ETHICAL CLIMATE, JOB PRESSURE, AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR AMONG FACULTY MEMBERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF NEUTRALIZATION

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ABSTRACT: Extant research linking ethical climate and job pressure to counterproductive work behaviour have consistently yielded significant results. However, the psychological mechanism that underlies the relationships between ethical climate, job pressure and counterproductive work behaviour remains unclear. We addressed this knowledge gap by examining the mediating role of neutralization in the relationships between ethical climate, job pressure and counterproductive work behaviour. The proposed model was tested by applying variance-based structural equation modelling to data collected from 356 academic faculty members of two ethnically diverse public universities in Nigeria. As expected, the results showed that both ethical climate and job pressure were significant predictors of counterproductive work behaviour. Additionally, the results established that the relationships between ethical climate and counterproductive work behaviour is mediated by neutralization. In the same vein, the results showed that job pressure triggers neutralization, which in turn, predicts counterproductive work behaviour.
Keywords: Ethical climate, job pressure, counterproductive work behaviour, neutralization

INTRODUCTION

The study of employee negative behaviour such as workplace deviant behaviours, counterproductive work behaviour, bullying, aggression, and other unethical acts is important because such a behaviour results in obvious costs to the firms such as absenteeism, work slowdown, turnover, and so on. Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) is described as behaviours in the workplace that is volitional, intentional, and detrimental to an organization and its members (Spector, Bauer,

& Fox, 2010; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). It includes rudeness, sabotage, wasting time, theft, refusal to follow superior officer's instructions, doing work incorrectly, and withholding effort (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2005).

Extant literature indicates that CWB has been discussed mainly in developed countries with less emphasis on developing and under-developed countries which are prone to CWB (Erez & Gati, 2004; Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010; Spector & Fox, 2005). However, counterproductive work behaviour in one culture may not be a CWB in another culture. Hence, findings from developed countries may not have similar implications for developing/underdeveloped countries like Nigeria with a loose culture. Studies indicated that the climate of an institution may be related to counterproductive behaviour such as tardiness, lax performance and absenteeism (Wimbush, Shepard, & Markham, 1997). However, despite empirical endeavours aimed at shaping employees' behaviours at work, only limited studies have looked at the effects of ethical climate on unethical acts such as counterproductive work behaviour, bullying, aggression, organizational, and interpersonal deviance (Peterson, 2002; Simha & Cullen, 2012). Besides, Simha and Cullen (2012), Litzky, Eddleston, and Kidder (2006) and Martin and Cullen (2006) called for empirical studies to diagnose the relationship between ethical climates and unethical acts. Such calls became necessary because scholars believe that ethical climates could be used by managers to reduce counterproductive work behaviour (Simha & Cullen, 2012). Hence, the present study responded to these calls.

Further, extant research linking ethical climate and job pressure to counterproductive work behaviour have consistently yielded significant results (Adeoti, 2018; Adeoti, Shamsudin, & Wan, 2017a, b; Burke, 2011; Penney, Hunter, & Perry, 2011; Spector & Fox, 2005; Sunday, 2014). However, the psychological mechanism that underlies the relationships between ethical climate, job pressure, and CWB remains unclear. Therefore, we addressed this knowledge gap by

examining the mediating role of neutralization in the relationship between ethical climate, job pressure, and CWB. Neutralization is a psychological mechanism which allows a potential deviant to provide justification before engaging in unethical acts (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

LITERATURE REVIEW
Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Behaviours known as deviant, counterproductive, or dysfunctional are found in many work environments under different names. Generally, negative work behaviours are discussed in research across disciplines with labels including counterproductive work behaviour (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010), deviant workplace behaviour (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), anti-social behaviour of employees (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998), dysfunctional workplace behaviour (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, & Collins, 1998), rule breaking, and organizational misbehaviour (Darrat, Amyx, & Bennett 2010; Jelinek & Ahearne 2006b). Of these related terms, CWB and DWB appear to be the most commonly used descriptors of negative behaviours in literature.

Firstly, Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined DWB as any voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members or both. On the other hand, CWB is defined as distinct acts that are volitional and harm or intend to harm organizations and or stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005). Thus, CWBs are not specifically defined by norm breaking, but rather by their intention to cause harm. The researchers are of the views that CWB is a function of both environmental and individual antecedents and need to be discussed as a response to stressful work conditions and the negative emotions they provoke. This line of thought is in consonance with some scholars (Penney, Hunter, & Perry, 2011; Spector & Fox, 2005).

