

“Effect of workplace favoritism on counterproductive work behavior: A moderated mediation model of organizational cynicism, organizational silence, and self-efficacy”

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EFFECT OF WORKPLACE FAVORITISM ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM, ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE, AND SELF-EFFICACY

Abstract

Drawing on social exchange theory, the study aims to explore the influence of workplace favoritism on counterproductive work behavior (CWB), with the mediating role of organizational cynicism and organizational silence and the moderating role of self-efficacy. A modified two-stage questionnaire was used to collect data in 2025 from 487 full-time employees from the private services sector in Iraq using non-probability convenience sampling. Hierarchical multiple regression and bootstrapping analysis were conducted to test the hypotheses, using SPSS 21.0 and Mplus 6.0. This study extends the literature on workplace favoritism as a prominent predictor of CWB ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01$). The study also highlighted the mediating role of both organizational cynicism ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.001$) and silence ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, we extend prior research by exploring the moderating role of self-efficacy, as its interaction with workplace favoritism reduced the positive impact between workplace favoritism and both organizational cynicism ($\beta = -0.19, p < 0.05$) and silence ($\beta = -0.21, p < 0.05$) and reduced their indirect impact on CWB. The study recommends that organizational management should promote awareness of the harmful effects of favoritism and highlight the dangers of negative behaviors stemming from it, specifically organizational cynicism and silence, as these are prominent intermediate indicators of CWB. In addition, this study could provide useful guidance for reducing CWB by focusing on self-efficacy as a moderating variable that decreases the impact of favoritism on cynicism and organizational silence.

Keywords

workplace favoritism, counterproductive work behavior, organizational cynicism, organizational silence, self-efficacy

JEL Classification

D23, M54, J24

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on social exchange theory, under conditions of leader favoritism, recognition, resource allocation, and promotions are based on personal relationships rather than performance and competence. This creates negative perceptions of organizational injustice and weakens employees' trust in their leaders and the organization as a whole. Such a favoritism climate not only undermines the spirit of justice but may also make a series of psychological and behavioral responses manifested in the spread of organizational cynicism as a mechanism to express disappointment by questioning management's intentions and decisions (Lee et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). Other employees may adopt organizational silence, convinced that expressing their opinions

or objections will not make a difference in an environment characterized by favoritism, or out of fear of being marginalized or punished (Lee et al., 2023). The cynicism of some employees and the silence of others cannot be viewed with optimism, as this can create a fertile ground for justifying negative behaviors such as sluggish performance, reluctance to express opinions and share information, resistance to instructions, or even damaging organizational resources. This paves the way for counterproductive work behavior (CWB) that ultimately leads to a decline in performance quality.

Despite the abundance of studies that have addressed the study variables individually, the evidence regarding their interaction mechanisms remains limited. Therefore, we attempt to understand the pathways through which the effects of favoritism in the workplace are transmitted to CWB. This can provide a more integrated explanation of this organizational phenomenon with the dual mediating role of both cynicism and silence, an impact that is often overlooked in management research despite its serious consequences (Liang et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2022). This study is of particular importance due to its application in the private services sector, where employees face additional challenges due to the need to work closely with individuals under strict leadership, leading to work-related stress as they strive to fulfill their duties in a demanding work environment (Al-kashab, 2024). Moreover, this study investigates the protective function of self-efficacy, which enables employees to resist and help conquer the negative thoughts and feelings connected with favoritism. Instead, it enables them to get rid of disillusionment and frustration that lead to cynicism (Pei et al., 2024; Shao et al., 2022). It also encourages employees to participate actively and express their opinions, rather than silently withdrawing (Joseph & Shetty, 2022). This makes understanding the role of self-efficacy a matter worthy of further research.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Favoritism makes employees feel that the organization does not fairly value their efforts, undermines the spirit of fairness and the essence of efficiency within the organization, and fosters a culture where relationships take precedence over performance (Akca, 2020; Safina, 2015). This leads to undesirable behavior patterns among employees, like disrespect toward authority, unethical behavior, absenteeism, low commitment, and poor performance (Akyol & Erkoç, 2022; Shaheen et al., 2020). This undesirable behavior reflects the behaviors of oppression, discontent, and rejection of underrepresented employees, which are exacerbated by a leader's preferential treatment of a select group, resulting in deviant organizational behaviors (Naseer et al., 2020). Akca (2020) indicated that favoritism positively correlated with counterproductive behaviors. Topsakal et al. (2024) found that favoritism in hospitality leads to decreased commitment and increased intentions to leave.

