



Emotional Intelligence and Counterproductive Work Behavior of Employees Working in Public Sector Organizations: Mediating Role of Organizational Justice

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: March 29, 2025
Revised: June 22, 2025
Accepted: June 23, 2025
Available Online: June 24, 2025

Keywords:

Emotional Intelligence
Emotional Self-Awareness
Counterproductive Work Behavior
Organizational Justice
Public Sector Employees

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), perceived organizational justice (OJ), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), and of public sector employees. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design, to select the sample of 250 employees from the public sector organizations of Pakistan. Both male employees (n = 128) and female employees (n = 121) were included. The respondents filled the indigenous version Urdu translated of the Emotional Intelligence (SRMEI), the Organizational Justice Scale, and the Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale. The reliability analysis revealed that all the scales and subscales are reliable and valid measures. The correlation analysis showed that EI positively correlates with organizational justice and negatively correlates with CWB. Moreover, mediation results demonstrated a significant negative role of organizational justice in mediating the association between EI and CWB. The results of mediation suggested that higher emotional intelligence resulted higher perception of organizational justice, which is related to the lesser counterproductive work behavior of public sector employees. Additionally, emotional self-awareness and emotional self-regulation as subcomponents of EI emerged better mediators for counterproductive work behaviors as compared to interpersonal skills. The findings help to support the significance of building emotional intelligence skills and fairness in HR-related policies and practices to decrease the occurrence of deviant/counter productive work behavior of employees in the public sector organizations. The research has provided empirical support for the indigenous contextual evidence in understanding better emotional self-awareness and self-regulation of employees at workplace, facilitating for their perception of fairness in the organization to minimize counter productive work behavior. Overall, this study offers novel evidence for understanding the relation of emotional intelligence as individual differences with counterproductive work behavior as individual outcomes through the perceptual experience of process (perception of organizational justice) from employee's perspective.

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1. Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) have become a critical phenomenon for organizations, especially for Asian organization. Counterproductive behaviors are frequently observed and have detrimental impact on employees and organizational outcomes. Considering this aspect, the scholars have studied several instances of workplace deviation in Pakistani context including employee tardiness and early departure, theft of company property, and taking extended lunch breaks (Nasir & Bashir, 2012). Such behaviors may have a huge potential to impact the performance of individuals and organization destructively, and this may vary in

severity across contexts. It could range from minor behaviors like absenteeism or tardiness, to more severe behavior like sabotage, workplace aggression or even theft (Mercado et al., 2018). Bureaucratic structures like government or public sector organizations, where multi-layers of authorities make the accountability process less effective and delayed, counterproductive work behaviors are inevitable. As Mehmood et al. (2022) studied counterproductive behaviors of employees working for private and public sector organizations and explained harmful consequences. Socio-cultural factors like high power distance and unfair treatment in hierarchical context may foster more suppression of emotions that manifest into counterproductive work behaviors, as explained by Hattab et al. (2022). There are constraints like political interference, coercion, and rigidity in rules, frustrating competent employees which may foster perception of injustice and counterproductive behaviors. Considering these socio-cultural, structural factors, and limited research involving public sector data is an important contribution and aspect of rationalizing the current study.

Emotional intelligence is recognized as the ability to understand, know, and manage one's own emotions, and the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), influences how employees cope with negative emotions in the workplace. Shafique (2023) discussed that workers having strong emotional intelligence are frequently able to succeed with challenges in the workplace and regulate their feelings of injustice. When employees feel and perceive themselves as mistreated, they are likely to work negatively (Dirican & Erdil, 2016) and sometimes, employees become resentful and respond by sabotaging things, stealing, or creating aggressive situations at work. As Li and Li (2024) reflected that when employees think their supervisors are not fair or do not help them, they may pull further back or behave unjustly. Furthermore, the study also suggested that people who have low emotional intelligence often face difficulties controlling emotions which may increase frustration and the chance of taking part in counterproductive work activities (Lee, 2019). Similarly, findings of a study De Stobbeleir, Ashford and Buyens (2011) exhibited that people who are more emotionally intelligent are optimistic employees, handle real or imagined unfairness by fixing problems through cooperation, rather than making negative choices at work. In contrast, when emotional awareness is low, negative feelings can easily turn into actions that harm work and workplace (Weiss, 2007), manifestation of counter productive work behavior. As Musdalifa, Iskandar and Taqwa (2024) provided the evidence for this by indicating that emotional intelligence significantly impacted counterproductive behaviors. However, individual differences, particularly in emotional intelligence (EI) show a crucial part in shaping how personnel respond to perceived unfairness (Hinojosa et al., 2016).