Ethical Climate and Counterproductive Work Behaviour
Ethical climate means the prevailing organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Similarly,

Martin and Cullen (2006) defined ethical climate as the perception of right and wrong behaviours in organizations and psychological mechanisms by which ethical issues are judged. The idea of shared perceptions associated with the definition of ethical climate gives this concept a subjective view and means that the existence of a type of ethical climate is only confirmed when most members in an organization or a unit consider that certain forms of ethical reasoning or behaviours dominate the functioning of the system (Arnaud, 2010; Martin & Cullen, 2006). Extant literature indicates that only few studies have partly investigated ethical climates in relation to CWB. Specifically, Vardi (2001) examined the effects of ethical climates on misconduct at work. The study sampled 97 employees from administration, marketing and production departments of an Israeli metal manufacturing plant. The study found a significant and negative relationship between organizational climate and organizational misbehaviour and between climate dimensions and organizational misbehaviour. Furthermore, Peterson (2002) found that the relationship between CWB and ethical climate is stronger in organizations that do not have a code of ethics. However, a difference was observed in the ethical climate for organizations with a code of ethics. Similarly, Feng-Jing, Avery, and Bergsteiner (2011) studied the relationship between performance in retail pharmacies and ethical climate in Australia. The result revealed that supportive climate is related to improved organizational performance, and staff satisfaction, which may reduce counterproductive work behaviours.

Also, it has been stated that the most important factor in ethical climate is the actual behaviour of top management; "what top managers do, and the culture they establish and reinforce, makes a big difference in the way lower-level employees act and in the way the organization acts when ethical dilemmas are faced" (Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005, p. 44; Sims, 1992). Faculty members do attach/assign meanings to the behaviours of management of universities and such leaders' behaviours determine the actual behaviours of lecturers. In other words, whether faculty members will

engage in counterproductive work behaviour or not, depends on the university work climate and behaviours of the management of such a university. In the views of the researchers, if the management behave ethically, fairly, justly, transparently, and make unbiased decisions, then the tendency for faculty members to engage in unethical acts such as CWB will be minimal.

Consistent with the preceding paragraphs, studies suggested that a negative relationship may exist between ethical climate of an organization and CWB (Deshpande & Joseph, 2009). Further, faculty members who judge their university as ethical are likely to consider the university as fair-minded to them, and this perception may breed positive behaviour void of CWB (Lu & Lin, 2014). From a theoretical perspective, the facet of opportunity in fraud triangle theory (Cressey, 1950) states that unethical acts can only thrive when there are organizational circumstances which create internal weakness, and a porous climate that may permit employee misbehaviours in forms of CWB, deviance, or fraudulent acts.

Based on the theoretical perspective of fraud triangle theory and past empirical studies, the following hypothesis emerged:
H1: Ethical climate is negatively related to counterproductive work behaviour.

Job Pressure and Counterproductive Work Behaviour
In the present study, job pressure is synonymous to workplace stress. According to the Canadian center for Occupational Health and Safety, workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. Past studies found a positive relationship between high workload and work pressure and different forms of unethical acts such as interpersonal conflicts, workplace deviance and counterproductive work behaviour (Adeoti, Shamsudin, & Wan, 2017a, b; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Houston, Meyer & Paewei, 2006; Jovanovich,

Lazaridis, & Stefanović, 2006). Specifically, high job demands are perceived to be a problem in jobs with high pressure and low pay, such as teaching.

In Nigerian context, the job pressure on faculty members is very high probably due to low level of development and amount of academic workload, poor salary package, and work pressure involved (Report on universities' needs, 2012). Hence, a faculty member who experiences job pressure may transfer his/her aggression/frustrations to the students and/or fellow faculty members (Adeoti et al., 2017a). The stress level has impacts on knowledge impartation on students, job satisfaction, commitment and employees' behaviours at work (Shahzad, Mumtaz, Hayat, & Khan, 2010). For instance, studies indicate that faculty members may experience pressure to meet challenging obligations in the areas of teaching, research, publications, and other administrative responsibilities (Adeoti et al., 2017a; Houston, Meyer, & Paewei, 2006). Job pressure takes a toll on productivity, physical and emotional conditions of faculty members, but little attention has been devoted to the impacts of job pressure on negative behaviours such as workplace deviance and counterproductive work behaviour in organizations (Burke, 2011; Houston, Meyer & Paewei, 2006). Also, Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti (2006) found that teachers who experienced high job pressure showed greater burnout, which in turn predicted health problems, anxiety, and turnover intentions.

