

FACTORS INFLUENCING DEVIANT BEHAVIOR AMONG EMPLOYEES IN SMALL-SCALE BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates factors contributing to deviant behavior among employees in small-scale businesses (SSBs). Surveying 250 employees from manufacturing, retail, and service sectors, key behaviors identified include task avoidance, theft, sabotage, extended breaks, and workplace gossip or conflicts. ANOVA and regression analyses reveal that workplace gossip and time-wasting have the strongest negative impacts on organizational performance. The findings highlight the complex nature of employee deviance and stress the need for targeted interventions to foster a healthier, more productive work environment in SSBs.

Key Words: - Behavior, Deviant, employees, workplace culture

INTRODUCTION

Employee deviance has been a growing organizational challenges in different industries. Though the focus has been primarily on large corporations, small-scale enterprises encounter their own set of unique challenges as they relate to employee behavior that, ultimately, stymies their growth, productivity, and workplace harmony. Deviant behavior also encompasses actions that go against organizational norms, policies, or ethical codes; infractions may run the gamut from something as minor as tardiness to serious misconduct like theft, fraud, or workplace harassment (Watts, 2018). Such behaviors can create a toxic workplace environment, diminish trust among colleagues, and result in severe financial consequences. Identifying the cause of deviant behavior in small businesses is normalized within a larger context. It opens the door for developing targeted interventions that might reduce its impact on the organizational culture and help create more healthful work environments.

Small businesses with less capital and employees are especially prone to the adverse effects of deviant actions. Unlike many larger organizations, such companies have few institutional safeguards, large HR departments, or extensive compliance mechanisms that detect and deter wrongdoing. As a result, even small acts of deviance can severely impact their operations. Extant research highlights that small businesses tend to function in informal, less-structured environments that may lead to coercive opportunities for deviant behaviors to flourish (Charalampous, 2012). These areas require a more thorough investigation to fully understand the specific drivers of such behaviors. Small businesses' organizational culture and climate are factors that lead to deviant behavior. unhealthy or unsupportive workplace, for instance, poor leadership, disregarding employees' achievements, or unequal application of rules, can provide ripe conditions for misconduct (Fleming, 2019).

Workplace stress and Job Dissatisfaction have also been found to be strong predictors of

deviant behaviors. The employees working in small businesses are under much stress due to reduced job security, lower salaries, external opportunities, and limited capabilities for career growth, and they tend to develop counterproductive work behavior (Tian, Zhang, and Zou 2014.). The combination of stressors and the inability to cope leads employees to react in ways that go against workplace norms (Arnbak, 2025).

Individual differences, including but not limited to personality traits and ethical orientations, also play a significant role in how corruption is perceived. Such individuals tend to exhibit more deviance, such as deviant behaviors (Wright, 2015). Perceptions of unfairness or inequity in the workplace can reinforce such tendencies. According to equity theory, those who perceive an imbalance between input and output are driven to restore balance through revengeful acts such as theft or sabotage (Obalade, 2022).

Outside ecological factors impact employee behavior. Indulgence vs. restraint and another cultural dimension, the long- vs. short-term orientation, can impact deviant behavior in culture. Moral behaviors are deprioritized, and economic pressures are high; employees may rationalize their actions as necessary and reasonable (Sun, Park & Hayati, 2019).

This study explores factors associated with deviant behavior in small-scale business (SSB) employees. It seeks to explore organizational, individual, and external environmental influences, what role having a stressful workplace, job dissatisfaction, and organizational culture plays, and how personality types and perceived fairness have a role in committing deviant actions. The study aims to investigate the socioeconomic and cultural influences that encourage such behaviors and make evidence-based suggestions to control them to ensure a productive and harmonious work environment in SSBs.

Literature of Review

The importance of employee behavior analysis in small-scale businesses is increasing due to the changing face of socioeconomic solidification brought about by globalization, industrialization, and technological

advancement (Smith, 2017). Despite the differences in the behavior of skilled and semi-skilled employees, the problem of unethical behavior and deviant behavior is becoming more apparent globally in the SSBs. According to estimates, the range for the frequency of misconduct around the globe is between 22%-75% of employees engaging in behaviors that differ from organization rules and regulations (Okoli, Edwin, & Attama, 2019).

Agba (2018) argued that deviant behavior caused an economic loss of \$16.6 billion in 2012. These trends are particularly evident in developing countries, where the rates of deviant workplace behavior are still disturbingly high. Michael and Chinwokwu (2020) also argue that the rising rate of deviant behavior amongst young staff significantly threatens socioeconomic development.