The theoretical background of this research study can be drawn from the concept of equity theory (Adams, 1963) which helps to understand the perception of fairness in input and output ratio and assessment of justice in comparing individuals' effort, competence, skills, training, knowledge, and loyalty for recognition and rewards in an organization. Lack of equity and inequality in these aspects may result in engagement of counterproductive work behaviors (Lee et al., 2019). Similarly, according to norms of reciprocity and social exchange theory Adams (1965) exhibits that individual's perception of unfairness and injustice activates negative exchange employees may react or reduce efforts to restore perceived equilibrium by demonstrating counterproductive behaviors as manifestation of organizational injustice. Overall, injustice and inequality may produce negative emotions which may motivate employees to produce counterproductive behavior at workplace. On the other hand, higher emotional intelligence enables better emotional regulation abilities and to manifest positively against injustice and may seek more positive contributory approach for the organizations instead counterproductive behaviors (De Stobbeleir, Ashford, & Buyens, 2011). Researchers are concentrating on studying the counterproductive work behaviors as correlates of organizational justice which is defined as fairness employees perceive in outcomes, decision-making processes, and interpersonal treatment within their organization (Mohsenikabir, 2021; Submitter & Komari, 2020). The association of emotional intelligence, organizational justice, and counterproductive behaviors were studied recently (Adha, 2023) and the results are reported into the negative direction for the relationship between organizational justice with counterproductive work behaviors. Similarly, research studies Abbasi et al. (2022); H. Hany, M. Hassan and M. M. Badran (2020); Nurmalaah, Suryatni and Nurmayanti (2022) have also reported the same findings for this empirical association. However, emotional intelligence strengthens (as moderator) the association between organizational justice with counterproductive work behaviors (Adha, 2023). Similarly, the stronger negative association between organizational justice and counterproductive

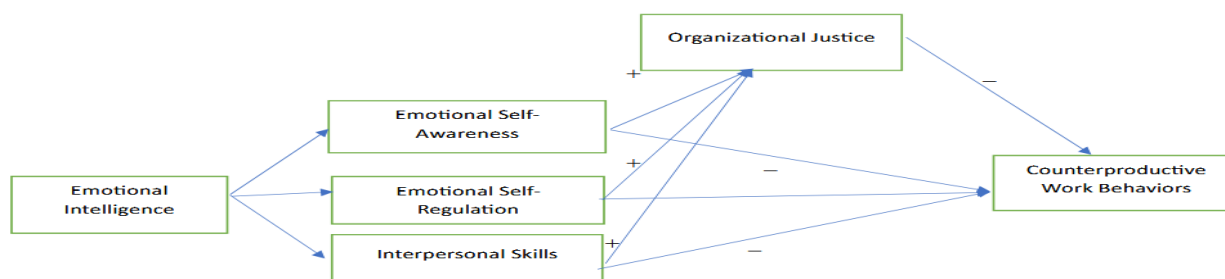
work behaviors and emotional intelligence as moderator was reported (Mahadiputra & Piartrini, 2021).