Organizational cynicism emerges when certain employees, favored by their leader, are perceived to possess advantages that facilitate access to both tangible and intangible resources, such as

financial rewards and career advancement, due to their personal relationship with the leader rather than merit (Yang et al., 2020). This leads employees who do not receive such favoritism to perceive that decisions are made based on personal relationships rather than competence, and consequently lose trust in management and form negative interpretations of its intentions. The accumulation of these negative feelings, mixed with frustration, anger, and distrust, leads to cynical attitudes among employees, which manifest through sarcasm and constant criticism (Arslan, 2018). Cynicism generates negative feelings, driving individuals to express them in unproductive ways as a form of catharsis or protest. Over time, these tendencies can translate into actual behaviors such as negligence, procrastination, reduced effort, or even deliberate harm to the organization's interests, as a means of restoring psychological equilibrium (Naseer et al., 2020).

Workplace favoritism makes employees feel wronged as a result of unfair treatment, unjust promotion practices, and inequitable compensation, which makes employees begin to perceive their role within the organization as marginal, becoming increasingly aware of their lack of value; consequently, they feel inefficacy and incompe-

tence (Lasisi et al., 2022). This negative organizational climate fosters employee reluctance to share ideas or suggestions, ultimately making silence the preferred coping mechanism or perhaps avoid potential risks or retaliation (Morrison, 2023). When employees remain silent for fear of marginalization or punishment, the difficulties they face remain hidden. The accumulation of these problems generates frustration, which later develops into aggressive or retaliatory behaviors, such as neglecting work or deliberately committing mistakes. If silence dominates in the organization, employees feel that deviations are tacitly accepted because they are the only means of getting revenge left. Deviant behavior disseminates as a collective trend, e.g., deliberate neglect, slow service delivery, hostile treatment, mass absence, and disruption of work (Durrah et al., 2023).

Employees possessing self-efficacy, even in adverse circumstances such as favoritism, exhibit a heightened internal locus of control, are more intentional, engage in self-reflection pertinent to rectifying the situation, leverage extensive personal resources, maintain diverse thought-action repertoires, and seek necessary social support (Stratman & Youssef-Morgan, 2019). Employees with high self-efficacy are less likely to engage in cynical behavior, as they can effectively regulate their emotions and invest their energy in focusing on performance, rather than succumbing to negative attitudes (Kim et al., 2019). Research in the service sector has also shown that self-efficacy effectively intervenes to decrease the association of favoritism with negative behaviors, thereby protecting performance and job adaptation (Xie et al., 2019). Moreover, studies in the field of nursing have concluded that self-efficacy decreases levels of workplace cynicism among employees, even under high job stress, which in turn lowers withdrawal or discontent toward the organization (Nazir et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy can significantly impact employees' thoughts, feelings, and actions. A strong sense of self-efficacy facilitates cognitive and executive processes in multiple contexts, influencing, for example, decision-making in the face of adversity and the pursuit of achievement goals (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Studies propose that employees with high self-efficacy are less likely to adopt or-

ganizational silence even in favoritism workplaces, because they trust their ability to effect change. For example, Nguyen et al. (2017) demonstrated that occupational self-efficacy mitigates the impact of favoritism on employee performance. This suggests that employees who trust their abilities are less likely to exhibit negative behaviors, such as favoritism. Additionally, El Abdou et al. (2023) demonstrated that self-efficacy serves as a protective factor against negative behaviors, such as employee silence, thereby promoting employees' ability to express their concerns and opinions. In contrast, employees with diminished self-efficacy may hesitate to articulate their proposals, grounded in the conviction that they lack the capacity to effectuate changes within the organization, so engaging in ineffectual silence (Dedahanov et al., 2021). Thus, self-efficacy can act as a buffer, mitigating the severity of organizational cynicism and organizational silence.

