

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## Injustice perceptions and employees misbehavior in the public organization: Exploration of mediating role of employee's cynicism to organization

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationships between justice perceptions, employee's misbehavior and cynicism to organization as to date very few studies have looked at the role of justice and cynicism in the prediction of employee's misbehavior in public organizations. According to the purpose of this study, the research is developmental and descriptive based on the method of data collection and correlational according to the classification. The related data were collected from 420 participants engaged in a public organization's administrative department. The results revealed that justice perceptions were negatively associated with employee's misbehavior; negatively predicted employee's cynicism and finally the relationship between organizational justice and misbehavior will be mediated by employee's cynicism. The results both support previous researches and extend the perception in relation with the mechanisms through which justice influences on employee's misbehavior.

**KEYWORDS:** *Cynicism, Justice, Mediating role, Misbehavior, Public organization*

### INTRODUCTION

Every year, misbehavior cost of employee's theft from their organizations in the United States of America is approximately 200 billion dollars (Buss, 1993) and 4.2 billion dollars for their workplace violence (Bensimon, 1997). Misbehavior of employees decrease the organization's welfare and their stakeholders (Gruys and Sackett, 2003; Bennett and Robinson, 2000; Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Judge, et al., 2006) and such misbehavior would be very costly for the organizations (Anderson and Pearson, 1999). Although bureaucratic and formal organizational structure in public organizations is the main determinant of justice but concentration on decision making and distribution of power and close communication and complexity, from dimensions of structure point of view, can decrease perceived justice in the organization (Greenberg, 1993).

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Among those points, centralization, low organizational participation of employees in decision making and the large size of structure can decrease organizational justice (Schminke et al., 2000) in public organizations. Moreover, many researchers have investigated the relationships between the various forms of organizational justice and types of employee's misbehavior in organization (Skarlicki et al., 1997; Ambrose et al., 2002; Aquino et al., 2004). This misbehaviors include frauds (Mars, 1982), work misbehavior (Vardi 2001), insistence (Knights and McCabe, 2000), humor (Collinson, 2000) and misbehavior of managers (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Also, perceptions of justice have been shown to influence numerous outcomes including employee's cynicism (Chiaburu, 2013, ozgener and et al., 2008; ozler et al., 2010; Benert et al., 2007; Wu and et al., 2007), organizational citizenship behavior's (Masterson et al.,

2000), counterproductive behavior's (Conlon *et al.*, 2005) and employee's misbehavior (Aquino *et al.*, 1999). Thus, justice in temporary organizations and especially in public organizations with regard to mentioned predictors such as bureaucratic organizational structure and confirmed consequences such as employee's cynicism as attitudinal consequence and employee's misbehavior as behavioral consequence are of great importance.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between organizational justice, employee's misbehavior and employee's cynicism because to date very few studies have looked at the role of employee's justice and employee's cynicism in the prediction of employee's misbehavior in public organizations with regard to particular contexts of organizational structure. Recent Investigations have shown that justice perceptions in organization predicted misbehavior of employee's in organization (Trevino and Weaver, 2001; Hollinger, 1991; De Schrijver, 2010) and employee's cynicism (Reichers *et al.*, 1997; James, 2005; Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013)(Taylor *et al.*, 2003; James, 2005). However, further research is needed to be carried out to investigate the relations between employee's justice, misbehavior and employee's cynicism with regard to the public organizations context and the effect of bureaucratic organizational structure.

#### *Justice and employee's misbehavior*

The justice is an important concept to understand and predict the employees' behavior in organization (Hartman *et al.*, 1999). Organizational fairness refers to subjective perception of employee's about equity (Di Fabio and Palazzeschi, 2012). Bieset *et al.* (1986) indicate that organizational fairness consists of three dimensions including distribution of justice, procedural and interactive. Fairness of distributive is a main dimension and can be defined as the normative principles that designed to conduct the responsibility and benefits allocation of economic and financial actions. The fairness of procedural defined as procedures justice such as procedures of decision making and also processes justice. Finally, fairness of interactional defined as the degree in which people in organization are affected by that decision is behaved with grandeur and respect. Certainly, fairness in practices of organization influences the procedures in which people work and behave.