Deviant behaviors are significantly more evident in Single-Sex Boys (SSBs), which are key drivers of socioeconomic growth (Harris & Steyn, 2018). Due to their small size, limited operations, low capital investment, and minimal management skills and training, the SSB sector is at the heart of socioeconomic development, especially in employment generation. In developed economies, the SSE sector is one of the largest employers of labor. Although less developed than in the developed world, SSEs still play an important role in developing economies' economic transformation. They create jobs in agriculture, production, transport, and services (Micah et al., 2017). Governments alone cannot handle the issue of mass unemployment; hence, SSEs are important partners in creating jobs and facilitating socioeconomic development (Obi, 2017).

SSBs hire people from all walks of life, people with different personalities, and some with a propensity for deviant behavior. Deviant behavior is defined as behavior that violates organizational norms and expectations (Aborisade, 2016). It deviates significantly from an accepted social and institutional norm and is perceived as undesirable or undesirable by the majority (Desta, 2019).

Employee deviant behavior leads to a loss of \$20-40 billion per year for institutions in the developing world (Agarwa, 2016) in Asia

alone. According to Smith (2017), many small-scale businesses have lost financial resources due to employee acts that divert from company norms.

A toxic or unsupportive workplace environment is a major predictor of deviant behavior. Inconsistent rule enforcement, lack of employee recognition, and poor leadership practices contribute to employee dissatisfaction and disengagement, thus enhancing the potential for misconduct (Appelbaum et al., 2007). In SSBs, in which leadership typically is drawn from the business owner or a small management team, the tone set by leaders significantly helps shape workplace norms. Leadership styles such as laissez-faire or favoritism can lead to experiences of inequity, which in turn encourages employee retaliatory behaviors (White, 2024).

Deviant behaviors must consist of Smith being entirely associated with workplace stress and dissatisfaction with one's job (Reisel et al., 2010). SSBs have employees with high-stress levels because of a lack of job security, low wages, and vague career advancement. The relationship between the two is captured in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that too many job demands and few job resources can contribute to burnout and counterproductive work behaviors (Balducci et al., 2011). This is especially true in the case of SSBs, as employees must wear multiple hats and seldom have adequate support to carry out the tasks.

According to equity theory, people gauge how fairly they are treated by comparing the ratios of inputs and outcomes for themselves and their peers, and they react if they feel that they are being mistreated (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). This is particularly true for SSBs with informal reward systems or where decision-making lacks transparency, as employees feel freer to engage in dysfunctional behavior like theft or sabotage when they perceive they have been mistreated. Khattak et al. (2019) argue that perceived organizational injustice (distributive, procedural, or interactional) is one of the main antecedents of workplace deviance.

Individual differences and personality traits are the most important reasons for deviant behavior. Employees with low

conscientiousness or high neuroticism tend to exhibit counterproductive work behaviors (Hunter, 2014). People more inclined to take risks or have low ethical orientations tend to justify acting unethically. Managing emotions and dealing with stressors positively is highly important in influencing employees' behavior. The second dependent variable is deviant behaviors due to inadequate coping mechanisms (Tuzun, Cetin & Basim, 2017). Negative affectivity, a propensity to feel negative emotions, is strongly associated with counterproductive behaviors (Rodell & Judge, 2009).

Other demographic factors that affect deviant behavior include education and work experience. However, immature employees or employees without proper work experience could show signs of professional immaturity and become more vulnerable to misconduct (Wright, 2015). In contrast, highly educated employees may justify deviant behavior as resistance against perceived constraints imposed by the organization.

According to Yaakov (2019), employees in financial distress are most likely to justify unethical behavior like stealing or scamming. For SSBs located within economically fragile communities, available resources to counteract these pressures are often diminished, leading people to think more about survival than the organization's tradition and character.

Local cultural attitudes towards deviance can heavily influence workplace behavior. Where unethical conduct is normalized or tolerated, employees often perceive deviant behavior as acceptable or even justified (Carlo, 2022). poor work conditions and societal acceptance of minor crimes appear to contribute to the high levels of deviance in SSBs (Galperin & Burke, 2006).

Monetary globalization and technical advances induce the rapid change of the predominant socioeconomic activities, which has created new problems for SSBs. According to Aku (2017), when competition and technological disruptions peak, employees experience unwanted stressors, ultimately leading to deviant behavior. The rise of digital platforms has also facilitated such behaviors, including cyberloafing or file sharing.