This study aims to examine the influence of workplace favoritism on CWB through the mediating role of organizational cynicism and organizational silence, in addition to discovering the moderating role of self-efficacy. Thus, we offer the conceptual model shown in Figure 1 predicated on the following hypotheses:

- H1: *Workplace favoritism has a positive impact on counterproductive work behavior.*
- H2: *Organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between workplace favoritism and counterproductive work behavior.*
- H3: *Organizational silence mediates the relationship between workplace favoritism and counterproductive work behavior.*
- H4: *Self-efficacy moderates the positive relationship between workplace favoritism and organizational cynicism, such that this relationship weakens when self-efficacy is high and strengthens when self-efficacy is low.*
- H5: *Self-efficacy moderates the positive relationship between workplace favoritism and organizational silence, such that this relationship weakens when self-efficacy is high and strengthens when self-efficacy is low.*

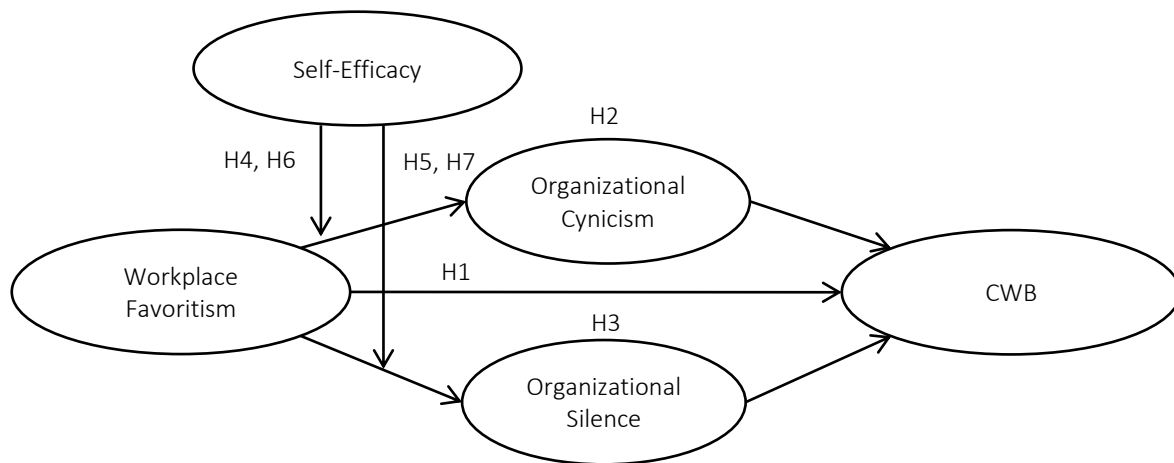


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

- H6: Self-efficacy moderates the indirect effect of workplace favoritism on counterproductive work behavior via organizational cynicism, such that the positive indirect effect weakens when self-efficacy is high and strengthens when self-efficacy is low.*
- H7: Self-efficacy moderates the indirect effect of workplace favoritism on counterproductive work behavior via organizational silence, such that the positive indirect effect weakens when self-efficacy is high and strengthens when self-efficacy is low.*

2. METHOD

The study used a quantitative methodology to collect the data in July 2025. Using a non-probability convenience sampling method, employees were selected from 24 privately owned (non-governmental) service sector companies distributed across travel, tourism, land transport, communications, and the Internet. Employees were required to fulfill the subsequent inclusion criteria: be a minimum of 24 years of age and have held their current positions for no less than two years. Participation was voluntary; participants were assured of the confidentiality of personal data and guaranteed anonymity. Additionally, our contact information was supplied for any inquiries from responders.

