

"EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AS A MEDIATOR IN EMPLOYABILITY, PROACTIVENESS, AND WORKPLACE BEHAVIORS"

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Abstract

The research delves into the intricate dynamics between employability, proactiveness, socioeconomic status, and workplace behaviors, aiming to unveil their interplay within organizational and educational contexts. Through meticulous empirical analysis employing linear regression models and mediation tests, the study draws from a sample of 430 students across various universities in Kerala. Findings elucidate a compelling narrative: both employability and proactiveness serve as robust predictors of workplace behavior, underscoring their pivotal roles in shaping organizational dynamics. Moreover, the study illuminates the mediating influence of socioeconomic status, illuminating how contextual factors intricately intertwine with individual attributes to modulate workplace conduct. This nuanced understanding offers valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers alike, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of workplace behavior and the imperative of considering socioeconomic contexts in organizational interventions.

Keywords: Organizational citizenship behavior, Deviant workplace behavior, Socioeconomic status, Employability, Proactive Personality and Mediation Test

Introduction

In the face of economic shifts and societal complexities, human resources are pivotal for delivering value to stakeholders, with employees' discretionary effort and ethical conduct being crucial for organizational success (Verghese, 2020; Callea et al., 2022). However, engaging in deviant workplace behavior undermines individual and organizational integrity, posing obstacles to competitive advantage (Zelga, 2017). Despite scholarly attention, there's still no consensus on how to assess and understand the multidimensional nature of organizational behavior (Ma et al., 2022).

Organizations strive to leverage their most valuable assets, their employees, to maintain competitive advantage and resilience. When employees experience fulfillment and alignment with organizational values, they often exhibit voluntary actions known as organizational citizenship behavior. However, individual factors like personality traits and socioeconomic status can also influence the likelihood of employees engaging in deviant workplace behavior, which can have significant and lasting negative consequences for both individuals and the organization, affecting reputation and financial stability. The paper investigates the influence of employability and proactive personality on workplace or college behavior, while examining the mediating role of socioeconomic status.

Conceptual framework

Gaining insights into workplace behaviors encompassing organizational citizenship and deviant actions

In today's dynamic environment, organizations prioritize meeting stakeholder needs and retaining highly committed employees as crucial factors for success (Mosadeghrad, 2013). Understanding and managing the spectrum of workplace behaviors, from appropriate to deviant actions, is a complex task that requires a comprehensive grasp of influencing factors (Kwentoh et al., 2020). Consequently, extensive research has been dedicated to exploring both appropriate and inappropriate workplace

behaviors in organizational behavior and psychology fields (Organ et al., 2006).

Appropriate behavior at work entails actions and attitudes aligned with organizational values, including integrity, respect, and professionalism, while organizational citizenship behavior involves voluntary actions beyond formal job duties that enhance organizational effectiveness (Khalili, 2017; Lee & Allen, 2002; Organ et al., 2006). These behaviors are closely linked, as engaging in positive behaviors like respecting colleagues and meeting job requirements can foster citizenship behavior, such as volunteering for extra tasks or helping co-workers (Greenberg & Baron, 2007; Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010; Robbins & Judge, 2016).

Citizenship behavior in the workplace, as evidenced by research, yields various positive outcomes for both the organization and its employees, including enhanced morale, productivity, and a positive work culture (Kelloway et al., 2008; Organ et al., 2006). Individually, such behaviors facilitate relationship-building, networking, and a heightened sense of purpose and fulfillment in work (Lee & Allen, 2002). Factors influencing engagement in citizenship behaviors include personal values, organizational commitment, and perceived support and recognition from colleagues and superiors (Greenberg & Baron, 2007; Kelloway et al., 2008).

Inappropriate behavior at work, characterized by unethical or unprofessional actions, can adversely affect employee well-being and satisfaction, leading to increased stress (Treviño et al., 2006). Such behavior may include theft, sabotage, lying, discrimination, or violation of company policies, resulting in negative consequences for both individuals and organizations (Treviño et al., 2006; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Factors influencing deviant behaviors include personal values, organizational stressors, and leadership practices (Greenberg & Baron, 2007). Deviant workplace behavior arises when employees lack motivation to adhere to required norms or succumb to social pressures (Wang et al., 2018). It lowers organizational citizenship behavior and increases employees' propensity to resign (Pletzer et al., 2022). Consequently, companies must address such behavior due to its significant human and financial costs (Raza et al., 2022).