Theoretically, Fraud triangle theory's facet of pressure revealed that the presence of job pressure is a good attraction to fraud, deviance, and other unethical acts such as CWB (Lister, 2007). Mostly, lecturing is a stressful profession because of emotional demands, big class sizes, inadequate resources, high workload, role conflict, pressure to attract external funding for publications, the low status of the profession, inadequate salary, and student deviant behaviour (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Also, job demand control model-JDC (Karasek, 1979) explains a positive relationship between job pressure and

counterproductive work behaviour. For instance, faculty members with high demanding workload may feel unhappy with their jobs and may not put more effort on the job thereby resulting in job dissatisfaction. This feeling of dissatisfaction may influence behaviours towards fellow faculty members and students leading to CWB. In line with extant empirical findings and theoretical views, the researchers hypothesized as follows:

H2: Job pressure is positively related to counterproductive work behaviour.

Neutralization as a Mediator in the Relationship between Ethical Climate and CWB

Theory of neutralization postulates that deviants must neutralize their moral beliefs, values, and standards which can prevent wrong-doing (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This follows the notion that human beings are moral agents, knowing the rights from the wrongs and for them to engage in the wrong behaviours, they must justify such undesired behaviours. For instance, an employee who perceives a warm and favourable ethical climate does not have any excuse to employ neutralization to engage in CWB but those who are dissatisfied with the ethical climate and policies of the organization may easily rationalize and justify their involvement in CWB. For instance, Lim (2002) found that employees who experienced organizational injustice engaged in cyber loafing (a form of unethical act) after they justified the existence of injustice in the organization. Also, Yu (2013) found that American and international students from Asian countries adopted neutralization to enable them to engage in digital piracy. In addition, Adeoti et al. (2017b) found that increased incidence of interpersonal deviance occurred in academia when faculty members justified their actions using excessive workload and work pressure. Based on neutralization theory, the following hypothesis emerged:

H3: Neutralization mediates the negative relationship between ethical climate and CWB.

Neutralization as a Mediator in the Relationship between Job Pressure and CWB

Neutralization stipulates that people can engage in unethical acts such as CWB provided they can justify their involvement based on reasoning but when the justification is not strong in the sight of the deviants, it becomes difficult to partake in deviance. Generally, before employees engage in any deliberate harmful acts, rule breaking, or norm-violating behaviours, neutralization techniques as sets of cognitive response modes must provide valuable explanations (Gruber, & Schlegelmilch, 2014). In the light of the foregoing, we submit that neutralization bridges the missing link between norm-violating behaviours among lecturers and CWB.

Empirically, in a study that sought to know the justifications for digital piracy, Yu (2013) found that Asian international students justified digital piracy than American students. The study concluded that neutralization enabled students to engage in digital piracy. Digital piracy was described as an unethical act which involved unauthorized copying of digital audio, software and digital video without express permission from the copy wright holder (Yu, 2012, 2013).

Practically, when lecturers adopt neutralization techniques, they would not recognize any wrong in committing CWB towards colleagues or students. In other words, neutralization makes deviants not to consider their acts as morally reprehensible (Morris & Higgins, 2009). Similarly, borrowing from disorganization theory, Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory and deviance literature, consumers have adopted techniques of neutralization to justify non-normative and negative behaviours of both consumers and corporations (De Bock, & Van Kenhove, 2011). Hence, De Bock and Van Kenhove (2011) found that consumers are less tolerant towards questionable corporate practices compared to similar questionable practices exhibited by the consumers. In other words, it is easier for consumers to justify their own deviant acts using neutralization techniques while consumers condemn organizations' unethical practices easily.

Similarly, high workload and pressure can make academics to engage in CWB because they will seek alternatives to show their dissatisfaction (Adeoti et al., 2017b). In addition, job-related stress and pressure can make faculty members to become frustrated, impatient, irritated and such emotions can lead to variety of deviant behaviours. Hence, positive relationship is predicted between neutralization and counterproductive work behaviour (Lim, 2002).

