

## Justice, satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour: A Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory study on Social Workers

Begoña Urien Angulo<sup>1</sup>; Vicente Díez Valdés<sup>2</sup>; Amparo Osca Segovia<sup>3</sup>

Recibido: 27/07/2017 / Revisado: 05/09/2017 / Aceptado: 07/09/2018

Disponible on line:

**Abstract.** Social work professionals have to confront an increasingly strenuous job context (e.g., more users into the system, budgetary cuts, increasing bureaucracy, etc.), and these changes added to their interest in social justice turn their job into a very demanding one. Furthermore, over the few last years, organizational justice has produced a great deal of research, although not in this particular discipline. Based on the Job Demands and Resources theory (JD-R), this paper analyses (1) the direct relationships of job demands (Demands) and organizational justice (Resource) on job satisfaction and on counterproductive behaviour, and (2) the buffering effect of organizational justice as a resource, on the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction, and between job demands and counterproductive behaviour. The sample is made up of 213 social work professionals from various Spanish regions (198 female and mean-age 40.56 years old). Hierarchical regression equations showed that more than job demands, it is organizational justice which is the variable that exerts the highest influence on results (satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour). Specifically, organizational justice explains a great deal of the variance on job satisfaction (40%). Justice also impacts on counterproductive behaviour, both directly as well as reducing the negative effect of high demands. These findings are important both from the theoretical and applied perspectives, since these underline the key role of organizational justice for social workers, beyond job demands.

**Key words:** Organizational justice; social work; counterproductive behaviour; job demands; direct and buffering effects.

### [en] Justicia, satisfacción y conductas contraproductivas: un estudio con trabajadoras y trabajadores sociales basado en la teoría de las demandas y de los recursos laborales (JD-R)

**Resumen.** Los y las profesionales de Trabajo Social tienen que afrontar un contexto laboral cada vez más estresante - más usuarios en el sistema, recortes presupuestarios, creciente burocratización, etc.- y estos cambios, sumados a su interés en la justicia social, convierten su trabajo en muy demandante. Además, en los últimos años, la justicia organizacional ha generado bastante investigación, aunque no con estos profesionales. Partiendo de la teoría de las demandas y los recursos laborales (JD-R), este artículo analiza: 1) las relaciones directas entre las demandas laborales (demandas) y la justicia organizacional (recurso) para predecir la satisfacción laboral y las conductas contraproductivas; y 2) el efecto moderador de la justicia organizativa, como recurso, en la relación entre las demandas laborales y la satisfacción y entre estas demandas y las conductas contraproductivas, aplicado a una muestra de 213 trabajadores sociales (198 mujeres y edad media de 40 a 56 años). Las regresiones jerárquicas muestran que es la justicia organizativa más que las demandas laborales la variable que ejerce una clara influencia en los resultados (satisfacción y conductas contraproductivas). Concretamente, la justicia explica gran porcentaje de la varianza de la satisfacción (40%). La justicia impacta en las conductas contraproductivas directamente y también reduciendo el efecto negativo de las elevadas demandas. Estos resultados son importantes, tanto desde el punto de vista teórico como aplicado, al resaltar la importancia de la justicia organizacional para los trabajadores sociales por encima de las demandas laborales.

**Palabras clave:** Justicia organizacional; Trabajo Social; Conductas contraproducentes; demandas de trabajo; efectos directos y moderadores.

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Pública de Navarra, España  
begona.urien@unavarra.es

<sup>2</sup> CTT. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, España  
vdiez@ctt.upv.es

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, España  
aosca@pdi.uned.es

**Summary:** Introduction. 1. Method. 2. Results. 3. Discussion. 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

**Cómo citar:** Urien, B., Díez Valdés, V. y Osca, A. (2019). Justice, satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour: A Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory study on Social Workers, en *Cuad. trab. soc.* 32(1), 141-152.

## Introduction

Social work based its profession upon the universal and indivisible values of human dignity, freedom and equality. Some of their general principles underline equity in rights, opportunities and participation among individuals, as well as social justice in society and specifically towards the people social workers work for. However, over the last decade, at least three trends have contributed to making the context within which social workers deliver their services more challenging (Abad & Martín, 2015; Carro & Mínguez, 2013). Firstly, a broader conceptualization of social services as rights within welfare societies, which attracts more users into the system who demand those rights to be satisfied. Secondly, the last economic crisis and its major effect on budget cuts, budgets that have not yet been fully adjusted to meet actual needs. Finally, geopolitical instability and its impact on migrations and people seeking asylum in Europe. Additionally, the tension between social work principles and tighter job demands derived from an over demanding work environment, could cause higher levels of stress among these professionals, as well as exert a negative impact on individual and organizational results (Ben-Zur & Michel, 2008; Smith & Clark, 2011; Lahana, Papadopoulou, Roumeliotou, Tsounis, Safaris, & Niakas, 2017).