Personal and social interactions between employees and managers in organization only are the organizational justice determinants. Greenberg (1993) illustrated that formal structure of organization is important predictor of organizational justice and structure dimensions can leads to fairness or unfairness (Greenberg, 1993). Dimensions such as centralization of power and decision making, complexity and close organizational communication can decrease perceived fairness in organization (Greenberg, 1993). Moreover, participation of employees can increase procedural and interactional fairness, centralization of power and decision making can decrease procedural fairness and size of organization can decrease interactional fairness (Schminke *et al.*, 2000).

Most decisions in centralized organizations are taken through hierarchy of command while in non- centralized organizations, process of decision making is assigned to executives of line or the decisions are made with the subordinates and employees contribution (Moghimi, 2006). Schminke *et al.*(2000) indicated that less organizational centralization positively would affect on perceptions of justice. Hence more participation of employees and line managers permits greater voice, and also less hierarchy of authority permits greater choice, then fairness of procedural among the employees have to increase. In addition, Schminke *et al.* (2000) indicated that a rigid hierarchy of authority and lack of employees and line manager's participation may decrease the employee's dignity and finally decreases perceptions of interactional justice. Therefore it is predicted that centralization of power and decision making in organization will reduce distributive justice perceptions. The lack of participation and power concentration could allow, economic interests disproportionate to amass the managers at the head of the organizational hierarchical levels, leaving employees of lower levels. Thus, more participation levels in hierarchy of authority and decision making or less centralization will be correlated with higher levels of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice perceptions in organization. Schminkeand *et al.* (2000) stated that for two reasons, the size of organization negatively affects the procedural and interactional justices. The first reason is that employees of larger organizations may concluded that their relationships with managers and other employees are disrupted (Kanungo, 1982; Blauner, 1964) and may lead to a alienation sense (Trist and

Bamforth, 1951; Gouldner, 1959). In result, fewer relationships of employees with managers and other employees based on intimate personal relationships, coupled with likely declines of humility, decorum, and reverence, indicates lower perceptions of employees about interactional justice. As expected, large size of organization also can be related with disquiet and turnover of employees and labors (Child, 1977). The next reason presented by Schminke and *et al.*, (2000) was that organizations with larger size have to accommodate more interest groups thereby increasing political behaviors and activities in organization (Witt, 1998). With regard to the theory of social exchange, Cropanzano *et al.* (1997) and Randallet *et al.*, (1999) stated that increase of political behaviors and activities in organization leads to less legitimate and less predictable processes and decisions of allocation in organization. Decisions are less likely to be determined based on contributions of employee's and more likely to be seen as resulting from the special structure of internal power in large organization. Generally, described consequences for large organizations are likely to be seen as less justly than other organizations with smaller size organizations. Therefore, larger size organization must lead to lower perceptions of organizational justice and as the result, it can be concluded that centralization of power and decision making in large organizations were correlated negatively to procedural justice, and organizational size was correlated negatively with perceptions of interactional justice. Vertical complexity indicates the number of organizational hierarchy levels (Price, 1972). Number of organizational hierarchy levels positively has been correlated with size of organization (Van de Ven and Ferry, 1980; Hall *et al.*, 1967). Hierarchy levels in some researches even have been used as a substitute for organizational size. Also, large organizations tend to be more complex (Fredrickson, 1984; Wally and Baum, 1994). Hence, more vertical complexity will be correlated with lower levels of justice perceptions, includes distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Many studies resulted that communication can decrease or increase interactional and procedural fairness. Open and bilateral communication, trustworthiness and sincerity in organizational communication lead to the fairness of higher procedural (Bies and Shapiro, 1987). Bruning and *et al.* (1996) provide empirical support for the relationship between organizational fairness and effective communication.

Also, particular characteristics of public organizations include formal structure, high concentration of decision making and power, formal regulations and roles, low participation of employees in decision making and high formality and complexity which can leads to close communication and finally leads to organizational injustice.

With regard to special structure of public sector including high complexity, larger size in compare with private sector and higher concentration in decision making it can be expected that employees in public organizations argue that injustice in their organization is high.

