



Deviant Behaviors at Work: Examining Job Constraints and Interpersonal Conflict as Potential Causes Across Workplace Models

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Abstract

Workplace deviance is a voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and threatens the well-being of an organization or its members. This study investigated potential causes of workplace deviance, specifically interpersonal conflict and job constraints, relate to deviant behaviors directed at both individuals and the organization across various workplace settings. Results showed interpersonal conflict and job constraints significantly correlated with both types of workplace deviance; showing the highest correlation between job constraints and organizational deviant behaviors. Workplace models (remote, in-person, hybrid) had no significant impact on the mean levels of any of the four variables. These findings suggest that reducing job constraints is essential for minimizing workplace deviance, especially organizationally focused deviant behaviors.

Introduction

Workplace deviance is a voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms or threatens the well-being of an organization or its members. These behaviors can be focused on the organization itself (organizational deviance) or any member of the organization (interpersonal deviance). These behaviors are costly, estimated at millions of dollars annually in the U.S., necessitating efforts to address potential causes. This study investigated two potential causes of workplace deviant behaviors, interpersonal conflict and job constraints (ex. faulty equipment, unclear instructions). Based on previous research (Hershcovis et al., 2007; Pindek & Spector, 2016), the following hypotheses were made.

Hypotheses:

- H₁:** Interpersonal conflict and job constraints will correlate with both types of workplace deviant behaviors
- H₂:** Interpersonal conflict will correlate more highly with interpersonal deviant behaviors than job constraints will
- H₃:** Job constraints and interpersonal conflict will correlate equally with organizational deviant behaviors

Implications

Investigating potential causes of workplace deviant behaviors can provide Indiana organizations with ways to reduce these behaviors. As Indiana's economy grows and attracts a diverse professional population, understanding the factors that foster a positive and productive work environment is essential.

A secondary aim of this study was the examination of workplace deviant behaviors across workplace models (remote, in-office, and hybrid). Working in various settings is a recent trend with national data showing 26% of employees work remotely, 52% hybrid, and 22% in-office (Gallup, 2025). In Indiana, cities like Carmel (28.29%) and Fishers (25.15%) rank among the largest percentages nationally of remote workers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Method

Participants:

A total of 222 participants with average age of 39 years (18-75), average time at current time job was 6 years. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling through campus announcements and social media to take a confidential survey online via Qualtrics. Eligibility criteria required a minimum age of 18 years, employment tenure minimum of 3 months, and working at least 20-hour work weeks.

Measures:

There were four main variables measured in the survey:

- Interpersonal Conflict** - frequency of friction or disagreements with others in the workplace (Ex. being yelled by others, being disrespected by others)
Sample question: 'In the past 30 days, how often had you had others yell at you at work?', (1 = never to 5 = very often)
- Job Constraints** - obstacles that interfere with task performance (Ex. faulty and/or lack of equipment, unclear instructions, inadequate training, excessive workload)
Sample question: 'How often do you find it difficult or impossible to do your job because of conflicting job demands?', (1 = less than once a month or never to 5 = several times per day)
- Interpersonal Deviant Behaviors** – behaviors that threaten the norms and well-being of an organization's members (Ex. acting rudely towards, not following boss' orders)
Sample question: 'In the last year how often have you cursed at someone at work?', (1 = never to 7 = daily)
- Organizational Deviant Behaviors** – behaviors that threaten and violate the norms and well-being an organization (Ex. coming in late, putting in little/no effort, stealing company property)
Sample question: 'In the last year how often have you dragged out work to get overtime?', (1 = never to 7 = daily)

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Across Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Possible Range of Values
Interpersonal Conflict	166	15.52	7.00 - 35.00
Job Constraints	161	28.47	13.00 - 65.00
Interpersonal Deviant Behaviors	154	11.13	7.00 - 49.00
Organizational Deviant Behaviors	153	25.31	12.00 - 89.00

Table 2: Correlations Between Variables

	Interpersonal Deviant Behaviors	Organizational Deviant Behaviors
Interpersonal Conflict	.26**	.28**
Job Constraints	.28**	.42**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). H₁ was supported.