Therefore, drawing from neutralization theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957), the researchers posit that it is reasonable for lecturers who perceived job pressure (stressful workload and work pressure) in universities to engage in self-justifications before engaging in CWB. In this case, academics may say 'the management of this institution, my colleagues and students are unethical, deviants, and wrong-doers as well' (condemnation of the condemners). Also, faculty members may say 'interpersonal deviance and conflicts are normal things among people in organizations' (claim of normalcy). Based on theory of neutralization and empirical submissions, the following hypothesis emerged:

H4: Neutralization mediates the positive relationship between job pressure and counterproductive work behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on theory of neutralization and job demand control model from which the conceptual framework emerged.

Theory of Neutralization

Neutralization theory asserts that individuals are free to participate in misbehaviours that they would otherwise believe to be wrong once they can adduce moral reasons for their wrongful acts (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Lim, 2002). It further states that individuals are largely allegiant (rather than oppositional) to a normative belief system and must employ justifications to engage in deviant behaviours. Ordinarily, the pressure of work on faculty members may lead to frustration, anger,

and depression with ability to severe interpersonal relationship with colleagues and/or students. Therefore, if faculty members in Nigerian public HEIs experience excess workload and intense work pressure, they may give moral reasons to engage in CWB.

Job Demand Control

Karasek's (1979) job demand-control model (JDC) posits that high job demands produce a state of normal arousal, which enables the body to respond to the demands. In other words, individuals react negatively to perceived stressors in the workplace including exhibiting CWB towards colleagues (Spector & Fox, 2005). Also, unresolved strain may in turn accumulate and as it builds up can result in anxiety, and depression. Consequently, perception of excessive workload and work pressure may result in CWB (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Based on these theoretical views, the following conceptual framework emerged:
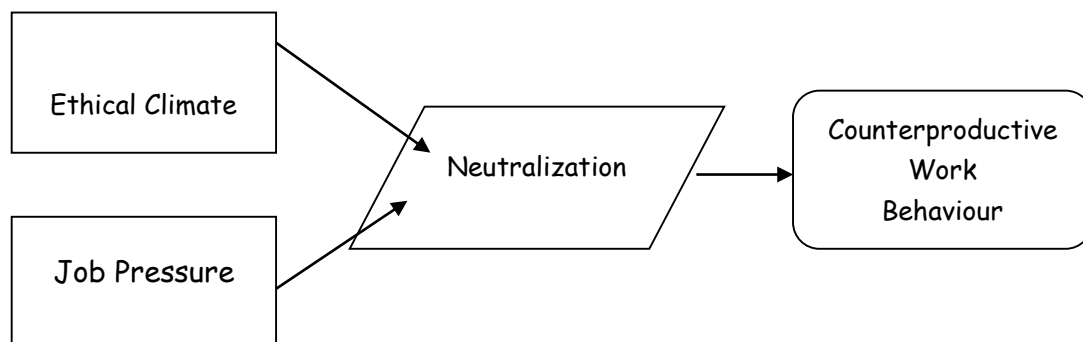
METHODOLOGY
Research Design

We adopted a cross-sectional research design. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from 356 full time faculty members in two ethically-diverse Nigerian public universities. Variance-based structural equation modeling was employed for data analysis. The choice of public universities is justified because CWB is higher in Nigerian public universities than private universities (Geidam, Njoku, & Bako, 2011; Makinde, 2013) In terms of gender, 274 participants were males (77% of the participants) while 82 participants which represented 23% were females. Educationally, 29.2% of the

participants were first degree holders, 45.2% possessed Masters' degrees, while 25.6% of the participants were doctorate degree holders. About 70% of the participants have spent 10 years and above on the job. In terms of age, 39% of the participants aged 41–50 years, 34% aged 31–40 years, 21.1% of the participants aged 50 years and above, while 5.9% of the participants aged 21–30 years.