One of the more constant foundations used to realize employee's misbehavior in organization is the fairness principle (Greenberg 1990; Adams 1963). Hollinger (1991) stated that employee's accord rightfulness on misbehavior in organizations since they understand that their organization had wronged them for not practicing fairness at work. Previous investigations have demonstrated that organizational justice by the organization is important predictor of employee's misbehavior (rouseeau 1989; Greenberg 1990) and perceived injustice of employees is the best predictor of employee's misbehavior (Ambrose *et al.*, 2002). Also, many researchers have investigated the impacts of organizational justice and have conclude that justice negatively is related to employee's misbehavior (Trevino and Weaver, 2001; De Schrijver, 2010; Aquino *et al.*, 2004; Hollinger, 1991; Skarlicki *et al.*, 1997; Ambrose *et al.*, 2002). Employees were more likely to compensate by engaging in misbehavior practices when they realized that organizational unfairness had occurred. Furthermore, with regard to fairness heuristic theory of Van den Bos, when members of organization believe that their work condition is fair, it is less likely they may try to retaliate by engaging in behavior which possibly is detrimental to the organization (De Schrijver *et al.*, 2010).

#### *Hypothesis 1:*

*Employee's justice perceptions will be negatively associated with their misbehavior in public organization.*

#### *Employee's cynicism to organization as a mediator*

Employee's cynicism to organization defines as an attitude that people hold about their organization. Employee's cynicism as an attitude is included

opinions, affect, and behavioral inclinations about a subject (Breckler, 1984; Ajzen, 1994). Also, fairness influences on attitude and behaviors of employees (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2001; Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997; Ohana, 2014; Konovsky, 2000; Mossholder *et al.*, 1998; Spell and Arnold, 2007; Liao and Rupp, 2005; Coetzee, 2005; Roberson and Colquitt, 2005). As the perceptions of fairness enhance employees trust and commitment to the organization, it should also reduce cynicism of employees to the organization with regard to negative relation between employees trust and cynicism to organization (Reichers *et al.*, 1997; Dean *et al.*, 1998; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Ohana, 2014; Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). As a result, employee's perceptions about lack of trust subsequently may lead to develop cynical and suspicious attitudes in employees toward the organization. In line with mentioned studies, Colquitt *et al.* (2001) presented evidence that low levels of justice dimensions includes procedural, distributive and interactional justice are correlated to negative responses of employees to the organization. Moreover, organic organizational structure can improve organizational trust in employees (James *et al.*, 2005) which that leads to good attitudes toward the organization. Mechanical organizational structure in public organizations with characteristics including high concentration, large size, concentration of power, the absence of participation and high complexity, decreases perceived justice (Ambrose and Schminke 2001; Schminke *et al.*, 2002; Masterson *et al.*, 2000; Schminke *et al.*, 2000), trustworthiness and finally lead to cynicism in employees (Kim, 2005; Hassanpour *et al.*, 2009). As the result, justice is antecedent of employee's cynicism and it is anticipated that low level or lack of justice lead to development of a negative, cynical attitude toward the organization by employees.

Furthermore, literatures show that employee's cynicism has some undesirable and unfavorable outcomes both for the organization and the individual. Some of these unfavorable consequences include levels of lower organizational citizenship behavior, resignation, distrust of others, hopelessness, disillusionment, lower motivation, burnout and poor performance (Dean *et al.*, 1998; Andersson, 1996; Wanous *et al.*, 1994; Dyne and Graham, 1994).

It is proposed that employees who have higher cynicism levels toward the organization will have lower

levels of good behaviors. This is because cynical attitude of employees toward their organization can extend to attitudes toward their work through mechanisms such as affect infusion and the negative feeling resulting from cynical attitudes toward the organization may modulate evaluations of their job experiences (Forgas, 1995). Judge *et al.* (2006) proposed a positive relationship between employee's cynicism and deviant work behavior as one of employees misbehavior's in organization. Moreover, Bashir (2009) with regard to the past studies proposed, that negative attitude effects on negative behavior and employee's cynicism is correlated to deviant work behavior and thus employee's cynicism is related to employee's misbehavior's.

Clearly, there is a need for greater attention to be paid to understanding the mechanisms and processes which through organizational justice influences misbehaviors such as workplace deviance; antisocial behavior; workplace aggression and organization-motivated aggression in public organizations with regard to bureaucratic organizational structure. Thus, the aim of the present study was to examine the relationships between organizational justice, employee's misbehavior and employee's cynicism in public sector because very few studies have looked at the role of organizational justice and employee's cynicism in the prediction of employee's misbehavior in public organizations with regard to structural contexts of public organizations.