The association of emotional intelligence with counterproductive behaviors as organizational outcomes is crucial. Whereas to completely understand and comprehend the background of emotional intelligence operations, it is imperative to use personal state, attitudes, and experiences about work such as perceptions of organizational justice (Simonet & Castille, 2020). By studying perception of organizational justice as a vital driver for counterproductive behaviors workplace (Johnston et al., 2016) will fulfill the gap in the organizational psychology literature. Because it will go further to examine the variability of work context and individual differences in contextual perceptions, also there is a consistent negative association of emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behaviors, and this requires further exploration of contextual factors to affect the strength of this relationship (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017). Therefore, it is suggested to study perception of justice to explain and know the variations of employee personality (EI) and process (CWB) across sensitive workplace contexts (Tziner et al., 2020). As in an empirical endeavor (Musdalifa, Iskandar, & Taqwa, 2024) studied and explained the combined effects of emotional intelligence and organizational justice for predicting counterproductive work behaviors (Ragmoun, 2024; Ragmoun & Alfalih, 2024; Wided & Alfalih, 2023). Similarly, recent study employed a combined theoretical approach to examine the role of emotional intelligence and organizational justice for predicting counterproductive work behaviors Tiansari and Widiastih (2024), findings reveal stronger relationship of emotional intelligence and organizational justice for counterproductive behaviors at work. The results stated that emotional intelligence enhanced organizational justice and decreased counterproductive work behaviors. These findings provided evidence for novelty and sufficient justification for determining the mediating effect of perceived organizational justice for predicting counterproductive work behaviors from emotional intelligence employing the sample of Pakistani public sector employees (Ahmed, Azhar, & Mohammad; Dler M Ahmed, Z Azhar, & Aram J Mohammad, 2024; Dler Mousa Ahmed, Zubir Azhar, & Aram Jawhar Mohammad, 2024).

There is a dire need to study the variables i.e., organizational justice and counterproductive behavior employing Pakistani context, because human resource departments are yet to be develop in various public sector institutions. The concepts of human resource management and developments for policy and practices are underdeveloped in the government sector organizations in comparison to the private organizations, which is more developed for human resource functions to foster human capital. There is a gap in literature across contexts, especially public sector employees from the capital city Islamabad where strategies and policies are developed and implemented. Due to lack of research and development in the public sector HR systems and departments, this study is vital to provide empirical contribution related to emotional awareness, regulations, perceived justice in terms of policy and procedures, and reducing counterproductive behaviors. Based upon the given rationale the conceptual model is proposed to test through various hypotheses given in the next section:

2. Proposed conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Emotional intelligence, Organizational justice, and counterproductive work behavior



Based upon the concertized model and cited literature in the introduction section, following hypotheses were formulated to test in the present study.

1. There will be a positive association of perceived emotional intelligence (emotional self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, & interpersonal skills) with perceived organizational

- justice (Distributive, procedural, & interactional) as composite scores of public sector employees.
2. There will be a negative relationship between perceived emotional intelligence (emotional self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, & interpersonal skills) and counterproductive work behaviors as composite scores of public sector employees.
 3. There will be a negative association between perceived organizational justice (Distributive, procedural, & interactional) and counterproductive work behaviors as composite scores of public sector employees.
 4. Organizational justice as composite scores will mediate the association between emotional intelligence as composite along with its subscales (emotional self-regulation, emotional self-awareness, & interpersonal skills) and counterproductive work behavior as composite scores of public sector employees.

3. Method

3.1. Operational definitions

Emotional intelligence: Self-reported emotional intelligence of the employees was assessed through the SRMEI (Bukhari & Kamal, 2003), it has three sub factors emotional self-regulation, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. Inversely phrased items were scored reversed on the overall scale and computed as composite scores of the participants, which indicated high scores means higher emotional intelligence on the composite and on its sub scales.

Organizational Justice: Perception of organizational justice is measured through taking the scores of employees on all the items of OJS (Rasul & Masood, 2022), it comprises three subscales procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. Overall composite scores on all the items were taken, higher score indicated higher perception of organizational justice.

Counterproductive Work behaviors: Counterproductive behaviors of employees were measured on the composite scores CPWBS (Rasul & Masood, 2022). It includes dysfunctional behaviors, deviant behaviors, aggressive behaviors, antisocial behaviors, biased behaviors, and misuse of authority. Higher composite scores on these six behaviors indicate higher counterproductive behaviors of employees.

