

Exploring Antecedents of Deviant Workplace Behaviour in Law Enforcement Agency in a Developing Country Context

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Abstract: *Deviant workplace behavior (DWB) has caught the interest of numerous academics in a number of areas, including definition, causes and effects. Numerous organizations have carried out studies. However, there has not been enough focus on law enforcement agencies. This study investigates the antecedents of DWB in Malaysian law enforcement agency. A qualitative study involving officers from various departments was carried out. Purposive sampling was used to recruit them, and thematic analysis was used to examine the data gathered. According to the study, the antecedents of DWB among Malaysian law enforcement professionals were composed of seven elements. For example, inadequate education and upbringing, lack of funds, excessive stress, incompetence and dishonesty, workplace culture, living expenses and family problems. This study's practical implications will improve employee engagement and performance by lowering DWB. In addition, law enforcement personnel must be responsible and efficient in their duties. The results of this investigation offered a through comprehension of the reasons for DWB and provided a model on antecedents of deviant workplace behavior in law enforcement agency.*

Keywords: Deviant workplace behaviour, Law enforcement officers, Antecedents

1. Introduction

In the last decade, DWB (Deviant Workplace Behaviour) has drawn the attention of many organizational behaviour scholars. Studies have explored both positive and negative deviance (Appelbaum, 2005). Positive deviance is defined as “intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways” (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003). In other words positive deviant behavior must be praiseworthy and must focus on actions with honorable intentions, irrespective of the outcomes (Herington, Matthew and Elske Van deFliert, 2018; Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003). Such as innovative behaviours, noncompliance with dysfunctional directives and criticizing incompetent superiors (Galperin, 2003). Previous research on positive deviance from 1976 to 2015 has captured the attention of health and medicine practice compared to Business, Sociology, Economics, Psychology and Computer science (Herington et.al, 2018).

Whereas Negative deviance has many undesirable consequences for organizations and their employees such as detrimental financial wellbeing to the organization. Negative deviance entails violation of significant organizational norms (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2004) such as sexual harassment, vandalism, rumour spreading and corporate sabotage, not following

manager's instruction, intentionally slowing down work cycle, arriving late, committing petty theft, not treating co-workers with respect. Robinson and Bennett (1995) developed a typology on DWB focusing on negative workplace deviance. They classified 2 dimensions, minor versus serious and interpersonal versus organizational. Organizational deviance is a grouping of behaviours between individual and the organization that involves behaviours such as theft, sabotage, lateness or putting little effort into work (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). These workplace deviance affects the health of organization (Yildiz B, 2015). Meaning it decreases organizational citizenship behaviours, productivity and increases employee absenteeism and withdrawals (Mackenzie, Garavan and Carberry, 2011; Braje, Aleksic and Jelavic, 2020).

However negative deviance is an obstacle for the public service in Malaysia to enhance their services and understanding of antecedent that affect deviant behaviour (Alias et.al., 2013). The Malaysian National Press called as *Bernama News Agency*, reported in July 2024 there has been cases of police misconduct in Malaysia. Bukit Aman Department of Integrity and Standard Compliance (JIPS). Mentioned 1,671 officers and personnel have been dismissed from their jobs over the past 10 years (2014 – 2024). Even though it does not represent a large number but yet to be studied to protect public perception on image of law enforcement organization. Law enforcement institutions is to detect and prevent crime. Moreover, police integrity and reporting of rule breaking continues to be an area of public interest (Westmarland, 2020). The nature of police job needs integrity at workplace because it can prevent corruption and abuse of power.

Therefore this study aims to explore the antecedents of DWB in the Malaysian Police force.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Individual factors

Individual related factors of DWB are seen as characteristics, emotions and cognitions of the employee (O'Boyle et al., 2011). Generally, most research workplace deviance has typically focused on individual predispositions for deviant behaviour, such as demographic or personality variable. One of the areas of individual – related police deviance are minimum education and race. Kane and White (2009) and Maher (2008) argued that minimal education or lack of knowledge in misconduct may cause police crime. Moreover young police officers who did not advance in the police organization, no post secondary education, were more likely than others to engage in misconduct (Seron, Pereira and Kovath, 2004).