The questionnaire was administered in two waves to 680 employees at Time-1. Participants were requested to provide their views on workplace

favoritism and self-efficacy. A total of 571 completed questionnaires were received, indicating a response rate of 84%. Every participant was allocated an identity code to maintain secrecy. The demographic inquiries were included in the initial phase, Time-1. After a fortnight in Time-2, we administered a survey utilizing the identical methodologies as in Time-1. Participants provided their assessments of organizational silence, organizational cynicism, and counterproductive work behavior. We obtained 496 integrated surveys, reflecting a response rate of 73%. This signifies that attrition in the sample was minimal, approximately 11% between Time-1 and Time-2; no differences were seen between those who departed and those who remained; roughly equivalent numbers of individuals exited. After eliminating nine incomplete replies across the two phases, the final sample consisted of 487 participants, yielding an overall response rate of 72%. In the sample, 63% were male, 68% were aged between 25 and 35 years, 84% had over 5 years of work experience, and 54% possessed a university degree or higher.

The scales utilized in this study were in English; however, the study population consisted of Arabs; consequently, the questionnaires were translated into Arabic. The initial section included the demographic attributes of participants about gender, age, and years of experience. The second section employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Workplace favoritism was measured with 14 items borrowed from Arasli and Tumer (2008). The sample items include: "Employees always feel that

they need a relative in a high-level position.” Self-efficacy was evaluated using the 10 items developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The sample items include: “It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.” Organizational cynicism was measured with a 14-item scale developed by Dean et al. (1998). The sample items include: “I believe my organization says one thing and does another.” Organizational silence was measured with a scale developed by Van Dyne et al. (2003). The scale consisted of 15 Likert-type items, including “Because it is not about me, I am reluctant to talk about the suggestions made for change in our company.” Counterproductive workplace behavior

was measured with a 12-item scale developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) to assess counterproductive workplace behavior. Sample items are “Discussed confidential company information with an unauthorized person.”

3. RESULTS

Regarding the reliability and validity of the measurement, the composite reliability scores of workplace favoritism, counterproductive work behavior, organizational cynicism, organizational silence, and self-efficacy ranged from 0.96 to 0.94 (Table 1). The values exceed the benchmark value

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Variables	α	λ	CR	Variables	α	λ	CR
Workplace Favoritism	0.86		0.96	OS5		0.76	
WF 1		0.75		OS6		0.81	
WF 2		0.86		OS7		0.80	
WF 3		0.77		OS8		0.71	
WF 4		0.80		OS9		0.86	
WF 5		0.81		OS10		0.84	
WF 6		0.79		OS11		0.85	
WF 7		0.75		OS12		0.72	
WF 8		0.70		OS13		0.87	
WF 9		0.73		OS14		0.80	
WF 10		0.81		OS15		0.75	
WF 11		0.74		Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.83		0.95
WF 12		0.82		CWB1		0.84	
WF 13		0.78		CWB2		0.82	
WF 14		0.80		CWB3		0.88	
Organizational Cynicism	0.85		0.95	CWB4		0.82	
OC1		0.81		CWB5		0.80	
OC2		0.78		CWB6		0.72	
OC3		0.70		CWB7		0.81	
OC4		0.83		CWB8		0.75	
OC4		0.76		CWB9		0.69	
OC5		0.68		CWB10		0.82	
OC6		0.82		CWB11		0.80	
OC7		0.85		CWB12		0.79	
OC8		0.84		Self-Efficacy	0.91		0.94
OC9		0.75		SE1		0.67	
OC10		0.65		SE2		0.81	
OC11		0.81		SE3		0.86	
OC12		0.70		SE4		0.84	
OC13		0.81		SE5		0.77	
OC14		0.75		SE6		0.85	
Organizational Silence	0.79		0.96	SE7		0.68	
OS1		0.82		SE8		0.81	
OS2		0.80		SE9		0.71	
OS3		0.73		SE10		0.74	
OS4		0.79					

Note: Factor Loading (λ), Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (α). WF = Workplace Favoritism, OC = Organizational Cynicism, OS = Organizational Silence, CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior, SE = Self-Efficacy.

(0.6) established by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and all loading coefficients were statistically significant. Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed satisfactory fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.31$, RMR = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.048, IFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.91), indicating a robust fit of the study model and demonstrating the excellent reliability of the study data.