3.2. Sample

The sample consisted of ($N = 250$) government employees with 128 females (51.4%) and 121 males (48.6%). Convenience sampling was employed to collect the data. The estimated sample size through G power was 225. Informed consent of all the participants was taken, and confidentiality of data was also ensured. Based upon the demographic description, the participants were divided into three age groups: 91 individuals (36.4%) were between 22–30 years, 90 individuals (36.0%) were in the 31–40 years range, and 69 individuals (27.6%) were aged 41–59 years. Regarding educational background, the participants had completed intermediate education to a master's degree. For work experience, 91 participants (36.4%) had 1–5 years, 65 (26.0%) had 6–10 years, 49 (19.6%) had 11–20 years, and 45 (18.0%) had 21–41 years of experience. In terms of monthly income, 90 participants (36.0%) earned between 10,000–50,000 PKR, 108 (43.2%) earned between 52,000–100,000 PKR, and 52 (20.8%) earned between 105,000–220,000 PKR. Lastly, the sample included 113 individuals (45.2%) at the BPS 6–15 level and 137 individuals (54.8%) at the BPS 16–20 officer level. The data was collected in the limited time frame, however, the response rate was also good, rarely participants who approached refused and could not complete the questionnaires due to their engagement and limited time.

3.3. Measures

The data from the public sector (government employees) was collected through the indigenously developed (SRMEI, ESR, ESA, IPS, and CBWS) and translated version of (OJS) self-report measures.

Demographic sheet: A sheet specifically designed to cover the information regarding the demographic of the study participants. It consisted of personal (age, gender, marital status, education) and organization (work experience, structure of organization, designation level, monthly income) of the participants.

Self-Report Measure of Emotional Intelligence (SRMEI): The measurement tool is a scale indigenous developed by Khan, Kamal and Sajjad-UI-Hassan (2016). It consists of 60 items and three subscales which determine emotional intelligence. The three subscales are Emotional Self-Regulation Scales (ESRS) consisting of 27 items with scores ranging from 27 to 135, emotional self-awareness scale (ESAS) consisting of 21 items and scores ranging from 21 to 105 and interpersonal skills scale (ISS) which has 11 items, and the scores range from 11 to 55. The scoring is on Likert scale (5-point), 5 being *always* and 1 *being never*. The scores range from 60-300. Out of 60 items of the scale, 37 statements are negatively worded. Statements that are negatively worded are scored reversely. The alpha reliability of the scale is estimated in this study is .95 for SRMEI.

Emotional Self-Regulation (ESR): This subscale is developed by Khan, Kamal and Sajjad-UI-Hassan (2016) and it has 27 statements. The subscale covers five different subcomponents of emotional intelligence include emotional stability (6 items), conscientiousness (3 items), adaptability (9 items), emotional reactivity management (9 items), and achievement drive (4 items). The scoring ranges from 27-135 and so high scores indicate high ability to self-regulate one's emotions. The scale has the alpha reliability of .94 estimated in this study.

Emotional Self-Awareness (ESA): is the second subscale of SRMEI with the alpha reliability of .87 (Khan, Kamal, & Sajjad-UI-Hassan, 2016) and consists of 21 statements spacing over three facets namely, Self-awareness have 9 items, self-confidence having 4 items, and perceived self-assessment includes 8 items. The scoring range for this subscale is 21-105 and so the high score on this subscale indicates high self-awareness of a person emotionally. Reliability is estimated in the current study .84.

Interpersonal Skills (IPS): is the third subscale of the SRMEI and has 12 statements with an alpha reliability of .74 (Bukhari & Kamal, 2003). This scale covers three aspects of emotional intelligence i.e. sociability with 4 items, empathy includes 4 items and communication having 4 items. The scoring range is 12-60. High score on this subscale indicates high emotional self-awareness of an individual. Thus, these individuals have high social skills enabling them to affect how others handle their emotions and will be able to speak with them directly and without reluctance about both happy and sad occurrences. The reliability estimated in this study is .80.

Organizational Justice Scale (OJS): This scale originally developed (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993), the scale was translated (through standardized procedures of backward & forward) into Urdu version of organizational justice scale (OJS; (Rasul & Masood, 2022). It consists of 20 items and has three subscales that are distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. The Likert type scale is a 5-point scoring range with 5 as *strongly disagreed* to 1 being *strongly agreed*. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale is .95 (Rasul & Masood, 2022). The internal consistency for subscale as distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice are .74, .85, and .92 respectively (Rasul & Masood, 2022). The reliability estimated in this study is .96 for overall scale and for subscales ranged between .86 to .95.

Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (CWBS): This is an indigenous scale used in this study (CWBS; (Rasul & Masood, 2022). It is a 35-item scale with 6 subscales dysfunctional behavior, misuse of authority, deviant behavior, aggressive behavior, biased behavior and antisocial behaviors. It is a Likert scale with five-point scoring 5 as *always* to 1 as *never*. High score exhibits high level of counterproductive work behavior. In the current study, reliability estimates for the total scales are .96 and for subscale it ranged from .77 to .93.

4. Results

4.1. Statistical Analysis

The analyses were performed via SPSS version-27.0.1. The study utilized analytical strategies of correlation, and mediation analysis was performed by using the simple mediation model number 4 PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). Indirect effects are reported and estimated as recommended through biased-corrected bootstrapping with 5000 samples for more robust confidence intervals. Moreover, normality assumptions for linear regressions were also tested and ranges of kurtosis along with skewness on the scores of three measures (SRMEI, subscales, OJS, & CWBS) indicated with the +1 to -1, which is very good normality indicators as per the criteria given by Cline (2016).

Table 2: Correlations among the scores on SRMEI, the Subscales, OJS, the Subscales, CWBS, and its subscales (N=250)

| Variable | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|----------|-------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| s | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | SRMEI | - | .921** | .856** | .445** | .425** | .385** | .395** | .379** | .534** | .520** | .398** | .558** | .445** | .361** | .421** |
| 2 | ESRS | | - | .648** | .127* | .454** | .428** | .424** | .397** | .489** | .513** | .341** | .571** | .382** | .279** | .324** |
| 3 | ESAS | | | - | .457** | .343** | .308** | .295** | .321** | .469** | .413** | .369** | .422** | .445** | .391** | .436** |
| 4 | ISS | | | | - | 0.004 | - | 0.025 | 0.009 | .222** | .156* | .209** | .137** | .238** | .225** | .278** |
| 5 | OJS | | | | | - | .824** | .928** | .961** | .328** | .342** | .296** | .377** | .203** | .242** | .145* |
| 6 | DJ | | | | | | - | .659** | .665** | .262** | .281** | .215** | .325** | .139* | .192** | .117* |
| 7 | PJ | | | | | | | - | .890** | .310** | .314** | .281** | .371** | .187** | .222** | 0.118 |
| 8 | IJ | | | | | | | | - | .314** | .325** | .229** | .336** | .207** | .242** | .148* |
| 9 | CWBS | | | | | | | | | - | .922** | .919** | .877** | .900** | .709** | .860** |
| 10 | DB | | | | | | | | | | - | .813** | .833** | .784** | .577** | .719** |
| 11 | MA | | | | | | | | | | | - | .701** | .860** | .651** | .794** |
| 12 | DeBT | | | | | | | | | | | | - | .655** | .493** | .638** |
| 13 | AggB | | | | | | | | | | | | | - | .608** | .883** |
| 14 | Bbeh | | | | | | | | | | | | | | - | .604** |
| 15 | AB | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | - |

Note: ** $p < .01$ SRMEI = Self-report measure of Emotional Intelligence; ESRS=Emotional Self-regulation scale; ESAS = Emotional Self-awareness Scale; ISS= Interpersonal skills scale; OJS = Organizational Justice Scale; DJ = Distributive Justice; PJ = Procedural Justice; IJ = Interactional Justice; CWBS= Counterproductive work behavior scale; DB = Dysfunctional behaviors; MA = Misuse of Authority; DeBT= Deviant behavior; AggB= Aggressive behavior; Bbeh= Biased behaviors; AB = Antisocial behavior

