



PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AMONG EMPLOYEES: EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH AND ORGANIZATIONAL EXCLUSION

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Abstract

The issues of unfair treatments among workers in organizations have continued to generate interest among researchers. However, studies linking psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion to perceived organizational justice seem to be lacking in literature. Therefore, this study investigated psychological contract breach, organizational exclusion and gender as predictors of perceived organizational justice among workers in selected organizations in Port Harcourt metropolis. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design while purposive sampling technique was used to select five organizations in Port Harcourt metropolis. Data were conveniently collected from 250 workers using validated scales and analyzed with independent samples t-test and multiple regression analysis. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance. The result showed that psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion jointly predicted perceived organizational justice among study participants [$R^2 = .603$, $F(2, 247) = 187.829$, $p = .001$]. Furthermore, the results indicated that both psychological contract breach ($\beta = .394$, $p = .001$) and organizational exclusion ($\beta = .474$, $p = .001$) independently predicted perceived organizational justice among study participants. Finally, the result revealed a significant gender difference in perceived organizational justice among study participants [$t(248) = 22.03$, $p = .001$]. The study concluded that psychological contract breach, organizational exclusion and gender are robust predictors of perceived organizational justice among study participants. It is recommended that all stakeholders in these organizations should put in place policies and programmes to improve organizational justice among their workers

Keywords: psychological contract breach, organizational exclusion, perceived organizational justice

1. INTRODUCTION

Perceived organizational justice (POJ) is a subjective feeling that an organization cares about employees' involvement in work and well-being (Zeng et al., 2020). POJ considers the degree individuals' organization values the contributions of their employees and promotes their welfare. There are four components of POJ: Distributive, procedural, interactive and informative justice (Correia & Almeida, 2020). While distributive justice is the belief that resources allocated to employees are "deserved" based on their contributions (Correia & Almeida, 2020), procedural justice shows the level of fairness by which rewards are shared to the employees (Correia & Almeida, 2020). Interactive justice means the respect and correct way employers communicate detailed procedures and justify the decisions taken by using honest and truthful information channels (Correia & Almeida, 2020). Finally, informational justice explains the "amount, authenticity and clarity of information regarding outcome distributions and the procedures used to determine outcomes" (Bidarian & Jafari, 2012). Perceived organizational justice plays important roles in employee attitudes, behaviors, and overall organizational effectiveness. It affects the organization both positively and negatively. Positive feeling of organizational justice leads to job satisfaction while negative feelings of perceived organizational justice causes job dissatisfaction (Tellang et al., 2023).

Some factors have been implicated as predictors of perceived organizational justice. The first factor considered in this study is psychological contract breach which refers to awareness that one or more obligations have not been fulfilled by the other party that triggers an emotional experience of contract breach (Ntimba et al., 2021). It has also been variously described as when employees become convinced that their employers have failed to meet one or more of their obligations as expected in terms of their psychological contract (Balogun et al., 2025; Maimane et al., 2018; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Examples of perceived psychological contract breach include cut in salary, lack of promotion, no provisions for career development and lack of job security (Maimane et al., 2018). Psychological contract has been found to be negatively related to favorable job attitudes and performance in organizations (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Employees who perceived a breach of their psychological contract were found to have reduced their commitments to their organizations (Winter & Jackson, 2006; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Also, Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall (2008) found that a breach of the psychological contract results in reduced psychological well-being, job dissatisfaction, mistrust, withdrawn organizational commitment, increased intentions to leave the organization, and negative attitudes towards the organization among employees. Finally, perceived psychological contract breach has always leaves the employees in a state of dissatisfaction about their work and that of the organization itself (Ntimba et al., 2021). This psychological contract breach results in employees' negative attitude and destructive behaviors which are detrimental to the survival of organizations (Herrera & Las Heras-Rosas, 2021).

The second factor considered in this study is organizational exclusion which refers to the experience of being marginalized, ignored, or deliberately excluded by colleagues or superiors in an organizational setting (Metz et al., 2022). Organizational exclusion takes different dimensions such as social isolation, exclusion from decision-making processes and

being left out of important discussions or events. Further manifestations include micro aggressions, ostracism, or deliberate neglect by coworkers or supervisors. Examples of organizational exclusion include when employers do not share information, do not establish eye contact, when employees are excluded in conversations, when left out in important meetings, when necessary resources are hidden, etc., (Metz et al., 2022). Organizational exclusion could warrant employees to make more efforts and show positive behaviors in order to create favorable outlook and make themselves accepted (Kouchaki & Wareham, 2015).

Finally, gender was considered to influence perceived organizational justice in this study. For example, Olowookere et al. (2020) found that gender has significant effects on employees' perceived organizational justice, with male having better perception of organizational justice than their female counterparts. This finding also agreed with the previous result that women are concentrating more on distributive rather than procedural justice issues in their organizations (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2010). However, Roberts and Okurame (2021) in a study on the influence of psych-demographic factors on perceived organizational justice among 166 employees in Port Harcourt did not find gender to influence perceived organizational justice.