2.2 Peer group

Some studies focus on peers as one of the factors of police deviant behavior. Barker and Carter, (1977) provided a seminal review paper of opportunity structure and socialization on practices within the occupation with peer groups to create a social situation where certain corrupt behavior acts are tolerated and accepted. They found that a peer group is an influential factor of deviant behavior among police officers. and applied the social learning theory to explain the phenomena. This was further explained by Benoit and Dubra (2004) that ethical officers defend unethical officers. From the researcher's perspective, they noticed that behavior of the group is determined by the desire of the majority. A group develops norms that go with its interests. Implying that the group acts indiscriminately to favor such behavior.

In commenting about group level factor Reiner (1992) stated:

“The most important thing that probationary officers learn in their early months in the public is the need to keep their mouths shut about practices including

those in breach of the rules which experienced officers deem necessary in discharging policing responsibility” (p.93). This shows officers practice code of silence.

Chappell and Piquero (2004) conducted a study in Philadelphia among 504 police officers and found accepting gifts from public or business purposes are regarded as normative. On the other hand using excessive force considered serious violation. Philadelphia police perceived theft among officers regarded as the most serious offence compared to rule violation. Rule violations are due to peer association, attitudes, reinforcement and modeling. Chappell and Piquero (2004) used Akers’ social learning theory to view police misconduct. Unfortunately, Chappell and Piquero (2004) did not measure the type of complaint and only surveyed one department. Furthermore, he did not measure frequency and intensity of interaction with deviant peers.

However, McCluskey, Terrill, and Paoline (2005) mentioned that peer group was not a major predictor but the real factor are situational ones such as when an arrest is made and the degree of evidence present. This suggests that the influence of one’s peer group is not direct but one that interacts with theoretically relevant situational factors as the predictor of police misconduct. He found that the monolithic police culture is a major obstacle for the police officers to overcome in order to reform. Monolithic culture focuses more on the occupational and organizational levels of explanation. Monolithic culture means homogeneity among occupational members (Ingram, Paoline, & Terrill, 2013). They argued that officers are adapting to strains of the job in different ways. This is shared by those in the same workgroups. Ingram et. al., (2013) found there are no commonalities between the officers. Data was collected from five municipal police agencies. Overall, they suggested it was more an individual phenomenon.

2.3 Police Culture

Police culture in this study defined as problems in police work Prenzler (1997). According to Prenzler (1997) being a police officer is an extremely dangerous occupation and highly stressful job because it entails dealing with people in conflict situations. Similarly Punch (2003) mentioned amount of time spent unsupervised makes a person involved in DWB. This is also in line with Goldschmidt (2008) police culture causes police dishonesty.

Code of silence is also factors of DWB in police culture. Code of silence means inappropriate behaviour. It is distortion of truth which causes a legal and moral problem Cebulak, (2012). According to Huberts Lamboo and Punch (2003) the gap between seriousness of the offences and the willingness to report said offence indicated the existence of a code of silence. Similarly, Anderson (2011) suggested in his study that code of silence is a factor of police misconduct. Officers are prone to report serious offences cases compared with less serious offences this is due to administration leniency.

Code of silence is supported by countries such as America and not supported by countries such as Netherlands, Rom and Finland. Based on Huberts, Lamboo and Punch (2003) did a study on police perception of code of silence, they found American police officers have low ethics and integrity compared to Netherlands and Romanian officers. Meaning American police officers do practice code of silence compared to Netherlands and Romanians. In line with this Finland police departments does not support code of silence Kaarianinen, (2008). It is proved Finnish police officers are more loyal towards their organizations compared with other countries. Because they report on both their own service misconduct as well as those of their fellow officers.

2.4 Theories of Deviant workplace behaviour.

Social cognitive theory (SCT)

SCT was developed by Albert Bandura, (1986). It emphasizes the learning that occurs within a social context. In this view, people are active agents who can both influence and are influenced by their environment. In short, we learn new behaviors by observing of others and the consequences of their behavior. If the behaviour is rewarded positively, we are likely to imitate and if it is rewarded negatively imitation is less likely. SCT has been used to wide range of behaviors such as aggression, substance abuse and mental health problems.

Bandura mentioned personal factors such as the locus of control, empathy, trait, cynicism and moral identity can influence a person to deviate. Next, environmental factors attributes are organizational procedures, policies and practices. Lastly organizational climate refers to ethical behaviour and practices. Therefore influence of DWB is determined by these 8 principles that judges if the action is ethical or unethical behaviour. To conclude SCT can explain on factors of police deviance.

Vardi and Wiener's Model (1992, 1996).