Table 2 shows the Pearson Correlational Analysis which was performed on the data to analyze the analysis amid emotional intelligence, perception of counterproductive work behavior and organizational justice. According to the analysis, emotional intelligence is positive and significantly correlated with organizational justice ($r=0.42$; $p<0.01$) whereas emotional intelligence is significant in a negative direction and correlated with counterproductive work behaviors ($r= -.53$; $p<0.01$) of government sector employees. Furthermore, organizational justice and counterproductive work behaviors of employees are significantly negatively correlated ($r= -.32$; $p<0.01$). composite scores of emotional intelligences and its subs components i.e. emotional self-regulation ($r=.92$; $p<0.01$), emotional self-awareness ($r=.85$; $p<.01$) and interpersonal skills ($r=.44$; $p<0.01$) have a positive and significant correlation. Emotional intelligence also has a positive and significant correlation with the subscales of organizational justice i.e. procedural ($r=.39$; $p<0.01$), distributive ($r=.38$; $p<0.01$) and interactional justice ($r=.37$; $p<0.01$). Moreover, emotional intelligence and subscales of counterproductive work behaviors i.e. dysfunctional behavior ($r=.52$; $p<0.01$), misuse of authority ($r=.39$; $p<0.01$), deviant behaviors ($r=.55$; $p<0.01$), aggressive behaviors ($r=.44$; $p<0.01$), biased behaviors ($r=.36$; $p<0.01$) and antisocial behaviors ($r=.42$; $p<0.01$) are negatively and significantly correlated. These results indicated the desired directions of the correlations among emotional intelligence, on three subscales i.e., emotional self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and emotional self-regulation, organizational justice, its three sub scales procedural, distributive justice, and interactional justice, and counter productive work behaviors total scale and its six sub dimensions deviant behaviors, dysfunctional behaviors, anti-social behaviors, biased behaviors, aggressive behaviors, and misuse of authority.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis for Organizational Justice between Emotional intelligence with Counterproductive work behavior (N = 250)

| Predictor | Consequent | | Counterproductive work behaviors | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|------|
| | Organizational Justice | | | |
| | B | SE | B | SE |
| Constant | | | | |
| Emotional Intelligence | .42*** | .03 | -.39*** | 0.04 |
| Emotional Self-Regulation | .46*** | .05 | -.52*** | 0.07 |
| Emotional Self-awareness | .74*** | .12 | -.80*** | .15 |
| Interpersonal Skills | .02 | .20 | -.83*** | .22 |
| Organizational Justice | - | - | -.14*** | 0.07 |
| R ² | .38 | | .25 | |
| F | 40.52*** | | 20.93*** | |

Note. Coeff. = Standardized regression coefficient. ***p<.001.

The mediation analysis for organizational justice between emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behavior is illustrated in table 3. It depicts that the emotional intelligence of the workers is significant and positively predicts organizational justice ($B=0.43$, $S.E. = 0.03$, $p<0.001$) while emotional intelligence predicts counterproductive work behavior negatively ($B=-0.39$, $S.E. = 0.04$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, organizational justice predicts the counterproductive work behaviors into negative direction for the employees of government sector ($B=-0.14$, $S.E. = 0.07$, $p<0.001$). Thus, organizational justice played as a significant predictor for counterproductive behavior for government sector employees. Therefore, mediation was significant. If we talk about the subscales emotional intelligence, the emotional self-regulation was found to be positive and significant predator of organizational justice ($B=0.46$, $S.E. = 0.05$, $p<0.001$) and a significantly negative predictor of counterproductive work behavior ($B=-0.52$, $S.E. = 0.07$, $p<0.001$) in public sector employees. Whereas emotional self-awareness emerged as a significant predictor into positive direction of organizational justice ($B=0.74$, $S.E. = 0.12$, $p<0.001$) and significant and negative predictors of counterproductive work behavior ($B=-.80$, $S.E. = 0.15$, $p<0.001$). On the other hand, interpersonal skills were not found to be significant predictors of organizational justice ($B=0.2$, $S.E. = 0.20$, $p<0.001$) and counterproductive work behavior ($B=-0.83$, $S.E. = 0.22$, $p<0.001$) in public sector employees. All the indirect effects ($S.E. = 0.02$; $LL = -0.09$, $UL = -0.00$) are significant for the overall model in which emotional intelligence as composite scores was tested to predict counterproductive behavior through organizational justice. Indirect effects for emotional self-regulation (subscale) as predictor for counterproductive work behavior through organizational justice is also significant ($S.E. = 0.03$; $LL = -.11$, $UL = -0.01$), indirect effect for emotional self-awareness (subscale) as predictor is also significant ($S.E. = 0.04$; $LL = -0.25$, $UL = -0.09$). While indirect effect of interpersonal skills as subscale of emotional intelligence was non-significant.