The dynamics of the employment relationship have significant implications for employee attitudes, behaviors, and overall organizational effectiveness. The psychological contract, which represents the unwritten expectations and obligations between employees and their organization, and organizational exclusion, which encompasses experiences of marginalization and isolation, can significantly influence employees' perceived organizational justice. Although studies have been conducted on the psychological construct and organizational exclusion, the results have produced varied results. Also, studies linking these two constructs to private and public organizations in Nigeria are lacking which leaves gaps in knowledge to fill.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate psychological contract, organizational exclusion and gender differences as predictors of perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The research questions raised to guide this study were: Would psychological contract and organizational exclusion jointly and independently predict perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria? And, would there be gender differences between male and female employees on perceived organizational justice among study participants?

The study would provide fresh insight on psychological contract and organizational exclusion on perceived organizational justice among workforces in emerging economies . Also, the study would help human resource managers in taking decisions in the areas of recruitment, selection, promotion, training, motivation, and implementing organizational change.

The following hypotheses were tested in this study.

H1: Psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion would jointly and independently predict perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis.

H2: There would be gender differences in perceived organizational justice among employees in the Port Harcourt metropolis.

3. METHOD

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design study while data were collected using validated questionnaires. The independent variables were psychological contract, organizational exclusion and gender while the dependent variable was perceived organizational justice. The population of the study was projected by (NPCC) National Population Commission Center (Obia/Akpor 665,000) which is the population of the study. The participants come from different sectors, such as government, private, non-profit, representing a diverse range of job roles, levels, and backgrounds.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select five public and private organizations within Port Harcourt metropolis namely Ponticeli Nigeria Limited, Nigerian Agipoil Company, Schlumberger, C-way Water Bottling Company and Rivers State Secretariat while convenience sampling technique was used to distribute questionnaires to the participants.

Three validated questionnaires were used for data collection:

Organizational Justices Scale (Colquitt, 2001) is a 20-item scale presented on a 4-point Likert's format ranging from always = 4, often = 3, rarely = 2 and never = 1. Sample items include: "My supervision explains details in a timely manner" and "The procedures used in my organization are free of bias". Author obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 and in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 was obtained.

Psychological Contract Scale (Morrison & Robinson, 2000). It is an 8- item scale presented on 5-point Likert's format ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. Sample items include: "Almost all the promises made by my employer during recruitment have been kept so far" and "I fell extremely frustrated by how I have been treated by my organization". Authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 while in this study Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 was obtained. Work Place Exclusion Scale (Hitlan & Noel, 2009) is a 17- item scale that is presented on 5-point Likert's format ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. Sample items include: "Your boss or supervisor complimenting you on a job well-done" and "Been unable to interact with others at work due to language communication difficulties". Authors obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 and in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 was obtained.

Permission to carry out this study was based on the introduction letter obtained from the Department of Psychology, Rivers State University, Nkpulu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt. Each organization selected for the study was presented with the letter and oral approval to meet the potential participants was given. Potential participants were met in their offices, cafeteria and under recreational canopy in some organizations. The researchers approached potential participants and discussed the purpose of the study to them. They were assured of confidentiality from their responses. Individuals who agreed to participate were given

questionnaires to fill which were collected on the spot. However, some participants asked the researchers to leave the questionnaires with them and pick it up the following day. The percentage of this group of participants was calculated to be 3%. A total of 262 questionnaires were distributed while 254 questionnaires (i.e., 97% response rate). However, during coding and screening, four questionnaires had more than 60% missing data and were removed thus leaving 250 used for data analysis.

Finally, IBM SPSS version 26 was used to analyze data collected. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed on the data. Multiple regression analysis was used to test hypothesis 1 while independent sample t-test was used to test hypothesis 2. All the hypotheses were accepted at $p = .000$ level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1. Demographic data of study participants

Variables		Frequency Percent	
Gender	Male	110	44
	Female	140	56
Age	Below 29yrs	54	22
	30-39yrs	44	18
	40-49yrs	57	22
	50-59yrs	45	18
	Above 60yrs	50	20
Marital Status	Single	54	22
	Married	107	42
	Separated	33	13
	Divorced	32	13
	Widowed	24	10
Religious affiliation	Christian	191	76
	Muslim	28	11
	Traditionalist	31	13
Educational qualification	FSLC	20	8
	OND/HND	60	24
	HND/BSc	110	44
	MSc/MA	34	14
	PhD	26	10
Work experience	Below 10yrs	41	16
	11-19yrs	96	38
	20-29yrs	72	29
	Above 30yrs	41	16
	Below 10yrs	41	16
Monthly income	Below N30,000	67	29
	N31,000-N100,000	80	32
	N101,000-N300,000	53	21
	N301,000-N500,000	35	14
	Above N501,000	15	6

Descriptive statistics revealed that 56 % of the participants were female employees with more participants (22%) being in the age bracket of 40-49 years and 43% of them were married couples. Also, more of the participants (76%) were Christians with the highest percentage (44%) having first degree or equivalent with as many as 38% participants having 11-19 years' work experience. Finally, 32% of the participants earned between N31, 000 and N100, 000 as monthly income.