Vardi and Wiener (1996) define OMB (or DWB) in this model as “any intentional actions by members of an organization that violates core organizational and or societal norms” (p.151). In this model the intentional to misbehave is assumed to mediate the relationship between the antecedents and manifestations of OMB (DWB). Moreover, the intention to misbehave is a cause of 2 major independent forces such as the instrumental force reflecting beliefs about personal interests and normative force reflecting internalized organizational expectations. Antecedents in the model are grouped into 4 categories such as individual level, task or position level, group and organization level. The manifestations of OMB (DWB) can be categorized into 5 interpersonal misbehaviour (e.g. substance abuse), interpersonal misbehaviour (e.g. aggression), production misbehaviour (e.g. absenteeism) and political misbehaviour (e.g. favouritism).

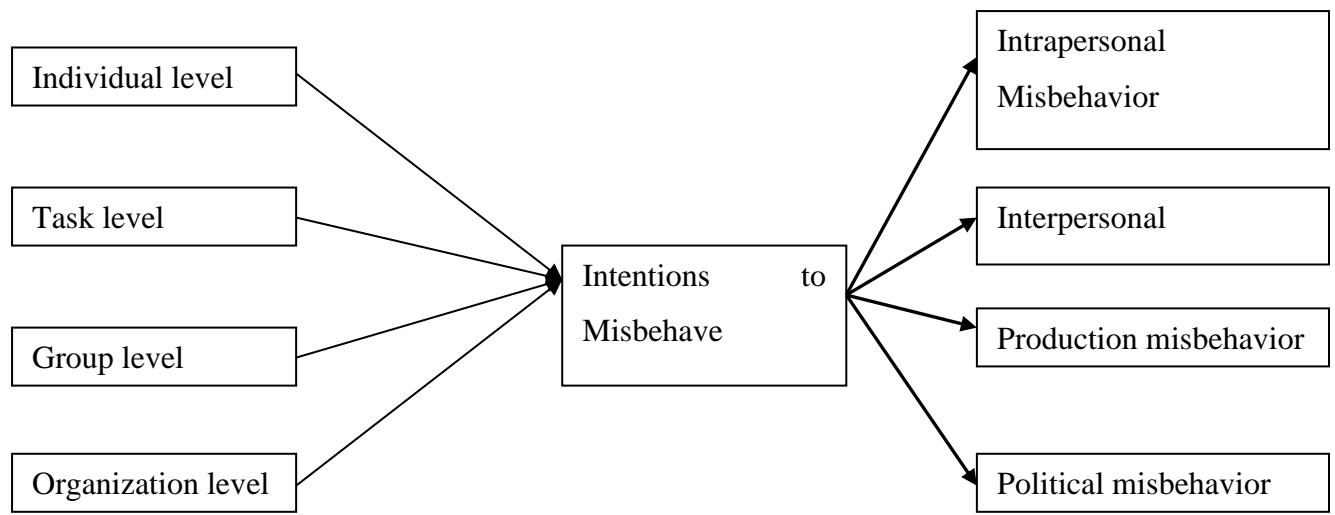


Figure 2.1: Vardi and Wiener's Model (Vardi & Wetize, 2004)

The above framework was applied by Vardi et al., (2001) in a survey among 97 employees of a production plant. He used research questionnaire and distributed to individuals at workstations. 25 of the employees were classified as managers and the others were classified as subordinates. Results of his study proved that there exists organizational misconduct among different groups of employees. To explain further, Vardi and Winer (1996) have acknowledged that workplace deviance directed at either work or organizational property. They have categorized workplace deviance into three types S, O and type D. Type S refers to deviance that benefits oneself like theft of goods (instrumental process). Whereas type O refers to deviance that benefits the organization such as overcharging customers (normative process). Type D may be triggered by either instrumental or normative force or by both.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative method to better understand the process of DWB among police officers who has experienced and witnessed co-workers engaging in negative behaviour at workplace.

Data Collection

For this study, a sample of 14 informants with a experience of deviant workplace behavior was chosen. Purposive sampling was used to choose the informants because the researcher wanted to have a more comprehensive grasp of the tactics of Deviant Workplace Behavior that the informants had recommended (Adamu and Mohammed, 2018). They had at least three years of experience and came from different departments. Such as crime, investigation, federal reserve unit, general, integrity and compliance department. Data saturation was achieved at the 12th interview; hence 14 police officers all are males were interviewed. There were no female police officer.