Fostering high employability needs

In response to socioeconomic changes, human resources focus on enhancing employability through personal competencies and continuous learning (Serim et al., 2014; Römogens et al., 2020). Employability serves as a bridge between education and the job market, emphasizing the importance of essential skills and adaptability (Tong & Gao, 2022; Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020). Higher education institutions play a vital role in fostering employability by providing opportunities for skill development and real-world experience through partnerships with industries (Römogens et al., 2020; Du-Babcock, 2016). However, there's a noted influence of the employability agenda on higher education, rather than vice versa (Chadha & Toner, 2017).

Employability is closely linked to emotional competencies, such as empathy, which facilitate collaboration in the workplace (Sauli et al., 2022). Additionally, access to relevant social networks predicts success in the labor market (Harry et al., 2018). Social exchange theory suggests that employability encourages individuals to engage in organizational citizenship behavior by fulfilling their rights and obligations (Imam & Chambel, 2020). However, perceived employability negatively affects organizational commitment and employee performance, as employees may feel less dependent on their employer (Philippaers et al., 2019). Conversely, perceived employability positively correlates with organizational citizenship behavior directed towards individuals, such as offering help to overwhelmed colleagues (Imam & Chambel, 2020). Furthermore, organizational and demographic factors, including skills and emotions, can trigger negative perspectives leading to workplace deviance, posing risks to organizational objectives (Yıldız & Alpkan, 2015).

H1: Individuals' employability is expected to positively predict higher levels of organizational

citizenship behavior and negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

Proactive personality

Leaders seek employees who demonstrate proactive behavior, autonomy, teamwork skills, and engagement in tasks beyond their job descriptions to ensure organizational success in unstable business conditions (Marica, 2018). A proactive personality, characterized by a consistent willingness to take initiative, enables individuals to employ innovative solutions and adapt to unforeseen changes, positively impacting career adaptability and organizational improvement (Chen et al., 2021; Hua et al., 2020; Hsieh & Huang, 2014; Li et al., 2022; Liao, 2021; Wu et al., 2018; Li et al., 2010; Battistelli et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2022; Callea et al., 2022).

Braje et al. (2020) suggest that individuals with higher levels of openness, extraversion, and agreeableness exhibit lower levels of workplace deviant behavior, while Schettino et al. (2022) argue that strongly committed employees are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover. Additionally, Kayani et al. (2021) found that proactive personality moderates the relationship between aversive leadership and deviant workplace behavior, indicating a negative effect.

H2: Individuals' proactiveness is expected to positively predict higher levels of citizenship behavior and negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status (SES) encompasses an individual's economic and social standing relative to others, influenced by factors like income, education, and occupation, impacting access to resources and overall well-being (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2014; Kraus et al., 2009).

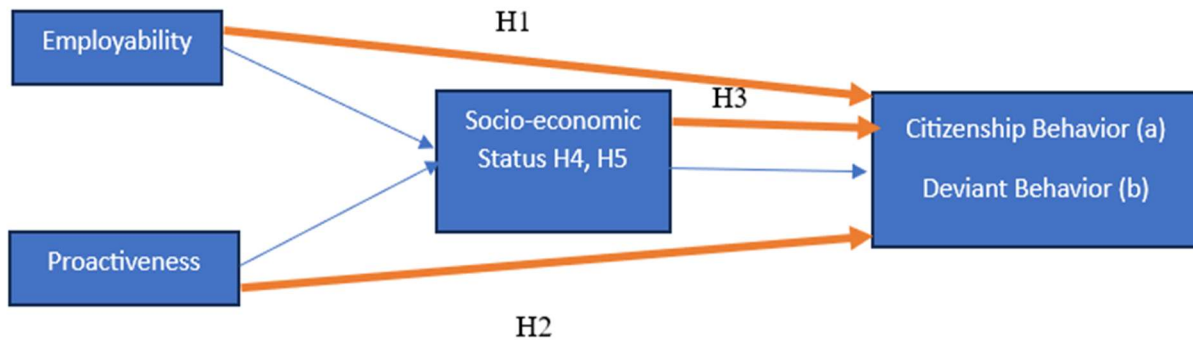
SES is a dynamic concept that can change over time and varies within societies, influenced by factors like income, education, and occupation, with its relationship to citizenship and deviant behavior in the workplace being complex and requiring further investigation (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2014; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

The relationship between SES and proactiveness influences organizational citizenship behavior, with psychological empowerment and employees' perception of generating positive change mediating this link (López-Domínguez et al., 2013). Managerial support mediates the relationship between prosocial motivation and organizational citizenship behavior (Arshad et al., 2021), while interpersonal harmony and job autonomy mediate the relationship between proactive personality and organizational citizenship behavior (Gan & Cheung, 2010; Liguori et al., 2013). However, evidence for the causality between employability or proactiveness and workplace deviance is limited.

H3: Socioeconomic status is expected to positively predict higher levels of citizenship behavior and negatively predict deviant workplace behavior.