*Hypothesis 2:*

*Organizational justice perceptions will be negatively associated with employee's cynicism to organization.*

*Hypothesis 3:*

*Employee's cynicism perceptions will be negatively associated with employee's misbehavior.*

*Hypothesis 4:*

*The relationship between organizational injustice and employee's misbehavior will be mediated by employee's cynicism.*

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### *Participants*

In the present research, the population under analysis includes the employees of the Isfahan University in Iran. Participants were 420 employees from a public university in Isfahan City-Iran, which

consisted of 256 men and 164 women, and all of them were administrative employees. All participants provided their informed consent before completing the questionnaire. All scales were subjected to validity and reliability analyses.

#### *Procedure*

A quantitative analysis was conducted in order to investigate the relationship between organizational justice, employee's cynicism and misbehavior of employees. All questions were completed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### *The organizational justice scale*

The scale of organizational justice presented by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) was widely used to measure the dimensions of justice including procedural, distributive and interactional. The scale includes 20 questions and some examples of questions include "the compensations that I receive here are quite fair", "To make job decisions, my manager clarifies decisions and provides additional information when requested by the employee", "I feel that my job responsibilities are fair" and "Job decisions are made by managers in an unbiased manner". In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the organizational justice scale was 0.80.

#### *The employee's misbehavior scale*

The employee's misbehavior scale based on the theoretical types of employee's misbehavior distinguished by Huberts, Pijl and Steen (1999): Three dimensions of misbehavior dimensions have been measured in the present research, which are indecent treatment, waste and abuse of organizational resources, fraud and theft of resources and improper use of authority. The scale includes 12 items and some examples of items are as follow: "discrimination of colleagues based on sex, race or sexual orientation", "Careless use of organizational properties" and "Use of organizational resources for private purposes". The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the employee's misbehavior scales were 0.78.

#### *The employee's cynicism scale*

Employee's cynicism scale was assessed with 13 items, (Brandes, Dharwadker and Dean, 1999) which covered three dimensions of cognitive, affective and

behavior. Example items were "I believe that my organization says one thing and does another", "When I think about my organization, I get angry" and "I criticize the practices and policies of my organization to people outside the hospital". The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the employee's cynicism scales were 0.88.

#### *Statistical Analyses*

According to the purpose of this study, the research is developmental and descriptive based on the method of data collection and correlational according to the classification. SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to test the research Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 and to assess the appropriateness and fitness of the proposed theoretical model. In conducting SEM analysis of full latent variable models, it was essential to verify the validity of the model measurement portion (Byrne, 2006).

To evaluate reliability, the composite reliability for research variables was estimated. The composite reliability for all research variables was higher than 0.70, which was the acceptable value. Thus, the used measurements for variables in present research are reliable.

The obtained results from respondent's demographic statistics were as the following: Based on variety of gender 44 % of respondents were female and 56 % were male. In concern with education, 12 % were under bachelor degree and 77.1 % were holding bachelor degree and 10.1 % with higher than bachelor degree. Besides, regarding to respondent age, 46.2 % were less than 30 years old and 46.2 % between 31- 40, and 7.6 % of them more than 40 years old.

*The result of the bivariate and partial correlation tests:* The results of the bivariate and Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the research variables are presented in Table 1. As expected, the three justice variables are correlated with each other, as well as the three employee's cynicism variables. Furthermore, consistent with proposed model, the organizational justice perceptions are significantly and negatively correlated with employee's cynicism and misbehavior to organization. Also, misbehavior and employee's cynicism (cognitive, affective and behavioral cynicism) were positively correlated with each other.

The research conceptual model which assumed that employee's cynicism will mediate the relationship



Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables of interest

Variables	Mean	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Justice	3.62	0.607	-0.584	-0.421	0.783	0.866	0.890	-0.566	-0.466	-0.410
2. Cynicism	2.22	0.602		0.508	-0.440	-0.542	-0.498	0.818	0.856	0.781
3. Misbehavior	1.89	0.493			-0.274	-0.385	-0.406	0.447	0.375	0.437
4. Distributive justice	3.25	0.681				0.467	0.552	-0.421	-0.374	0.552
5. Interactional justice	3.85	0.758					0.705	-0.486	-0.454	-0.393
6. Procedural justice	3.75	0.710						-0.531	-0.378	-0.327
7. Cognitive cynicism	2.46	0.676							0.578	0.464
8. Affective cynicism	2.23	0.819								0.476
9. Behavioral cynicism	1.96	0.706								-