Figure 1: Relationship Between Constraints and Deviance

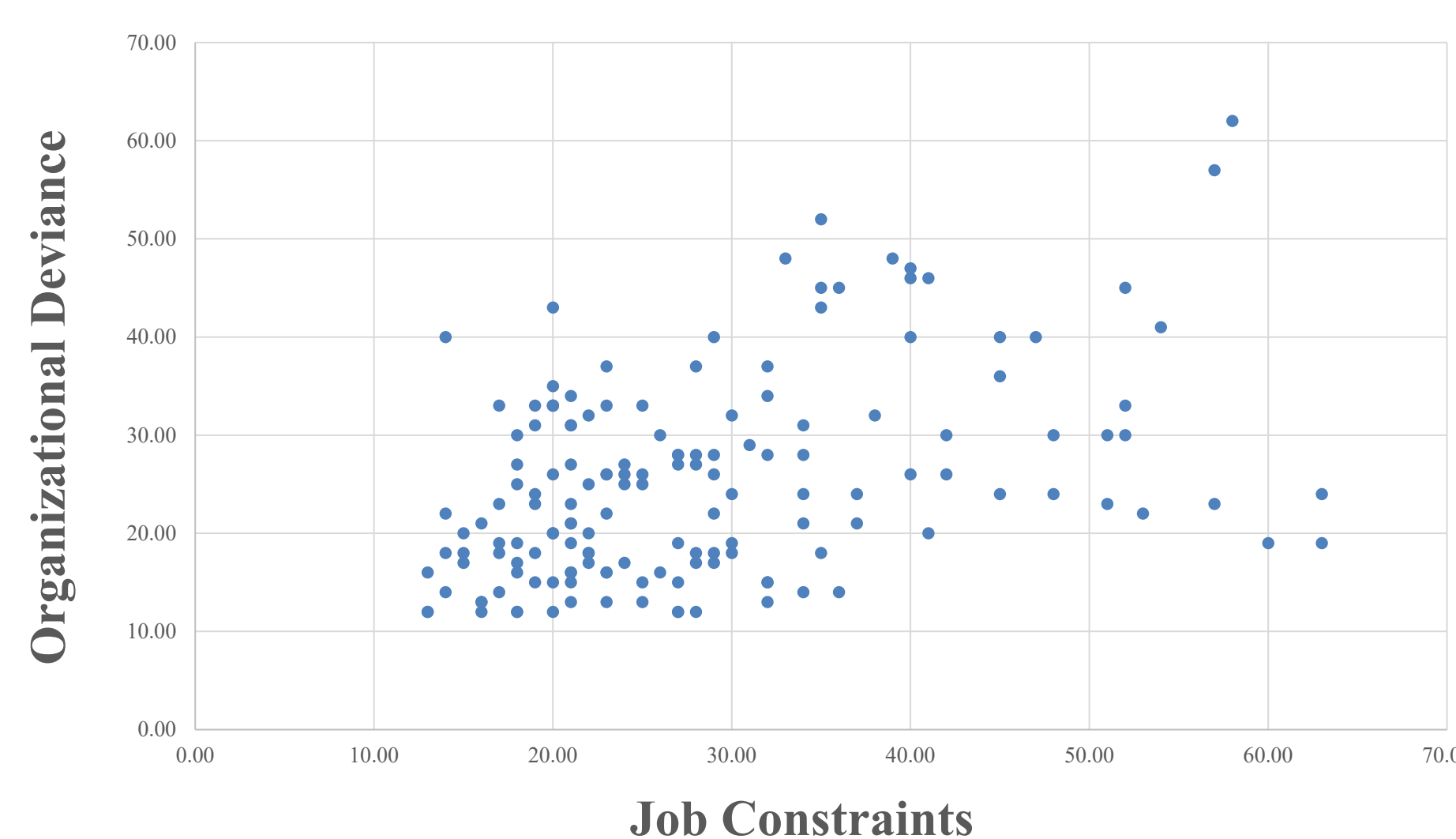


Table 3: Variable Means Across Work Models

Variable	Remote	In-person	Hybrid
Interpersonal Conflict	13.90	16.45	15.04
Job Constraints	25.55	29.76	27.94
Interpersonal Deviant Behaviors	9.69	11.72	11.14
Organizational Deviant Behaviors	23.90	25.28	26.28

Means for each variable were tested but showed no significant differences. Remote (N = 32), In-person (N = 83), Hybrid (N = 55).

Conclusions

- Based on the results, both interpersonal conflict and job constraints are potential causes of workplace deviant behaviors; thus, organizations should implement strategies to reduce both
- Indiana employers should particularly prioritize minimization of job constraints, such as providing proper training, working equipment, and clear information, to reduce behaviors that harm the company
- This study highlights the importance of good supervision, clear communication and providing employees with adequate training and resources
- Although no differences were found across workplace models, future research should continue to investigate this topic
- Future research should also examine workplace deviant behaviors within specific job sectors, (such as manufacturing, tech, financial, etc.), organizational position (managerial, employee)

References

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- Pindek, S., & Spector, P. E. (2016). Organizational constraints: a meta-analysis of a major stressor. *Work & Stress, 30*(1), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2015.1137376>