Analysis

The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Every interview was recorded on audio and then transcribed. In order to identify similarities and differences, the transcribed data were coded while all meanings acquired throughout the coding process were compared concurrently. This approach was recommended because it offers a methodical way to analyze any type of data set due to its inductive comparative character. The researcher can systematically discover themes as they emerge from the data using this strategy (Merriam,

2009). The author's desire to look for ways to reduce DWB at work and encourage the informants to freely express their emotions on the topic of focus were crucial components of this interview. The following pages include key quotes from the interview.

4. Findings

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Respondent	Gender	Department
R1	Male	Investigation
R2	Male	Crime
R3	Male	Training
R4	Male	Crime prevention and community safety
R5	Male	Management
R6	Male	General
R7	Male	Integrity and standard compliance
R8	Male	Federal Reserve Unit
R9	Male	Integrity and standard compliance
R10	Male	Integrity and standard compliance
R11	Male	Crime
R12	Male	Crime
R13	Male	Crime
R14	Male	General

The findings of this exploratory investigation are presented in the current part, organized according to the research objective and presented a model on antecedents of DWB in law enforcement agency in the last section.

Why do police officers engage in DWB?

Findings revealed individual and external factors of DWB occurred among the officers and categorized individual factors such as 1) inadequate education and upbringing, 2) excessive stress, 3) incompetence and dishonesty. As for external factors findings revealed 1) workplace culture, 2) living expenses, 3) family problems and 4) lack of funds.

Inadequate education and upbringing

Police perception that religion plays an essential role in one's life. Furthermore it is believed that the upbringing of parents, care and affection will shape up a person to be ethical in conduct.

“lack of faith may lead them to indulge in bribery and drugs. With good religious upbringing and parents who are ok, whichever branch a person is posted to, I think he or she' ll be ok” R 12 said.

Similarly in another interview with police officer who was working for 8 years noticed that since a person lacks in civic education it can lead to deviant behaviour. While the nature of this perceived lack of upbringing and teaching was rarely explicitly articulated, it was linked in participants' narratives that police officers need to be aware of what is happening around them

on ethical behaviours.

“Islam prohibits (taking of alcohol).... This is due to lack of faith. When there are many offers, the environment...(encourages bad behavior)” R 9 said.

Excessive Stress

Another police officer narrated stress at workplace due to spending less time with family members. Besides that, misunderstanding between family members can lead to stress.

“After I was employed as an officer I realized myself spend less time with family members. I can compare police job with factory work for 6 years. Sometimes I use to fight with my wife.....it is difficult because wife cannot understand our work” R14 said.

“stress is been experienced...sometimes I use to quarrel with my wife, it is difficult because wife cannot understand our work” R 14 said.

“ officers at workplace are dissatisfied due to too much workload which causes stress. This makes them frustrated because they cannot spend time with family. Therefore workload tension can make a person less committed and retaliate at workplace. I have seen behaviors such as lateness, disrespect for supervisors and disobey duty roster” R 10 said.

Incompetence and dishonesty

Police officers understood competency and self-integrity as lack of honesty with oneself and others. Competency and integrity is a life that is aligned with moral principles.

“ basically before family problem persist. It is the individual is the cause of the problem. It exists because of acts. Get help from BAKA (counseling section), supervisor, head of department or others. Factors can be exaggerated. Actually, discipline of the police indeed we are bounded to it. And it is compulsory in the police force. If there is no discipline makes them disobedient to his superior. Discipline in law enforcement is strong enough. However some officers are still disobedient” R 1 said. Furthermore he reported lateness is also due to lack of integrity.

“Employees are lazy ...should have the attitude of self-improvement. Cause I have seen in my department officers come to work late.attitude problem. It means lack of civic education” R 12 said.

Next theme external factors consist sub themes, such as workplace culture, Living cost and family problems as factors of DWB.

Workplace culture

Workplace culture factor is a sub theme for Research question 1. It refers to organizational culture of police agency. Police officers of this study identified workplace place culture as co-worker and ineffective leadership.

Co-worker factor has been explained by one of the police officer as clannish behaviour.

“Clannish behaviour means groups of people who do not have the same

principles while working. Example some of the group may motivate others to join in bribery while patrolling. Unfortunately, some of them hesitate to join the group. This will lead to two different groups in the department. Those officers cannot fit the culture of the group will be discriminated”.

He further explained another situation *“where duty should be rolling for officers at low ranking officers unfortunately some supervisors do not follow it. They fix one duty for that particular officer. Meaning superior officers do not follow SOP (standard operating procedure) and this reflects on the culture of organization”.*

From the above evidence it shows that not complying with rules of organizations called as insubordination is a type of organizational deviance from Management perspective.