Deviance is standard in every sector and every record and region, so day by day, again and again. Studies have shown that 22% and 75% of employees work outside the premises of accepted organizational rules and regulations (Tyler & Blader, 2005). Workplace deviance manifests absenteeism, theft, and other negative behaviors that can cost the workplace approximately \$300 billion annually in the United States (Gottschalk & Hamerton, 2021). The situation is even more disturbing in developing economies. In Asia, it has been estimated that institutions potentially lose between \$20 and \$40 billion from employee deviance (McCaghy, 2016), while in Africa, businesses are burdened by poor working conditions and adverse societal factors (Amponsah et al., 2011). Such behavior disproportionately negatively impacts SSBs because of their smaller operational footprint and scarce resources. According to Harun, numerous SSBs have faced financial bankruptcy primarily due to employee

misconduct, underscoring the necessity for focused interventions.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to systematically and objectively examine the organizational, individual, and external environmental factors influencing employee behavior in small-scale businesses (SSBs). A survey-based approach is used for data collection. The target population for this study includes employees working in SSBs across diverse sectors, including manufacturing, retail, and services. A total of 250 respondents were selected from Sahiwal Division. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert scale for most items, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or frequency of behaviors. Surveys were distributed physically to accommodate the working conditions of employees in different sectors, ensuring accessibility and higher response rates.

Results

Table 1

Demographic profile of the respondents

	Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	214	85.6
	Female	36	14.4
Age			
	Below 20	25	10.0
	20-30	189	75.6
	31-40	20	8.0
	41-50	16	6.4
Education	Primary	91	36.4
	Secondary	97	38.8
	Bachelor's degree	24	9.6
	Master's Degree or Higher	38	15.2
	Job Role		
	Administrative	12	4.8
	Skilled Worker	61	24.4
	Semi-skilled Worker	177	70.8
Employment Duration	Less than 1 year	35	14.0
	1-3 years	129	51.6
	4-6 years	47	18.8
	More than 6 years	39	15.6

Table 1 showed the demographic characteristics of the Respondents. Many of the participants were male (85.6%), with females representing 14.4%. In terms of age, the largest group was between 20 and 30 years (75.6%), followed by younger respondents below 20 years (10%) and smaller proportions in the 31-40 years (8%) and 41-50 years (6.4%) age ranges. Regarding educational background, most respondents had completed secondary education (38.8%), followed by primary education (36.4%), with

fewer holding a bachelor's degree (9.6%) or a master's degree or higher (15.2%). Concerning job roles, most employees were semi-skilled workers (70.8%), followed by skilled workers (24.4%) and a smaller proportion in administrative roles (4.8%). Regarding employment duration, the largest group had been employed for 1-3 years (51.6%), followed by those employed for less than one year (14%), 4-6 years (18.8%), and more than 6 years (15.6%).

Table 2
ANOVA Results of Deviant Behavior Among Employees

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.043	1	2.043	17.605	<.001 ^b
	Residual	28.773	248	0.116		
2	Regression	3.172	2	1.586	14.172	<.001 ^c
	Residual	27.644	247	0.112		
3	Regression	4.4	3	1.467	13.66	<.001 ^d
	Residual	26.416	246	0.107		
4	Regression	7.155	4	1.789	18.521	<.001 ^e
	Residual	23.661	245	0.097		

The ANOVA table 2 demonstrates the impact of various predictors on deviant behavior among employees. Model 1, which includes the predictor "failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally," explains a significant portion of variance ($F = 17.605$, $p = .000$) with a regression sum of squares of 2.043. Adding additional predictors in subsequent models further enhances the explanatory power. Model 2 incorporates "participating in theft, fraud, or sabotage" and shows an improved fit ($F = 14.172$, $p = .000$). Model 3 adds "taking

extended breaks or wasting time during work hours," with further variance explained ($F = 13.660$, $p = .000$). Finally, Model 4, which includes "engaging in workplace gossip or conflicts," achieves the highest explanatory power ($F = 18.521$, $p = .000$) with the lowest residual mean square (.097). This progression highlights the cumulative effect of these factors in contributing to deviant behavior in the workplace.

Table 03
Regression Models of Deviant Behavior Among Employees

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	B			
1	(Constant)	.974	.046		21.200	.000

	Failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally	.085	.020	.257	4.196	.000
2	(Constant)	1.110	.062		17.825	.000
	Failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally	.070	.020	.212	3.424	.001
	Participating in theft, fraud, or sabotage within the organization	-.065	.020	-.197	-3.177	.002
3	(Constant)	1.260	.075		16.707	.000
	Failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally	.079	.020	.240	3.919	.000
	Participating in theft, fraud, or sabotage within the organization	-.079	.020	-.238	-3.849	.000
	Taking extended breaks or wasting time during work hours.	-.063	.019	-.207	-3.382	.001
4	(Constant)	1.767	.119		14.867	.000
	Failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally	.053	.020	.162	2.699	.007
	Participating in theft, fraud, or sabotage within the organization	-.081	.019	-.245	-4.166	.000
	Taking extended breaks or wasting time during work hours.	-.134	.022	-.437	-6.044	.000
	Engaging in workplace gossip or conflicts.	-.131	.025	-.392	-5.341	.000