The paper employs confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Harman's one-factor test to assess common method variance (CMV). Harman's one-factor analysis indicated that numerous components possessed eigenvalues above 1. The initial component accounted for 28.65% of the variance. It is below the 50% variance (Lin, 2007). The fit indices of a confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the loading of all questionnaire items onto a single factor was significantly inferior to that of the hypothesized model. Consequently, CMV did not affect our empirical results. We adhered to the methodologies of Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Cronbach (1951) to evaluate Cronbach's alpha (α) = 0.70, which falls within the range of 0.79 to 0.91; consequently, it exceeds the established standards. Additionally, we assessed the convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE) values, which ranged from 0.64 to 0.60 (Table 2), and should not fall below 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, maximum shared variance (MSV) values are inferior to the average variance extracted (AVE) values, and the correlation coefficients between the constructs are lower than the square root of the AVE. Consequently, there are no validity concerns regarding the data.

Regarding the correlation values (Table 2), workplace favoritism positively correlates with organizational cynicism, organizational silence, and CWB ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.36, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.25, p < 0.01$). Organizational cynicism and organizational silence are positively correlated with CWB ($r = 0.39, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.37, p < 0.01$). Self-efficacy negatively correlates with workplace favoritism, organizational cynicism, and organizational silence ($r = -0.31, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.39, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.41, p < 0.01$). Self-efficacy negatively correlates with CWB ($r = -0.38, p < 0.01$). Mean and standard deviation values indicate that respondents agreed to the workplace favoritism ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.73$), self-efficacy ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.78$), organi-

zational cynicism ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.65$), organizational silence ($M = 3.59, SD = 0.69$), and CWB ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.81$).

Table 2. Discriminant validity and correlational analysis

	WF	SE	OC	OS	CWB
WF	1				
SE	-0.31**	1			
OC	0.42**	-0.39**	1		
OS	0.36**	-0.41**	0.11	1	
CWB	0.25**	-0.38**	0.39**	0.37**	1
Mean	3.81	3.31	3.75	3.59	3.47
SD	0.73	0.78	0.65	0.69	0.81
MSV	0.18	0.17	0.18	0.17	0.15
AVE	0.61	0.60	0.64	0.63	0.62
$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	0.78	0.77	0.80	0.79	0.78

Note: N = 487. Standard Deviations (SD), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), Average Variance Extracted (AVE). WF = Workplace Favoritism, OC = Organizational Cynicism, OS = Organizational Silence, CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior, SE = Self-Efficacy. * $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

This study evaluated the hypotheses by using a structural model utilizing confidence intervals (CI) for indirect, direct, and interaction effects with 5,000 bootstrap samples at a 95% confidence level (Hair et al., 2012). It was different from zero, and the results are statistically significant. The finding revealed that workplace favoritism positively affects CWB; the CI did not contain zero (LLCI (95%) = 0.230, ULCI (95%) = 0.390, $p \leq 0.05$). Thus, H1 is supported (Table 3). Further, to understand the organizational cynicism, organizational silence as an intervening variable between both workplace favoritism and CWB (H2 and H3), the process utilized was mediator bias-corrected; the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) for the indirect impacts of workplace favoritism on CWB through organizational cynicism was (LLC (95%) = 0.392, ULCI (95%) = 0.568). The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating that the indirect effect was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, H2 is confirmed. The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effects of workplace favoritism on CWB through organizational silence was (LLC (95%) = 0.440, ULCI (95%) = 0.680). The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating that the indirect effect was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, H3 is corroborated.