Therefore, this tension between social work principles and tighter job demands derived from intensive relationships (with users, their families, and other professionals), and budget constraints could cause higher levels of stress among these professionals (Ben-Zur & Michel, 2008; Smith & Clark, 2011; Lahana, Papadopoulou, Roumeliotou, Tsounis, Safaris, & Niakas, 2017). In this regard, literature on social work, consistently reports from moderate to high levels of burnout in this profession (e.g., Algarín, Bernal, & Sánchez-Serrano, 2015; Esteban, 2014).

One of the most applied frameworks analysing relationships between job characteristics and outcomes is the Job demands and resources theory (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerou-

ti, 2007). This theory posits that two types of working conditions (i.e., job demands and job resources) are related to psychosocial wellbeing and job outcomes. Continuous over demanding jobs drain individual and team energy resulting in negative attitudes such as job dissatisfaction, counterproductive behaviour or absenteeism. Work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, lack of control or unfairness are among these demands that social workers have to deal with on a daily basis (Wilson, 2016). Conversely, job resources are physical, psychological, social and organizational aspects of the job that helps to deal with demands and specifically these resources play an important role when job demands are high. Job resources interact with job demands in order to decrease the levels of burnout and these are positively related to job performance and positive job attitudes such as job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Work environments can provide several resources such as supportive colleagues or performance feedback, cohesion or task oriented norm (Urien, Osca, & García-Salmones, 2017). Support from peers and supervisors, challenge, meaning and logic at work exemplify types of resources in the social work profession (Hamama, 2012; Lahana et al., 2017).

Although counterproductive behaviour is not a common concept applied in social work literature, ethical behaviour is studied since aligning codes of ethics with professionals' decision-making and ethical behaviour (e.g., confidentiality, relationships, information and users' autonomy) is of paramount importance to them (see Reamer, 2013, Úriz & Salcedo, 2017). Additionally, several scholars underline the impact of the organizational context on the individual unethical behaviour, therefore organizations could redesign the organizational setting in order to either prevent or facilitate unethical behaviour. One of the settings that could conform an appropriate ethical climate is organizational justice. If the management structure uses fair procedures, employees would perceive the organization as a neutral and ethical collective (De Cremer, Tenbrunsel, & van Dijke, 2010). As stated at the beginning of this

paper, justice is one of the underpinnings of social work so perceiving it in their work place, could be considered as a resource for these professionals. Social workers deserve organizational justice, since they are called upon to deliver social justice to their users (Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, Pasupuleti, Hall, & Jankins, 2005). A number of studies have argued about the importance of justice in social work however, there has been little research analysing the impact of organizational justice on the behaviour of social workers particularly on counterproductive behaviour. Some research papers reported that organizational factors such as injustice and work constraints were found to be triggers for counterproductive behaviour.

Based on the above mentioned, the purpose of this research paper, is to examine the role of organizational justice in the framework of the job demands and resources (JD-R) theory (Baker & Demerouti, 2007) to predict job satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour (i.e., deception, misuse of time, or peers mistreatment) in a sample of 213 Spanish social workers. Additionally, and according to the job demands and resources (JD-R) theory, it seeks to identify whether organizational justice moderates the relationships between job demands and both consequent variables. The main contributions of this present research work are (1) to study the direct relationships of job demands on job satisfaction and on counterproductive behaviour and (2) to analyse the buffering effect of organizational justice as a resource, on the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction, and between job demands and counterproductive behaviour. From an applied perspective, this study could shed some light on the role of two organizational variables, job stressors (Demand) and organizational justice (Resource) on the attitude and behaviour of social workers, complementing the role played by individual variables.

Within the Job demands and resources (JD-R) theory, demands are physical, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and these are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Role overload, role conflict, time pressure, level of concentration, and to depend on other's job could be included within this category (Wilberforce et al., 2014). Although relationships between demands and outcomes might be more complex, several me-

ta-analysis gave support to the negative link between job demands and outcomes since these demands evoke negative emotions and attitudes. In helping professions the negative role of job demands on job outcomes (e.g., quality of care) and attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) have been consistently found (Van Bogaert, Timmermans, Weeks, Heusden, Wouters, & Franck, 2014; Wilberforce et al., 2014). In social work, several studies also reported negative relationships between job demands such as job pressure or high intensity and job satisfaction (Allen, Lambert, Pasupuleti, Cluse-Tolar, & Ventura, 2004). Accordingly, this study has hypothesized that:

### **Hypothesis 1a. Job demands are negatively related to job satisfaction**

Counterproductive behaviour refers to work place behaviour performed by employees for their own benefit, which violates important organizational norms and consequently threatens the wellbeing of the organization and its employees. From more extreme types (thefts or sabotage) to miss-use of working time or showing cynical treatment to users, the common feature of this behaviour is that these are intentionally performed to exert some harm to the organization and/or their members. Counterproductive behaviour violates organizational norms and endangers the attainment of organizational goals (Smithikrai, 2014).