Table 2: Beta test, R-Square, Sig and Standard Deviation (SD)

	Beta	R-Square	Sig	SD
H1	-0.421	0.177	0.000	0.6075
H2	-0.584	0.384	0.000	0.6075
H3	0.508	0.258	0.000	0.6023

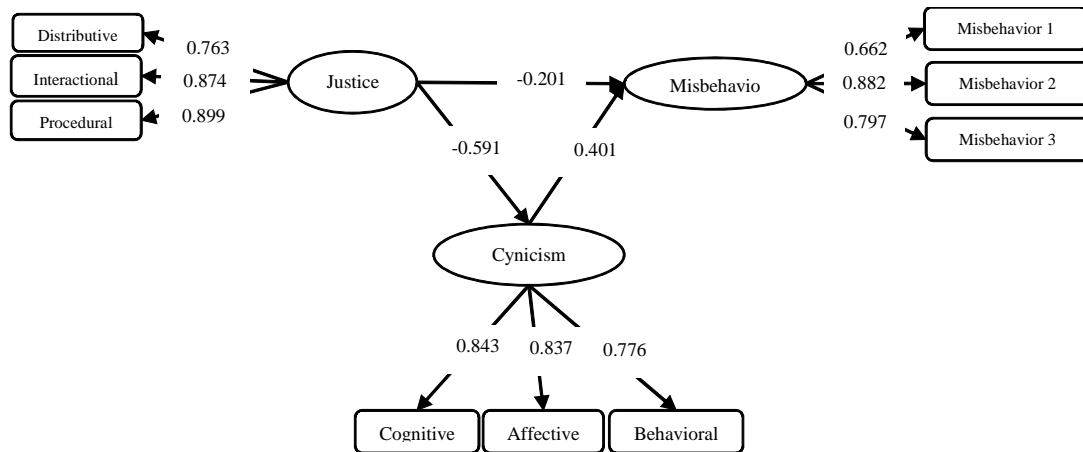


Fig. 1: PLS structural (path analysis) model

between justice perceptions and employee’s misbehavior was tested through structural equation modeling using PLS (Fig. 1).

Indirect effects were investigated to further test the mediating role of employee’s cynicism between justice and employee’s misbehavior using bootstrapped condense interval estimates of the indirect effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Results confirmed that the mediating role of employee’s cynicism between justice and employee’s misbehavior. In other words, employee’s cynicism mediates the relationships of justice and employee’s misbehavior.

The results of the Beta test, R-Square, sig and Standard deviation are presented in Table 2 for evaluating the research hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1 suggests a main effect of justice perceptions on the employee’s misbehavior. The results in Table 2 show that the interaction term of justice perceptions and employee’s misbehavior was significant (correlation = -0.421,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the justice perceptions was negatively related to employee’s misbehavior (sig = 0/00 < 0.05). Hence, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The results indicate that 17.7% (R-Square) of the variance in the employee’s misbehavior was explained by justice perceptions.

Hypotheses 2 suggests a main effect of justice perceptions on the employee’s cynicism. The results in Table 2 show that the interaction term of justice perceptions and employee’s cynicism was negatively

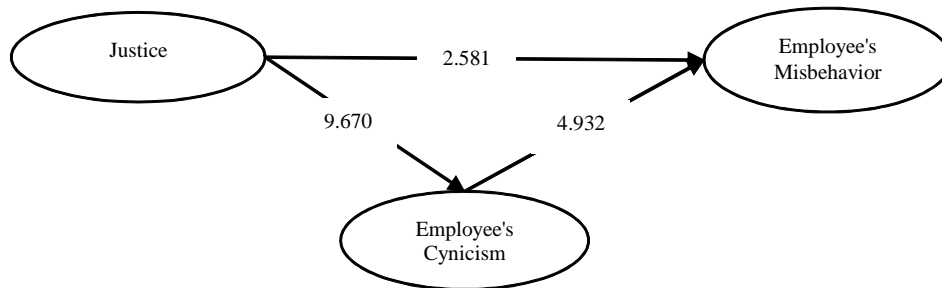


Fig. 2: T-value for estimate path coefficient meaningful in research model

significant (correlation = -0.584,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the justice perceptions was negatively related to employee's cynicism ( $\text{sig} = 0/000 < 0.05$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 2 is accepted. The results indicate that 38.4% (R-Square) of the variance in the employee's cynicism was explained by justice perceptions.