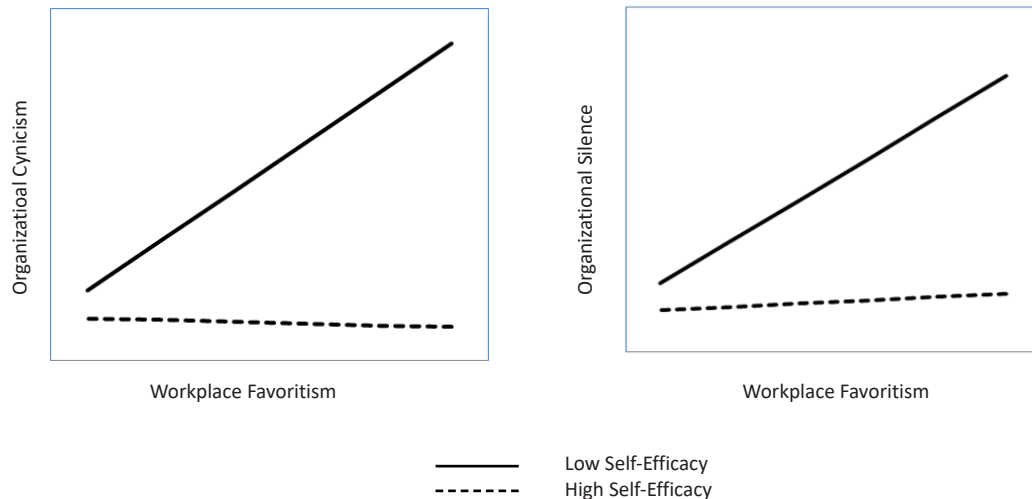


Figure 2. Self-efficacy as a moderator

Table 3. Hypotheses testing through structural model

	Variables	Estimated effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI	Results
Hypothesis1	WF → CWB	0.31**	0.041	0.230	0.390	Accepted
Hypothesis2	WF → OC → CWB	0.48***	0.045	0.392	0.568	Accepted
Hypothesis3	WF → OS → CWB	0.56***	0.061	0.440	0.680	Accepted
Hypothesis4	WF × Self-Efficacy → OC	−0.19*	0.047	−0.098	−0.282	Accepted
Hypothesis5	WF × Self-Efficacy → OS	−0.21*	0.044	−0.124	−0.296	Accepted

Note: Bootstraps 95%, lower limit confidence interval (LLCI), upper limit confidence interval (ULCI), standard error (SE), *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. WF = Workplace Favoritism, OC = Organizational Cynicism, OS = Organizational Silence, CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior.

Employing the bootstrapping technique with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals in Mplus, the estimation results reveal that self-efficacy support moderates the connection between workplace favoritism and organizational cynicism (95% LLC = −0.098, 95% ULCI = −0.282), hence supporting H4. Furthermore, self-efficacy support moderates the association between workplace favoritism and organizational silence (95% LLC = −0.124, 95% ULCI = −0.296), hence substantiating H5 of this study. The moderation is illustrated in Figure 2.

Ultimately, for H6 and H7, we employed Mplus 6.0 (Edwards & Lambert, 2007) to conduct path analysis and executed the comprehensive model in both high and low moderating settings. In addition, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was performed to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects.

In H6, we examined the indirect impact of workplace favoritism on CWB through organizational cynicism, mediated by self-efficacy. Table 4 indicates that the indirect effect was significant when self-efficacy was low (estimate 0.079, CI (95%) [0.042, 0.116]). Since the confidence interval did not contain the value zero, it was not significant when self-efficacy was high (estimate 0.037, CI (95%) [−0.012, 0.086]). Consequently, H6 is validated.

In H7, we examined the potential indirect influence of self-efficacy on the relationship between workplace favoritism and CWB through the mechanism of organizational silence. The indirect effect was significant when self-efficacy was low (estimate 0.082, CI (95%) [0.019, 0.145]). Since the confidence interval did not contain the value zero, it is not significant when self-efficacy is high (estimate 0.029, CI (95%) [−0.026, 0.084]). Consequently, H7 is corroborated.

Table 4. Moderated mediation results

Moderator	Level	Conditional indirect effect	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Self-Efficacy	Low (−0.65)	0.079*	0.019	0.042	0.116
	High (0.65)	0.037	0.025	−0.012	0.086
Between workplace favoritism and CWB via organizational silence					
CWB					
Self-Efficacy	Low (−0.65)	0.082*	0.032	0.019	0.145
	High (0.65)	0.029	0.028	−0.026	0.084

Note: N = 487, (LL) Lower Limit, (CI) Confidence Interval, (UL) Upper Limit, Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. *p < .05.