H4: Socioeconomic status is anticipated to mediate the relationship between employability and (a) citizenship behavior, and (b) deviant workplace behavior.

H5: Socioeconomic status is expected to mediate the relationship between proactiveness and (a) citizenship behavior, and (b) deviant workplace behavior.

**Figure 1- Conceptual Model****Methodology**

The study aims to explore factors influencing behavior in work or college settings, utilizing linear regression models to analyze the impact of employability, proactiveness, and socioeconomic status on citizenship and deviant behavior (Mayers, 2013). Additionally, mediation tests and moderation analysis using SPSS were employed to understand the extent of variable involvement and potential moderation effects (Hair et al., 2021). Data collected from university students in Kerala over three months used convenience sampling, with 430 responses and variables measured on a 1–7 Likert-type scale (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 2023).

Analysis and Interpretation

Linear regression analysis was utilized to assess the predictive power of employability, proactiveness, and socioeconomic status on both appropriate and inappropriate behavior at work and/or college, while controlling for gender, with the Skewness and Kurtosis values used to determine the distribution's shape and Cronbach alpha coefficients confirming data reliability (Mayers, 2013).

Table No. 1 Data Normality and Reliability

Variable	Items	C. alpha	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistics	Std. Error	Statistics	Std. Error
SES	Q1	0.724	4.56	1.113	-0.266	0.103		
	Q2		3.74	1.452	-0.093	0.103		
	Q3		4.73	1.373	-0.340	0.103		
EMP	Q4	0.836	5.80	1.330	-0.633	0.103		
	Q5		5.91	1.342	-0.856	0.104		
	Q6		5.51	1.340	-0.700	0.103		
PROA	Q7	0.776	5.91	1.148	-0.403	0.103		
	Q8		5.64	1.230	-0.739	0.104		
	Q9		5.84	1.321	-0.771	0.103		
	Q10		4.88	1.321	-0.279	0.103		
CITB	Q17	0.749	5.83	1.204	-0.904	0.104		
	Q18		4.35	1.690	-0.310	0.104		
	Q19		4.98	1.301	-0.518	0.104		
	Q20		4.52	1.653	-0.156	0.103		
	Q21		4.37	1.447	-0.276	0.103		
DEVB	Q11	0.845	3.46	1.613	0.100	0.104		
	Q12		3.86	1.712	0.104	0.103		

	Q13		2.77	1.780	0.792	0.103	-0.517	0.206
	Q14		3.93	1.753	0.257	0.103	-1.083	0.206
	Q15		2.38	1.506	0.633	0.104	-0.692	0.207
	Q16		2.44	1.592	0.966	0.104	-0.076	0.207

Note: C. alpha – Cronbach's alpha, SD – Standard deviation, SES – Socioeconomic status, EMP– Employability, PROA – proactiveness, CITB – Citizenship behavior, DevB – Deviant behavior
The causal relationship between variables, along with their predictive power while considering gender as a controlling factor, was investigated, acknowledging the potential influence of other variables, as shown in Table 2 for descriptive statistics and correlations (Mayers, 2013).

Table No.2 Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SES	Employ	Proact	Gender	CitiB	DevB
SES	1	7	4.18	1.065	1	0.185***	0.139***	-0.016	0.093	0.079
Empl	1	7	5.16	1.143		1	0.443***	0.009	0.255***	-0.173***
Proact	3	7	5.62	0.932			1	0.033	0.394***	-0.230***
Gender	0	1	0.68	0.485				1	0.117***	-0.205***
CtiB	1	7	4.79	1.089					1	-0.286***
DevB	1	7	3.15	1.266						1

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Regression analysis of Citizenship and Deviant Behavior

Table No. 3 Regression analysis of hypothesis H1

H1(a): CitiB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.396***	0.156***	3.849	0.165***	0.029	0.028	15.168***	0.000
Gender Employ	0.65*** 0.243***	0.126*** 0.245***	3.917 6.230	0.320***	0.091	0.068	39.498***	0.000
H1(a): DevB	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.536***	-0.206***	-4.845	0.203***	0.014	0.014	23.442***	0.000
Gender Employ	-0.524*** -0.198***	-0.201*** -0.157***	-4.584 -4.532	0.286***	0.027	0.031	18.391***	0.000

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The research employed linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between employability and citizenship or deviant behavior, controlling for gender. The results revealed that employability significantly predicted both citizenship and deviant behavior, explaining a notable portion of the variance in each (Mayers, 2013). Specifically, higher levels of employability were associated with increased citizenship behavior and decreased deviant behavior among participants. This suggests that individuals with greater employability skills were more likely to exhibit positive behaviors in both work and college settings.