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The coefficients of table 3 provides insights into the individual contributions of predictors to deviant behavior among employees. In Model 1, "failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally" significantly predicts deviant behavior ($\beta = .257$, $p < .001$), suggesting it is a strong contributor. In Model 2, this predictor remains significant ($\beta = .212$, $p = .001$), while "participating in theft, fraud, or sabotage" shows a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.197$, $p = .002$). Model 3 introduces "taking extended breaks or wasting time," which also has a significant negative impact ($\beta = -.207$, $p = .001$), alongside the other predictors. Model 4 adds "engaging in workplace gossip or conflicts," which shows the strongest negative impact ($\beta = -.392$, $p < .001$). Across models, the predictors collectively explain a significant portion of the variance, with "taking extended breaks" and "gossip or conflicts" being the most influential negative

factors in the final model. This highlights the complex interplay of these behaviors in contributing to workplace deviance.

Discussion

These findings stress the importance of small-scale businesses (SSBs) closely surveying employee deviance as it adversely impacts their growth and productivity while disrupting peace in the workplace. The lack of institutional constraints and resource scarcity in SSBs render them more susceptible to detrimental outcomes of deviant behavior, as even marginal deviance can lead to disproportionate operational disruptions. The informal and less-structured environments in which SSBs operate further deepen this vulnerability, providing fertile ground for misconduct. This corresponds to previous studies that suggest a correlation between informal environments in

the workplace and deviant behavior (Charalampous, 2012). Second, however sociable the workplace culture, climate, and atmosphere of SSBs are, they are also significant factors influencing workplace deviance. Factors like insufficient organizational principles, lack of praise, or inconsistent execution of organizational rules have been identified as important contributors to depraved behavior at work. As Fleming (2019) described, conditions such as these breed dissatisfaction and disconnection with employees who are now more prone to detrimental behaviors. Additionally, we found that job dissatisfaction and workplace stress were significant predictors of SSB deviant behaviors. Tian, Zhang, and Zou (2014) also corroborated that employees usually deal with pressure relating to job security, pay, and slow career advancement, which results in counterproductive work behavior. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, burnout and deviance result from high demands and low resources (Balducci et al., 2011).

Individual differences, such as unique personality traits and ethical orientations, also have been shown to have an impact on deviant behavior. According to Hunter (2014), employees with low conscientiousness, high neuroticism, or poor coping mechanisms are more prone to misconduct. Unresolved equity in the organizational context and continuous perceptions of inequity or unfairness in the workplace further exacerbate these phenomena. Equity theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) indicates that employees who perceive inequity in their input and output often resort to deviant behaviors such as theft or sabotage to restore equity. The first sentence is especially true in SSBs, where reward systems are informal, and decision-making is rarely transparent.

Diverse external factors influence SSB deviance. Employee behavior is being shaped heavily by economic pressures, societal norms, and cultural attitudes towards deviance. In settings where unethical behaviors have become a norm or where economic conditions are weak, employees tend to justify their deviant behaviors as deserved or necessary (Sun, Park & Hayati, 2019). For example, staff experiencing

financial problems might rationalize committing theft or fraud to survive, Yaakov (2019) states. Globalization and technology have also embedded additional stressors in the workplace, contributing to the increased opportunity for deviant behavior, such as enhanced competition and digital interruptions (Aku et al., 2017). These results highlight workplace deviance's key financial and operational impact on SSBs. According to earlier studies conducted by Agarwagens (2016) and Smith (2017), deviant (non-compliant) behavior is responsible for significant financial losses around the world, especially in developing economies. As digital platforms have proliferated, new forms of deviance have also arisen (e.g., cyberloafing), which presents additional challenges to SSBs. Targeted interventions are needed to address these challenges. More SSBs need to create the right kinds of organizations by encouraging productive leadership behavior, rewarding people who help the institution be successful, and applying rules fairly and consistently. **Workplace Stress and Career Development:** Stress management programs and opportunities could help mitigate workplace stress and lack of career development opportunities. Ongoing training and transparent processes to promote ethical outcomes may also mitigate uneven perceptions of decisions and fairness in outcomes. Deviance, on the other hand, is affected by society's socioeconomic and cultural status, and policymakers and stakeholders should develop organizations within the community to combat deviant behavior.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to deviant behavior among employees in small-scale businesses (SSBs). The findings highlight those organizational, individual, and environmental factors, such as failing to complete assigned tasks intentionally, participating in theft or fraud, taking extended breaks, and engaging in workplace gossip, all play significant roles in shaping deviant behavior. The analysis shows that while certain behaviors have a direct negative impact on employee performance and organizational

efficiency, others, like workplace gossip and taking extended breaks, exacerbate deviance. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that focus on improving organizational practices, enhancing employee engagement, and fostering a positive work

culture. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of providing employees with the necessary resources and support to minimize the occurrence of deviant behaviors, ultimately contributing to the overall success and sustainability of small-scale businesses.

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