H1: Psychological contracts breach and organizational exclusion would jointly and independently predict perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis and result is presented in Table1.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis showing psychological contract breach and organization exclusion as joint and independent predictors of perceived organizational justice

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
Psychological contract breach	.394	7.865	.000	.777	.603	187.829	.001*
Organizational exclusion	.474	9.454	.000				

Dependent variable: Perceived organizational justice.

*Significant at $p < .001$ level of significance

Table 2 shows the result of the regression analysis on joint and independent predictors of perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis. The result revealed that psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion jointly predicted perceived organizational justice among study participants [$R^2 = .603$, $F(2, 247) = 187.829$, $p = .001$]. Also, the results indicated that both psychological contract breach ($\beta = .394$, $t = 7.865$, $p = .001$) and organizational exclusion ($\beta = .474$, $t = 9.454$, $p = .001$) independently predicted perceived organizational justice among study participants. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

H2: Gender would significantly influence perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis. The hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents independent samples t-test of gender differences on perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis. The result indicated that gender significantly influence perceived organizational justice among study participants [$t(248) = 22.03$, $p = .001$] such that male workers scored higher in perceived organizational justice ($M = 63.364$, $SD = 5.526$) than their female counterparts ($M = 49.421$, $SD = 4.480$). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3: Independent samples t- test showing gender differences on perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis

Gender	N	M	SD	Df	t	p
Male	110	63.364	5.526	248	22.03	.001*
Female	140	49.421	4.480			

Dependent variable: Perceived organizational justice

*Significant at $p < .001$

The study examined psychological contract breach, organizational exclusion and gender as predictors of perceived organizational justice among employees in Port Harcourt metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were tested and accepted at $p = .001$ level of significance.

The hypothesis that psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion would jointly predict perceived organizational justice among employees in the Port Harcourt metropolis was accepted. This means that practicing organizational exclusion in the workplace would lead to psychological contract violation which in turn would affect perceived organizational justice. In other words, organizations perceived to be fair would lead to demonstration of job satisfaction among their employees. This finding lent credence to the result by Zehir and Esra Erzengin (2019) that high organizational justice increases the job satisfaction level of employees. In addition, the result corroborated with the finding by Yolanda Estreder (2020) who found that beyond the positive effect of fulfillment of obligation by the organization, psychological contract violation tends to have a strong negative effect on perceived organizational justice. Also, the result of this study supported finding by Ines Tomas (2018) that employees who experienced a feeling of violation, assigned responsibility for a serious infringement of their psychological contract to their organization, had unfavorable reactions by diminishing their perceived justice within their employment relationship. Also, the study found both organizational contract and organizational exclusion to independently predict perceived organizational justice.

Finally, the hypothesis that there would be gender difference in perceived organizational justice among employees in the Port Harcourt metropolis was supported. The result showed that male employees reported higher perceived organizational justice more than their female counterparts. The finding supported Olowookere et al. (2020) result that gender has significant effects on employees' perceived organizational justice, with male having better perception of organizational justice than their female counterparts. Also, the result lent credence to Lee (2007) who found that women are more involved on distributive rather than procedural justice issues in their organizations. However, the study contradicts finding by Roberts and Okurame (2021) who did not find gender to influence perceived organizational justice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study was aimed to investigate psychological contract breach and organizational exclusion as predictors of perceived organizational justice among employees in the Port Harcourt metropolis. Also, that gender would significantly differentiate perceived organizational justice among study participants. The result has empirically confirmed the two hypotheses tested in the study. Psychological contract, organizational exclusion and gender significantly influenced perceived organizational justice among study participants.

The study makes the following recommendations: To begin with, there should be a contract agreement between the employees and management in the form of a bargain. This would recognize the employees' rights to services that provide basic need for life such as good policies that would allow the organization to collect accurate information for decision

making, equitable distribution of rewards and job security. In addition, management should improve communication channels within the organization to enhance transparency and reduce ambiguity, positively influencing the psychological contract. Also, management should implement social support to address exclusion principle, provide avenues for employees to connect with colleagues and management. Furthermore, management should provide a favorable working environment that would enhance the perception of justice at the workplace, ensure good working conditions, provide opportunity for advancement, promotion, feedback on the job and strengthen skills through regular training of employees. Finally, management should strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms within the organization to address dispute promptly and fairly in order to maintain a positive psychological contract.

The study has some limitations which need to be addressed in further study. To begin, data were collected using self-reported questionnaires which were not free of response bias. Further study should include focus group discussions and key informant reports to triangulate self-report generated data. Furthermore, the selection of organizations only in the Port Harcourt metropolis with sample size of 250 participants would limit generalization of study findings. Further study should select organizations from other cities in the state and increase the sample size. Finally, the independent variables studied were not exhaustive. Further study should include personality traits, self-esteem, and social support to explore perceived organizational perceived justice.

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