs and values, along with feelings of betrayal by an institution or authority figure.

Counterproductive work behavior, on the other hand, includes voluntary behaviors including diminished effort, tardiness, sabotage, dishonesty, and withdrawal that negatively impact the organization or its members. The Perceived Injustice scale (PIS), Moral Injury Events Scale-

Civilian (MIS) and Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CPWB) were employed to assess the perceived organizational injustice, moral injury and counterwork productive work behavior respectively. The psychometric properties and analysis of the scales showed higher reliability and validity for the overall scales. The Cronbach's alpha of the Perceived Injustice scale (PIS) is 0.80 which says that this scale is reliable to measure perceived organizational injustice for the intended study. Also, the Cronbach's alpha of Injury Events Scale- Civilian (MIS)) is 0.84 from which this scale is internally consistent and reliable to measure moral injury in this study. Moreover, regarding the Cronbach's alpha of Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB) i.e. 0.81 from which it is evident that this scale is internally consistent and reliable to measure the level of counterwork productive work behavior in the present study. Furthermore, Skewness and kurtosis values indicate that data was normally distributed with only minimal deviations as skewness values lies between the range of -1 to +1 and kurtosis values lies between the ranges of -3 to +3 (Sekaran, 2003). (Table 2)

It was hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice, moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among university faculty members (H1). The results showed that perceived organizational injustice appears to be significantly positively correlated with counterproductive work behavior ( $r=.153^*$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which suggests that higher levels of perceived organizational injustice are associated with higher engagement in counterproductive work behaviors. In other words, when employees feel they are treated unfairly, they are more likely to respond with behaviors that harm the organization or its members (Table 3).

According to a study by De Clercq, Kundi, and Sardar (2022), individuals who perceive organizational unfairness are more likely to engage in unproductive job behavior; this effect can be partially explained by organizational identity. In the correlation model, there was a statistically significant positive association between perceived injustice and CWB (De Clercq, Kundi, & Sardar, 2022).

Moreover, the positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior was illustrated in an empirical study on employees conducted by Amzulescu & Butucescu (2021) that offers a stronger proof that workplace alienation acted as a mediation factor in the relationship between organizational injustice and unproductive behavior (Amzulescu, G., & Butucescu, A. (2021).

Furthermore, it was reported that a significant positive correlation exists between perceived organizational injustice and moral injury among university teachers ( $r=.497^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which suggests that workers are more likely to suffer moral injury when they believe that organizational procedures are unjust (Table 3).

To validate these findings, Nelson et al. (2022) presented mixed-method research on healthcare professionals to track the phenomena. Moral injury levels were found to be correlated with organizational perceptions. It offers empirical evidence that unfavorable organizational attitudes, such as injustice or betrayal by authority, are linked to higher moral injury ratings, although not reporting a straightforward bivariate correlation coefficient (Nelson et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice and moral injury was illustrated in a correlational study conducted on mental health nurses conducted by LotfiBejestani et al., 2023. Perceived organizational justice and moral injury were found to have a significant but inverse association in this correlational analysis. This suggests that moral injury and perceived organizational justice are closely related because both involve psychological harm from morally limited contexts. (Lotfi-Bejestani et al., 2023).

It was further hypothesized that perceived organizational injustice will positively predict moral injury among university faculty members (H2). The findings indicate that perceived organizational support significantly predicts the scores on the moral injury scale. The positive sign shows direct relation among the two variables.  $B = 1.74$ ,  $SE = .217$ ,  $(\beta = .497, p < .001)$  indicating that higher perceived organizational support was associated with higher counterproductive work behavior. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval further supporting the result that perceived organizational injustice was a significant predictor of moral injury. These results support the study hypothesis that perceived organizational injustice leads to greater moral injury (Table 4). To support these findings a study was reported by Khan et al., (2013). It used a sample of Pakistani employees to investigate the mediation function of discrete emotions in an association between perceived organizational injustice and CWB. The findings demonstrated that counterproductive work behaviors were significantly predicted by perceptions of injustice (Khan et., 2013). According to a second study by Carter, C. (2021) on frontline workers, moral injury can result from organizational injustice, treachery, and moral violation (Carter, C., 2021).

It was further hypothesized that perceived organizational injustice will positively predict counterproductive work behavior among university faculty members (H3). The findings revealed that perceived organizational injustice significantly predicts ( $p < 0.001$ ) the scores on the counterproductive work behavior scale. The positive sign shows direct relation among the two variables.  $B = .286$ ,  $SE = .131$ ,  $(\beta = .153, p < .001)$  indicating that higher perceived organizational injustice was associated with higher counterproductive work behavior. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval further supporting the result that perceived organizational injustice was a significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior. These results support the study hypothesis that perceived organizational injustice leads to greater counterproductive work behavior (Table 5).

Consistent with this, Aisha, Channa, Mirani, and Qureshi (2022) conducted a quantitative study on bank employees and found that bank employees' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice have a significant impact on counterproductive work behaviors thus by confirming the predictive role of injustice for CWB (Aisha, Channa, Mirani, & Qureshi., 2022). The hypothesis was further supported by another study conducted in 2023 by Qamar, Iqbal, and Fatima. This quantitative study in Pakistan's energy sector supported the predictive influence of perceived organizational injustice on CWB by finding a high positive correlation between organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior (Qamar, Iqbal & Fatima., 2023).

### Limitations

1. Time constraints and workload of faculty members may affect response depth and accuracy.
2. The cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal inferences among perceived organizational injustice, moral injury, and counterproductive work behavior.
3. Data collected from teachers of selected Higher Education Institutes may restrict the generalizability of findings to other educational levels or occupational sectors.
4. Cultural and institutional norms specific to HEIs may influence responses, limiting cross-cultural applicability.
5. Potential moderating variables (e.g., leadership style, organizational support, coping strategies) may not be fully examined.

## Recommendations

1. Future studies should adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs to better establish causal relationships and capture changes over time.
2. Incorporating qualitative interviews could provide deeper insight into teachers lived experiences of moral injury and perceived injustice.
3. Expanding the sample across different regions, types of institutions, and educational levels would enhance generalizability.
4. Organizational interventions focusing on transparent policies, fair leadership practices, and ethical governance should be implemented to reduce perceptions of injustice.
5. HEIs should provide institutional support systems, such as counseling and grievance redressal mechanisms, to mitigate moral injury.

## Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of perceived organizational injustice on moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers working in higher education institutes (HEIs). The study determined that perceived organizational injustice had a significant positive impact on moral injury and counterproductive work behavior among teachers in higher education institutes. Teachers who perceive unfair treatment are more likely to experience moral distress and engage in behaviors that negatively affect organizational functioning. These conclusions highlight the importance of promoting fairness, ethical leadership, and transparent practices in HEIs to safeguard teachers' well-being and reduce counterproductive behaviors.

The study emphasizes the importance of fostering fair and supportive organizational environments to protect teachers' moral and mental wellbeing and to reduce maladaptive workplace behaviors. Addressing perceptions of injustice through equitable policies, open communication, and ethical leadership may enhance institutional effectiveness and promote healthier work environments in higher education institutions.

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