Ineffective leadership is a workplace culture of DWB. Because it has been understood by respondents as

“Surbordinates will not follow or obey the leader’s decisions”. R1 said.

Adding on he also mentioned *“high level officers if you are decision maker or leader. Go back and drink like mad or die. People have negative thoughts how do you expect people to listen. This guy won’t give good decision, why want to follow him”.*

Therefore by inheriting positive behaviour, officers will tend to listen, trust and follow leader’s instruction. Police officer believes that a leader should be able to make good decision because the values of every individual is unique and have different opinions.

Living Cost

The data revealed a sub theme for external factor is living cost. It is a major cause of deviant workplace behaviour. Police officers understand cost of living means the amount of money that a person needs to live. In other words, he or she should be able to cover housing cost, food, taxes and healthcare.

“Cost of living is too high which leads officers lack of interest in their job and this leads to absenteeism” said R14.

Other police interviewees expressed similar views, commenting that:

“ This is due to the fact that the cost of living has increased and officers found alternate ways of fulfilling their needs through on-line gambling” R5 said.

Police also mentioned that is the individual factor and not friends. He has observed.....spending more than the pay, on-line gambling. Now we are trying to fight this (on-line gambling). Meaning police are concerned about officers indulging in unethical behaviour. Therefore trying to curb this behaviour.

Interestingly, police in this study highlighted deficiencies among themselves. For example cost of living exceeds more than salary...It is not the friend’s influence. It is the individual factor.

This show’s police officers are lacking personal moral or discipline These were constructed as schools, and colleges ought to provide moral education to police officers.

Family problems

Police officers in this study understand family as a social unit. That lives together and important entity in sharing common attributes.

Police officers perceive family as a cause of DWB *“officer has a child who is ill....it is difficult for him to judge whether or not to accept the bribe. Some of them may accept it due to need of their family”* R9 said.

Therefore it is proven that socioeconomic factor influence officers on duty to involve in negative behaviour. In other words family pressure is considered a significant factor why police engage in DWB.

“family needs are unavoidable.

“family needs comes as a primary demand for every individual. Especially for those residing at urban areas need to cover up their expenses with low income”.

Therefore some of them were pressured to engage in unwanted behaviour R12 said.

Generally, they conveyed that family problems do exist in most cases. They are in a dilemma to accept the offer (bribe). The situation depends on the financial needs of a family. If family members are demanding people then he or she might involve in accepting the offer (bribery).

Lack of Funds

Lack of funds is the second sub themes of internal factor. Police officers understand it as low salary, financial constraint and spending more than salary earned.

According to R11 touched on financial constraint. He highlighted that financial constraint plays significant role in an individual's life especially for people residing in cities. Financial management is an important element for an individual to plan full needs and lead a comfortable lifestyle at urban areas.

“Base on salary received officers need to budget themselves especially in big cities. If salary is not enough individual is a factor for financial management. Besides that cost of living exceeds more than his salary. It is not the friend's influence”. R11 said.

These comments demonstrate that police in this study perceive officer's negative attitudes as from financial constraint of an individual's life.

Police expressed this happens for those who live in cities. These people want to have a comfortable living style. Unfortunately, their salary is not sufficient to lead a luxurious lifestyle. This leads some officers to involve in corruption. A key way in which officers sought to overcome this problem is by proposing good financial planning.