Table 4. Regression analysis of hypothesis H2

H2(a): CitiB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.397***	0.156***	3.849	0.165***	0.029	0.028	15.168***	0.000
Gender	0.65***	0.126***	3.917	0.320***	0.091	0.068	39.498***	0.000

Proact	0.243***	0.245***	6.230					
H2(a): DevB	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.536***	-0.206***	-4.845	0.203***	0.014	0.014	23.442***	0.000
Gender Proact	-0.524*** -0.198***	-0.201*** -0.157***	-4.584 -4.532	0.286***	0.027	0.031	18.391***	0.000

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The second linear regression analysis revealed that proactiveness significantly predicted both citizenship and deviant behavior, explaining a substantial portion of the variance in each behavior, while controlling for gender (Mayers, 2013). Specifically, higher levels of proactiveness were associated with increased citizenship behavior and decreased deviant behavior among participants. This suggests that individuals with a proactive personality were more likely to engage in positive behaviors and less likely to engage in negative behaviors in work and college settings.

Table 5. Regression analysis of hypothesis H2

H3(a): CitiB	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.396***	0.156***	3.849	0.165***	0.029	0.028	15.168***	0.000
Gender SES	0.65*** 0.243***	0.126*** 0.245***	3.917 6.230	0.320***	0.091	0.068	39.498***	0.000
H3(a): DevB	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	<i>p</i>
Gender	-0.536***	-0.206***	-4.845	0.203***	0.014	0.014	23.442***	0.000
Gender SES	-0.524*** -0.198***	-0.201*** -0.157***	-4.584 -4.532	0.286***	0.027	0.031	18.391***	0.000

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Controlling for gender, socioeconomic status did not significantly predict citizenship or deviant behavior, failing to support hypotheses H3(a) and H3(b) (Mayers, 2013).

Mediation Test

Table 6. Mediation tests

Testing Path	Effect	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Low	High
H4(a): Employ→SES→CitiB				
Direct Effect	0.255***	0.040	0.156	0.344
Indirect Effect	0.000	0.002	-0.006	0.020
H5(a): Proact→SES→CitiB				
Direct Effect	0.410***	0.048	0.301	0.429
Indirect Effect	-0.0001	0.002	-0.004	-0.017
H4(b): Employ→SES→DevB				
Direct Effect	-0.218***	0.049	-0.308	-0.241
Indirect Effect	0.024*	0.002	0.004	0.059
H5(b):				

Proact→SES→CitiB				
Direct Effect	-0.339***	0.065	-0.449	-0.228
Indirect Effect	0.020*	0.002	0.002	0.059

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Socioeconomic status mediated a small portion of the relationship between employability and deviant behavior, as well as between proactiveness and deviant behavior, but did not significantly mediate the relationships between employability/proactiveness and citizenship behavior (Mayers, 2013).

The moderation analysis using SPSS did not find any statistically significant moderation effects of socioeconomic status on the relationship between employability/proactiveness and citizenship/deviant workplace behaviors (Mayers, 2013).

Discussion

Promoting positive behavior and discouraging negative behavior in organizations is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and employee wellbeing (Verghese, 2020; Callea et al., 2022). Research suggests that employability positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior and negatively predicts deviant workplace behavior (Imam & Chambel, 2020; Philippaers et al., 2019). Proactive personality traits are positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior and negatively associated with deviant behavior (Li et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2006). Personal values, beliefs, and socioeconomic status also influence workplace behavior (Greenberg & Baron, 2007; Heslin et al., 2006). Strategies like clear policies, training, and ethical leadership are essential for fostering a positive work environment and minimizing deviant behavior (Harter et al., 2003; Kim & Cho, 2020).

Conclusion

The study aimed to identify predictors of organizational citizenship behavior and deviant workplace behavior, focusing on employability, proactiveness, and socioeconomic status. Findings revealed that employability positively predicts organizational citizenship behavior and negatively predicts deviant behavior, while proactiveness positively predicts citizenship behavior and negatively predicts deviant behavior. Socioeconomic status mediates the relationship between employability/proactiveness and deviant behavior. The research contributes to understanding organizational behavior predictors, particularly in the context of business students in Romania, providing valuable insights for organizations and policymakers aiming to foster positive workplace behavior and minimize deviance (Imam & Chambel, 2020; Wright & Bonnet, 2007). The study underscores the importance of considering students' perspectives in shaping labor market policies and organizational strategies (Greenberg & Baron, 2007; Kraus et al., 2009). Further research with larger samples and diverse perspectives is recommended to enhance understanding and inform practical interventions (Harter et al., 2003; Kim & Cho, 2020).

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