Measures/Instruments

Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)

CWB was measured with a 10-item scale developed by Spector and Fox (2001). The scale reported an acceptable internal reliability of 0.87 (Spector & Fox, 2001; Spector, Bauer & Fox, 2010). Participants indicated the frequency of their involvement in CWB on a 5-point scale ranging from '1' "Never" to '5' "Everyday"

Ethical Climate (EC)

EC was measured based on the work by Schwepker Jr. and Hartline (2005). The scale consisted of seven items measuring the ethical climate, presence and enforcement of codes of ethics and top management actions related to ethical climate. Also, the scale reported acceptable internal reliability of 0.79 (Schwepker & Hartline, 2005). Participants indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale ranging from '1' "Mostly false" to '5' "Completely true"

Job Pressure

Job pressure was measured with a 5-item scale developed by Brim, Ryff, and Kessler (2004). The scale reported an acceptable internal reliability of 0.85 (Brim et al., 2004). Participants indicated how often they experience job pressure on a 5-point scale ranging from '1' "Never" to '5' "Always"

Neutralization

Neutralization was measured with six items (α = 0.861) adapted from Rogers and Buffalo (1974) neutralization scale. All participants

indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale from "1" = strongly disagree to "5" = strongly agree.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS
Data Screening
To overcome common method variance (CMV), we observed both procedural and statistical remedies to lessen the impacts of CMV as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2012). According to Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011), multicollinearity is not a problem in the present study because VIF values are less than 5 (O'Brien, 2007; Rogerson, 2001) and tolerance values for all variables range from 0.425 to 0.837, indicating higher values than the threshold 0.20. Additionally, the normality test revealed that none of the items in the dataset has a skewness and kurtosis statistics above ±3 and ±10 respectively. After satisfying all preliminary screening conditions and all statistics fit within recommended parameters, we analyzed both measurement and structural models as shown in the subsequent sub-sections.

Results of Measurement Model
First, we assessed individual item reliability and construct reliability (internal consistency reliability) using cronbach's alpha (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). Cronbach's alpha values of 0.8469, 0.8547, 0.9685, and 0.9257 for ethical climate, job pressure, neutralization, and CWB, respectively. In terms of individual item reliability, only items with loadings greater than 0.70 were retained (Hair et al., 2014, 2017). Further, we ascertained convergent validity with average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values ranged from 0.6196 to 0.8649, indicating adequate convergent validity (Chin, 1998a; Hair et al., 2017).

Next, we analyzed discriminant validity by comparing the square roots of AVE for each latent construct with the correlations among latent constructs and our results suggest satisfactory discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 presents the result of Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 1: *Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)*

Construct	Ethical climate	Job pressure	Neutralization	CWB
Ethical climate	0.6196			
Job pressure	0.3869	0.6985		
Neutralization	0.3207	0.3931	0.8649	
CWB	0.2538	0.2726	0.3679	0.8192

Squared correlations; AVE in the diagonal.

Table 1 shows that adequate discriminant validity has been established in the present study because the square roots of AVEs are greater than the correlations between constructs (Roldan & Sanchez-Franco, 2012).

Also, to cross-examine the results of Fornell-Larker criterion, we appraised discriminant validity by computing heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Table 2 presents the result of HTMT.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	Ethical climate	Job pressure	Neutralization	CWB
Ethical climate				
Job pressure	0.7243			
Neutralization	0.6142	0.6760		
CWB	0.5544	0.5804	0.6382	

Based on Table 2, the highest correlation is between job pressure and ethical climate (0.7243). This indicates that all correlation values obtained are less than the cut-off value of 0.850 which confirms an acceptable level of HTMT in assessing discriminant validity (Clark & Watson, 1995; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Next sub-section describes the structural model of this study.

Structural Model

We employed bootstrapping techniques of estimating indirect effects in mediation models as suggested by Hayes (2013), as well as Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). This procedure provides "higher levels of

statistical power compared with the Sobel's test" (Spector & Jex, 1998, p. 223). First, we evaluated the path coefficients by testing the direct relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive behaviour and direct relationship between job pressure and counterproductive behaviour (H1, H2). However, we agreed with the school of thought that the results of direct relationships should not be reported in a model with mediation because a mediating variable is introduced when there is a significant relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Hence, our direct relationship results are consistent with previous findings which reported significant and negative relationship between ethical climate and unethical acts (Adeoti, 2018; Guerci, Giovanni, Siletti, Stefano, & Shani, 2015; Shahin, Shabani, & Khazaei, 2014; Simha & Cullen, 2012), and a positive and significant relationship between job pressure and counterproductive behaviour (Adeoti, Shamsudin, & Wan, 2017b; Burke, 2011; Bhatti, Hashmi, Raza, Shaikh, & Shafiq, 2011; Kayatasha & Kayatasha, 2012).