5. Discussion

The main aim of the current study was to accomplish the contextual and literature gape by investigate the connection of emotional intelligence, organizational justice, and counterproductive behaviors of public sector employees of Pakistan. The study also sought to examine the mediating effect of organizational justice explaining the association of emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behaviors of government employees. To attain these objectives, three instruments are used in this study including, a self-report instrument (Bukhari & Kamal, 2003) of emotional intelligence the Organizational Justice Scale (Rasul & Masood, 2022), and the Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (Rasul & Masood, 2022). The reliability coefficients for all the scales and subscales were high as stated in table 1, which highlights that the instruments used in the current study were sound as having satisfactory levels of reliability and validity. Prior studies have shown the accuracy of the emotional intelligence scale (Kalsoom, 2018), organizational justice scale (Rasul & Masood, 2022) and counterproductive work behavior scale (Rasul & Masood, 2022) used in this study by establishing the reliability and validity evidence through studying the various correlates of organizational justice, emotional intelligence, and counterproductive behaviors. Iner and intra scale correlation analysis highlights the validity of all subscales and scales of the measures used in this research study.

First hypothesis formulated in this study was that emotional intelligence would be positively related to organizational justice among public sector employees. A correlation analysis

was done to test the the assumption and the results displayed that emotional intelligence and organizational justice are strongly related in a positive direction. This result corresponds with the findings stated that people with strong emotional intelligence tend to see their workplace as fair and just (Khan, Kamal, & Sajjad-Ul-Hassan, 2016), who found that emotional intelligence is strongly linked to organizational justice among employees of Pakistan International Airlines. In the same way, Mustafa, Vinsent and Badri (2023) discovered that emotional intelligence is positively linked to organizational justice, confirming this relationship in the industry sector. It seems that those exhibited higher emotional intelligence are highly expected to notice fairness at their workplace as explained through many western empirical investigations (De Stobbeleir, Ashford, & Buyens, 2011; Lee, 2019; Li & Li, 2024) also. Because they can control their emotions well such employees may manage the emotional atmosphere in their workplace with comfort. Because they notice and relate to others' feelings, they may see their company's policies and practices as more justful. This highlights that encouraging emotional intelligence in employees, organizations can help employees feel that things are fair and equitable. Second hypothesis of this research was that emotional intelligence will be linked to less counterproductive work behavior in government sector employees. The analysis showed that workers with greater emotional intelligence are less expected to act in ways that harm their work. This result corresponds with Samanta and Kallou (2020) findings stated that workers with high emotional intelligence tend to avoid behaviors that negatively impact the organization or its members. In the same way Tziner et al. (2020) discovered that better emotional intelligence can control the feelings that are less likely to cause problems at work. The results highlight how important emotional intelligence is in preventing counterproductive work behaviors. Being emotionally intelligent helps employees handle work challenges in a more positive way. When workforces can manage their frustrations, they act less in ways that harm the workplace such as not coming to work, behaving aggressively or becoming disinterested. By encouraging emotional intelligence at work, organizations may see fewer and less serious counterproductive actions which would benefit both the company and its employees. These inferences are supported by the previous studies (Li & Li, 2024; Shafique, 2023).