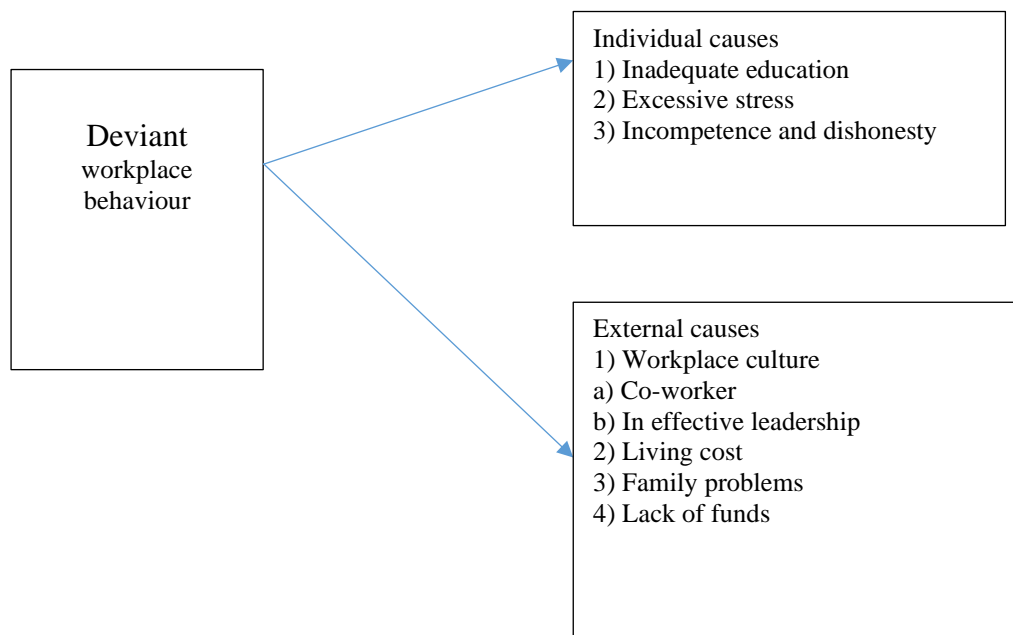


Figure 2: Antecedents of DWB

Discussion

It is proven from the above findings that informants from different departments has experienced either individual or external factors as a cause of DWB.

Police in the current study perceive lack of civic education causes lack of self-integrity among police officers. Meaning failure by institutions such as schools and families lead them to involve in negative behaviour such as absenteeism at work and accepting bribe.

Our findings discovered that stress due to workload tensions and lack of spending quality of time with family is a contributor towards deviant behaviour. No doubt police occupation is considered have high risk factor. Police officers have benevolence expression at work. This is unavoidable situation. Some of the officers unable to balance work and family which leads to stress, anger and frustrations. Sometimes they are emotionally disturbed and not able to comply with ethical conduct. Which leads to dissatisfaction at workplace.

Of course in the current study workplace culture is a caused of DWB among police community. Workplace culture refers as clannish behaviour among the officers. They group them according to originality of state where they were born. This is known as police sub-culture. In contrast previous studies identified it as peer group (co-worker). Alpert and Dunham (1977) mentioned police subculture might facilitate deviant activity. They explained an officer need to spend more time with his co-worker (officer) due to their duty. It is important for them to feel accepted by their peer group for the development of satisfactory self-concept regardless of personal differences, individual beliefs and definition of departments. Therefore, interactions with peer group can motivate them in engaging into DWB activity due to unforeseen circumstances. However from Malaysian perspective it is identified as clannish behaviour.

Surprisingly another significant factor discovered is lack of funds. It is obvious that police in

this country receives low pay therefore unable to meet family and individual needs. Due to pressure from family members, police officers are forced to be involved in DWB such as bribery. In Vardi and Weits (2004), model mentioned organizational level can lead to intrapersonal and interpersonal misbehaviour. Therefore findings of this study supports Vardi et.al (2004) model. However, it is perceived that organization can reduce police officers from engaging into unwanted behaviours by setting pay scale which can cover living cost.

Furthermore majority of the informants do not regard minimum education as one of the causes of DWB. They consider religious up-bringing and teaching, stress and financial constraint as predominant factors. Code of silence was not identified as a contributing factor towards DWB. From the Malaysian perspective, code of silence did not exist. But American scholars such as Andresscu et al., (2012), Cebulak (2012) and Kaarianinen et al., (2008) found that the code of silence as a contributing factor towards deviant behaviour. Therefore culture also plays a significant role in determining factors of deviant behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Findings of the study would help law enforcement officers, HRD practitioners, academicians and researchers to increase knowledge about the characteristics officers involved and their process of engaging into deviant activity.

This article concludes views of Malaysian police officers – may have relevance in similar cultural contexts such as other Asian countries. Future research could be designed in quantitative study, which could include a comparison study to explore the perceptions among various rank officers in Law enforcement agencies. It is advisable to conduct a survey with suspended officers who are able to reveal a framework.

The current research adds to the literature by suggesting that findings are closely related with Vardi and Weitz (2004) model and Social Cognitive theory (SCT). SCT theory points out the attributes such as locus of control as a significant role in determining a person's moral judgement and reasoning. Moreover lack of self-integrity is a factor why officers disobey guidelines and rules of organizations. The problem persists within the individual itself. Persistent family problems, which stem from lack of funds is also a cause of deviant workplace behaviour. Adding on the influence of public was seen as a major factor which causes officers to get involved in negative workplace behaviour. Those who believe he or she is able to control by public and co-worker are considered as external oriented factors.

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