Furthermore, when a mediator was incorporated in the PLS path model, we applied the standard bootstrapping procedure with 5000 bootstrap samples and 356 cases to assess significance of the path coefficients (Spector & Jex, 1998; Henseler et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2017). The result in Table 3 shows that the indirect effect of neutralization on the negative relationship between ethical climate and counterproductive behaviour was found to be significant (β= –0.1177; t= –4.0530). In addition, at 97.5% confidence interval, both lower and upper level values were negative (–0.1783; –0.0648). This implies that Hypothesis 3 was supported. Similarly, the positive relationship between perceived job pressure and counterproductive behaviour was mediated significantly by neutralization (β=0.1835; t=4.6389), giving credence to Hypothesis 4. Also, an attempt was made to test Hypothesis 4 at 97.5% confidence interval and the results yielded positive values for lower and upper levels (0.1077; 0.2613), which signifies acceptance of Hypothesis 4. Table 3 presents the mediation results.

Table 3: Structural Model Results (Mediation)

Effect	Original coef.	Standard bootstrap results					Percentile bootstrap quantiles			
		Mean value	SE	t-value	p-value (2-sided)	p-value (1-sided)	0.5%	2.5%	97.5%	99.5%
EC->Neut.->CWB	–0.1177	–0.1164	0.0290	–4.0530	0.0001	0.0000	–0.2034	–0.1783	–0.0648	–0.0586
JP->Neut.->CWB	0.1835	0.1805	0.0395	4.6389	0.0000	0.0000	0.0852	0.1077	0.2613	0.2881
				CWB	Neut.					
			R^2	0.4181	0.4438					

As shown in Table 3, both mediating hypotheses were mediated. Also, Table 3 shows that the coefficient of determination (R^2) for CWB was 0.4181(41.81%), which indicates that the indirect effect model explained 41.81% of the total variance in CWB. Also, the R^2 value of 0.4438 (44.38%) for neutralization indicates that the indirect effect model explained 44.38% of the total variance in neutralization.

DISCUSSION

Extant research has reported a significant and negative relationship between perceived ethical climate and various forms of unethical behaviours such as workplace deviance, anti-social behaviour, bullying, and counterproductive work behaviour (Adeoti, 2018; Adeoti et al., 2017b; Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005; Peterson, 2002; Simha & Cullen, 2012). Also, it has been stated that the most important factor in ethical climate is the actual behaviour of top management; "what top managers do, and the culture they establish and reinforce, makes a big difference in the way lower-level employees act and in the way the organization acts when ethical dilemmas are faced" (Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005, p. 44; Sims, 1992). When the management of universities behave ethically, the faculty members will understand clearly that unethical behaviours in all forms are not tolerated.

Further, prior studies have established a significant and positive relationship between different forms of job pressure (workload and work pressure) and unethical behaviours such as organizational and interpersonal deviance, bullying, aggression, among others (Adeoti, Shamsudin, & Wan, 2017; Burke, 2011; Devonish, 2013; Houston, Meyer & Paewei, 2006: Karasek & Theorell, 1990, 1992). The more faculty members experience different forms of job pressure, the higher the tendency for them to engage in unethical acts due to frustrations and psychological imbalance.

The present study extended these findings by examining the psychological mechanisms through which neutralization leads to counterproductive behaviour at work. To this end, the focus of the present research was to examine the mediating role of neutralization on the relationship between ethical climate and CWB on one hand, and on the other hand, to examine the mediating effect of neutralization on the relationship between job pressure and CWB among faculty members in Nigerian public universities. Results indicated that neutralization significantly mediated the negative relationship between ethical climate and CWB in a negative direction at 97.5% confidence interval. The result implies that faculty members may not give justifications to engage in CWB despite their negative perception of the prevailing ethical climate in Nigerian universities. One plausible explanation for this result may be linked to the level of education, age, and length of service of the participants. Studies indicated that highly educated individuals may be less deviant due to their exposure to knowledge and those who have spent long years in service are less likely to engage in CWB unlike new recruits (Akinbode & Fagbohungbe, 2011; Appelbaum et al., 2005; Fagbohungbe, 2012; Sunday, 2014). In the present study, 70% of the participants have spent 10 years and above on the job, which indicate that the participants are familiar with their institutions. Also, 70% of the participants obtained masters and doctorate degrees, which demonstrate that the participants are well educated.