The third hypothesis of the study suggested that the perception of organizational justice is negatively correlated to counterproductive work behaviors of public sector employees. The findings established that people who perceive higher organizational justice rarely engage in counterproductive work behaviors. This finding is consistent with Nurmalaah, Suryatni and Nurmayanti (2022) findings which highlight that fairness in organizations can reduce unproductive behaviors. Those who believe their workplace are fair and are likely to avoid actions that could damage the company or their coworkers. Organizational justice helps prevent problems like tardiness, theft and harassment from harming the workplace. In a similar way, Submitter and Komari (2020) found that people who feel their organization is fair are not commonly involved in counterproductive behaviors. The next hypothesis of this study suggested organizational justice would act as mediator for the relationship of emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behaviors. The findings confirmed that organizational justice played a significant role explaining the connection between emotional intelligence and perceived counterproductive behaviors at workplace. Emotional intelligence was shown to increase organizational justice which then led to lessening the counterproductive work behaviors. It means that emotional intelligence affects employees' actions both directly and indirectly, through their perception of fairness in the organization. This result is consistent with previous research, including Budomo (2022) suggests that organizational justice helps explain the link between what employees feel inside and how they behave. In this study, emotional intelligence affects counterproductive behaviors by shaping how employees view fairness in their workplace consistently with the outcomes of different previous research Abbasi et al. (2022); H. Hany, M. Hassan and M. M. Badran (2020); Nurmalaah, Suryatni and Nurmayanti (2022) studies.

Examining organizational justice further showed that it also emerged as a major contributor in explaining how emotional self-regulation (a part of emotional intelligence) affected counterproductive work behaviors. The association between emotional self-regulation and counterproductive work behaviors is mediated by organizational justice. It was also found that organizational justice helped explain the link between emotional self-awareness as sub part of emotional intelligence with counterproductive work behaviors. The outcomes point out that emotional intelligence and organizational justice influence together to effect employee counterproductive work behavior. Yet, perception of organizational justice did not show a major part in how interpersonal skills (a third part of emotional intelligence) affected counterproductive

work behaviors. Therefore, emotional self-regulation and awareness are important for employee behavior. Overall, these conclusions are constant with the previous research Adha (2023); Musdalifa, Iskandar and Taqwa (2024) studies. Similarly, Mahadiputra and Piartrini (2021). The combined effects of perceived emotional intelligence and organizational justice for predicting counterproductive work behaviors have been studied and explained. Tiansari and Widiasih (2024), findings revealed stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational justice for predicting counterproductive work behaviors of employees working in public organizations.

5.1. Limitations and Future Suggestions

Although the current research study is empirical and quantitative in nature, the elements of social desirability and self-report biased are always potential reservations to draw causal inferences for generalizability. Therefore, in future studies a measure of social desirability can be used to counter this limitation. Moreover, future studies may also expand on employing a larger sample and inter group comparisons based upon ethnic background across populations. Which may further elaborate the connections of emotional self-regulation and awareness with perceived organizational justice, and counterproductive work behavior from Pakistani context.

6. Conclusion

The current study explained perception of emotional intelligence relates to counterproductive behavior at workplace negatively and more fairness at work among public sector employees of Pakistan. It was also found perception of organizational justice is negatively connected to counterproductive work behaviors. These findings of this research suggested that people with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to consider their workplace fair, which is perception of organizational justice, and have less potential to do harmful acts (counterproductive behaviors) that negatively affect the organization. In conclusion, the study also contributed to the existing literature that organizational justice acted as a mediator between emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behaviors, promoting both organizations can achieve better outcomes, work environment, and culture at large.

6.1. Implications

The findings are valuable for leaders in public organizations. Managers can use the information to develop strategies that improve emotional intelligence by offering training and development (emotional self-regulation, emotional self-awareness, and interpersonal skills i.e., empathy, communication, and sociability) programs for employees. Organizations can encourage employee engagement plans to create fair perception of policy and procedures, which may help employees feel more fairly treated and discourage actions that harm the organization. Organizations should regularly monitor through HR-appraisal systems how employees feel about justice in the workplace. By dealing with perceived unfairness (through counterproductive work behavior training and introducing interventions to minimize such harmful behavior) and making decisions openly, public sector organizations can create a fairer workplace which may decrease the chances of unproductive or harmful behaviors for better work environment. In the end, paying attention towards incorporating and implementing standardized human resource development practices into the public sector organizations of Pakistan may result in employees being more engaged, satisfied, and better delivery for services and governance in the public and national interest.

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