4. DISCUSSION

Favoritism and cronyism are common and accustomed in Eastern societies where traditional friend relations are strong (Al-kashab et al., 2025). Phenomena relating to social connections cannot be entirely eradicated but can be mitigated and managed inside organizations. Our study reveals that the effects of favoritism extend beyond simply distorting the principle of fairness. It alters employees' beliefs and feelings, leading them to become apathetic and engage in counterproductive work behavior as a compensatory or protest reaction, reflecting their indifference and weak loyalty to this unfair organizational reality. This finding aligns with theoretical arguments asserting that favoritism is a major factor in the emergence of negative workplace behaviors. This is what several studies have confirmed, including Mishra et al. (2024). They confirmed that favoritism raises employees' desire to hold multiple jobs because of their feelings of job insecurity and violation of the psychological contract. Also, Akca (2020) has shown that favoritism leads to other negative aspects such as intentions to stress, quit, absenteeism, conflict with well-being, deviance, and alienation.

Moreover, failing to address negative feelings stemming from favoritism can widen the psychological gap between employees and their organization. This can lead employees to express their feelings in non-constructive ways, such as cynicism, which has been shown in our study to mediate the relationship between favoritism and counterproductive work behavior. In this context, numerous studies have supported this view, emphasizing organizational cynicism as a detrimental organizational phenomenon, and it has become a prevalent reality, accompanied

by a consistent rise in studies exploring its various dimensions (Gkorezis et al., 2018; Schmitz et al., 2018; Scott & Zweig, 2020). Kim and Jo (2024) concluded that organizational cynicism influences counterproductive work behavior in the tourism industry in South Korea. Ali and Elsayed (2022) found that organizational cynicism accounted for the variance in counterproductive work behavior in a sample of nurses in Egypt. On the other hand, our study also proved that silence plays a mediating role between workplace favoritism and counterproductive work behavior, as employees select to stay silent, especially when they face self-serving and self-centered behavior, when no established mechanism allows employees to articulate their perspectives (Chou & Chang, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). This is supported by Qi and Ramayah (2022) and Shahjehan and Yasir (2016), as silence leads employees to exhibit undesirable behaviors, such as deliberately injuring their colleagues and engaging in actions detrimental to the organization.

Finally, our study showed that self-efficacy reduces the negative effect of favoritism on employees' cynicism and silence. Employees possessing self-efficacy are inclined to attain their objectives due to their self-confidence. Consequently, despite workplace favoritism fostering perceptions of inequity among employees, those with elevated self-efficacy continue to engage in workplace issues, believing they can influence their environment and effect change. This is supported by Pei et al. (2024) and Shao et al. (2022), who demonstrate that self-efficacy can mitigate the adverse emotions of disillusionment associated with cynicism. In addition, Rai and Koodamara (2024) and Weiss and Zacher (2025) showed that employees with high self-efficacy are less likely to adopt organizational silence.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate how organizational cynicism and organizational silence jointly mediate the relationship between workplace favoritism and counterproductive work behavior within a single integrated model conducted in the private services sector, as well as focusing on self-efficacy as a moderating variable. The results confirmed that workplace favoritism strongly predicts the occurrence of counterproductive work behavior, and that cynicism and silence mediate this relationship. The results also confirmed that the self-efficacy of employees contributes to reducing the impact of favoritism on cynicism and silent behaviors, and thus on counterproductive work behavior. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for raising awareness of the negative effects of favoritism, which drives employees to cynicism by fueling feelings of frustration and distrust in the organization, and to silence by refraining from sharing their ideas or suggestions, both of which are key contributing factors to their engagement in counterproductive work behavior. The study also highlighted the protective role of self-efficacy in mitigating the negative effects of thoughts and feelings associated with favoritism, eliminating the disappointment and frustration that lead to cynicism and encouraging employees to actively participate and express their opinions rather than remain silent.

Several additional important points warrant consideration. Among them is that, despite the two-wave design's benefits concerning common method bias, it is important to recognize that this design is ineffective for establishing causality. In addition, we propose to explore in-depth the individual differences in dealing with workplace favoritism, for instance, the personal characteristics, experiences, and skills, which make some employees more likely to engage in cynical behavior while others choose to remain silent. Finally, we have studied only self-efficacy as a moderating variable. Future papers may explore the influence of different elements such as emotional intelligence, hope, and optimism.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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