Hypotheses 3 suggest a main effect of employee's cynicism on the employee's misbehavior. The results in Table 2 show that the interaction term of employee's cynicism and employee's misbehavior was positively significant (correlation = 0.508,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the justice perceptions was negatively related to employee's cynicism ( $\text{sig} = 0/00 < 0.05$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 3 is accepted. The results indicate that 28.8% (R-Square) of the variance in the employee's cynicism negatively was explained by justice perceptions.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that employee's cynicism would moderate the relationship between justice perceptions and employee's Misbehavior. The results in Table 2 show that the interaction term of justice perceptions and employee's cynicism was negatively significant (correlation = -0.584,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0/00 < 0.05$ ) and the interaction term of employee's cynicism and employee's misbehavior was positively significant (correlation = 0.508,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0/00 < 0.05$ ). Thus, employee's cynicism would moderate the relationship between justice perceptions and employee's misbehavior and justice indirectly and negatively related to employee's misbehavior.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between justice perceptions, employee's misbehavior and cynicism to organization in a one the public organization in IRAN. The present findings both support previous researches and extend the understanding about the mechanisms through

which organizational justice influences employee's misbehavior to organization. These findings lead to a number of theoretical and practical implications. In first hypotheses, the results from the present research revealed that justice perceptions will be negatively associated with employee's misbehavior. These results were consistent with previous research which has shown that organizational justice was negatively linked to employee's misbehavior (Gholipour *et al.*, 2009; De Schrijver, 2010; Hollinger, 1991; Trevino and Weaver, 2001). With regard to the focus on decision-making and power and close communication on the organization due to the public nature of the studied organizations can be expected that employees have a negative perception of justice in the organization. Also, because the vertical complexity that represents the number of the organizational hierarchy levels is high in studied organization can be certain about the existence of injustice in organization. Moreover, the implemented investigations showed that employee perceptions of injustice lead to the misbehavior. In second hypotheses, the findings of present research also showed that organizational justice negatively predicted employee's cynicism. These results are in line with past studies (Reichers *et al.*, 1997; Dean *et al.*, 1998; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Ohana, 2014; Colquitt *et al.*, 2001) which have shown that justice perceptions reduce individuals' cynicism toward the organization through enhancing the individuals' commitment and trust in the organization with regard to relation between trust and cynicism. Moreover, since on the one hand, the perception of unfairness in organizations leads to little perceived support (Shore and Griffeth, 2003; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004; Deconinck, 2010) and on the other hand, low organizational support leads to employee's cynicism in employees, the obtained results are predictable and justifiable. These

effects intensify due to bureaucratic organizational structure that provides little support from employees. Also, cynicism is the result of the employee perceptions of lower commitment and trust in organization that is because of injustice caused by specific organizational structures of government agencies. Also, the effect of bureaucratic organizational structure due to the direct relation of variables such as the concentration of power and decision-making (Darren *et al.*, 2005) and lack of transparency in political behavior can enhance the employee perceptions of cynicism (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). In third hypotheses, employees misbehavior in organization is more when managers adopt a pessimistic attitude to organization (Bashir, 2011; Judge *et al.*, 2006; Wang *et al.*, 2011; Judge and Piccolo, 2004) because employee's cynicism has some undesirable consequences both for the organization and the individual includes lower organizational citizenship behavior, resignation, hopelessness, distrust of others, lower motivation, disillusionment, poor performance, and burnout. Since negative perception can generally leads to a negative behavior, it can be argued that perception of organization injustice and also existence of employee's cynicism in employees can lead to employee's misbehavior in organization. Finally, the present results revealed that employee's cynicism positively predicted employee's misbehavior. In other words, the relationship between employee's injustice and employee's misbehavior will be mediated by employee's cynicism. Organizations and managers should try to decrease employee's cynicism to organization by enhancing employee's perceptions of organizational justice. More generally, our findings demonstrate the importance of organizational injustice and cynicism in fostering employee's misbehavior within a public environment.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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