Furthermore, neutralization mediated significantly the positive relationship between job pressure and CWB. The findings suggest that when faculty members experience excessive work pressure and overload, they are likely to justify their involvement in CWB by claiming that it was the pressure of work that made them, for example become uncivil towards colleagues and students (Adeoti et al., 2017b; Martin & Hine, 2005). Also, there is a possibility that before lecturers engage in CWB, they would justify and adduce reasons for their questionable actions to ameliorate any feelings of guilt which they may experience (Robinson & Kraatz, 1998). The present findings support reports that management of universities in Nigeria expose faculty members to excessive work pressure and work overload (NEEDS reports, 2012, 2014). Also, the findings of the present study support previous studies which reported that high workload and job pressure may make academics to engage in unethical acts because they may seek alternative means to vent their frustrations (Adeoti et al., 2017b; Costello, 2000; Mitchell, Dodder, & Norris, 1990).

The researchers submit that the presence of neutralization enables faculty members to justify their involvement in CWB, especially when faculty members experience high job pressure in the forms of excessive workload and work pressure over a long period. This submission supports theory of neutralization, which posits that deviants need to neutralize their moral beliefs and values that would normally prevent wrong-doing (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Hinduja, 2007). Extant literature demonstrate that cyber loafers used neutralization to justify their engagement in cyberloafing when they experienced organizational injustice (Lim, 2002). Similarly, Yu (2013) found that international students from Asian countries adopted neutralization techniques to rationalize their role in digital piracy.

Accordingly, the present study proves that neutralization is a fundamental psychological mechanism through which perceived job pressure and ethical climate can predict CWB. Therefore, it is essential to review the existing workloads, work pressure and working

conditions, which constitute job pressure to faculty members in Nigerian public universities with a view of minimizing CWB. Also, the work climate in Nigerian public universities needs to be improved to create a favourable perception in the minds of the faculty members, thereby reducing justifications for all forms of unethical acts such as workplace deviance, counterproductive behaviour, aggression, bullying, anti-social employee behaviour among others.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Firstly, the present study has contributed to the extant literature on organizational behaviour in a setting that is rarely studied. In the views of the researchers, this is very significant because most existing studies have western settings and their findings may not be readily applicable to Nigeria due to differences in culture and values. Also, the present study adds value to knowledge by testing a mediating variable on the constructs. Secondly, the major theoretical contribution of this study is the enhancement of neutralization theory and job demand control model (JDC model) in explaining CWB among faculty members in Nigerian public universities. Extant literature demonstrated that neutralization theory was originally used to predict adolescent delinquency, but the present study proved that the same theory can be used to predict deviance among adult participants. Also, available studies showed that job demand control (JDC) model has been used in stress-related studies but we extended its usage to predict CWB, thereby extending frontiers of knowledge.

Thirdly, this study has practical contribution. For example, our results suggest that management of public universities can minimize incidence of CWB by taking holistic review of the existing workload of faculty members and improve perceptions of ethical climate in public institutions. It is evident that lecturers in public universities in Nigeria are experiencing high job pressure. Therefore, management of public universities may recruit additional lecturers, introduce teaching/learning aids, flexi-time scheduling, and minimize non-academic related tasks assigned to faculty members. Once the

management of universities can adopt these job pressure-reduction strategies, there may be an increase in productivity and less counterproductive behaviours among faculty members.

Empirically, Spector and Fox (2005) developed a stressor-emotion model of workplace deviant behaviour that suggests CWB is a response to job demands at work. According to Spector and Fox's model, perceived high job demands in workplace can lead to emotional/psychological reactions, which can induce CWB in public universities. Therefore, there is need to reduce job stressors in the form of job demands to minimize counterproductive behaviour. Also, the management needs to show empathy towards the faculty members to discourage them from justifying CWB.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Firstly, the present study offers limited generalization because it focused mainly on faculty members in Nigerian public universities. Bearing this limitation in mind, subsequent works may include faculty members in private universities to make full generalizations of the findings. Also, the present study considered job-related and environmental factors to predict CWB. However, we acknowledge that future studies may consider personal factors such as emotional stability, self-control, and conscientiousness in predicting CWB. Further, the present study is a cross-sectional survey, future research may consider longitudinal approach to studying counterproductive work behaviour so that causal inferences could be made. Last but not the least, there is need for cross-country studies to be conducted to compare the present results with the results of studies in other countries using same/similar variables.

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