Extant research explained this behaviour based on injustice perceptions (i.e., lack of organizational justice), as an effect, these acts could be used in order to re-balance the equilibrium between the employees' perceived efforts and attained rewards. In addition to this, another approach more aligned with the job and demands (JD-R) theory, posits that job stressors produce a negative emotional reaction, which in turn could cause counterproductive behaviour (Beauregard, 2014). Both lines of thought consider that job stressors may serve as "provocations" for counterproductive behaviour (Robinson, 2008). Several studies showed significant relationships between job demands and counterproductive behaviour. Role ambiguity, role conflict, and job overload trigger negative emotions causing counterproductive behaviour (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Other studies also reported a positive link between job stressors (e.g., frequency and

intensity of stressful events at work) and counterproductive behaviour (Smithikrai, 2014). Although no specific social work research has been found on this subject, we could generalize that the more the employees feel exploited, the more counterproductive behaviour is likely to occur. As was earlier mentioned, the current working conditions of many social work agencies due to external changes and budgetary constraints might provide some ground for counterproductive behaviour to occur. From this rationale we could submit that:

**Hypothesis 1b. Job demands are positively related to counterproductive behaviour**

The term “justice” refers to social and interpersonal justice theories that can be applied to understand justice within organizations. Organizational justice is defined as the perceptions of individuals on what is fair or not fair within the organizations they belong to. From the social work perspective Flynn (1995, in Lambert et al., 2005), defined justice “as the embodiment of fairness (whether people are dealt with reasonably), equity (whether similar situations are dealt with similarly), and equality (whether people and situations are dealt with in the same manner)” (p. 2179). According to Lambert et al. (2005) this definition encompasses the concept of justice both from the social and organizational perspectives.

Perceptions of justice have a great impact on organizational results and these have been used to predict a wide range of attitudes and behaviour such as job satisfaction. If individuals think that they are fairly treated in comparison to others (distributive justice), this belief will contribute to maintaining positive attitudes towards their job, managers, and the organization as a whole (Osca, 2006). This first type of justice was completed by introducing procedural justice which deals with the consistency of the process through which outcomes decisions are made, and interactional justice, comprising the treatment people received when procedures were enacted (Colquitt, 2001).

Reciprocity norm seems to be behind why professionals are ready to do a good job and to be involved in voluntary tasks far and beyond their job descriptions (since they perceive their organization as doing its part too). Conversely, an unfair treatment could hinder a positive assessment of the professionals’ contributions, making the access to valuable resources (i.e.,

rewards and recognition, support from the leader and peers) more difficult, and a signal of the individual not being appreciated within its work unit.

Some meta-analysis as well as more recent studies (Malik & Naeem, 2011), showed positive relationships between organizational justice and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship and performance. Other studies have also corroborated the negative link between organizational justice and counterproductive behaviour (Devonish & Greenidge, 2010).

In social work literature there has been little research on this subject, except for the research of Huh and Song (2016) in a sample of 539 social workers that found positive relationships between organizational justice and job attitudes such as the perception of person-organization fit. Similarly, this study proposes that:

**Hypothesis 2a. Organizational justice is positively related to job satisfaction**

In the context of this study, we could state that a continuous over demanding job could be perceived as unfair due to the imbalance between the efforts made by the professionals and the rewards obtained. This imbalance could also be associated with negative emotions and this cognitive and emotional state could increase the likelihood of displaying counterproductive behaviour. In line with the above mentioned, we could hypothesize that in this sample:

**Hypothesis 2b. Organizational justice is negatively related to counterproductive behaviour**

Some extant literature addresses the indirect role of organizational justice when it comes to explain relationships between job demands and job attitudes. Specifically some papers reported the indirect role of organizational justice in the relationship between job stressors and job satisfaction, since organizational justice reduced the negative effects of job demands on job satisfaction (Haynie, Svyantek, Mazzei, & Varma, 2016; Heffernan & Dundon, 2016). Additionally, in a review article, Ndjaboué, Brissin and Vezina (2011) provided evidence that organizational justice is associated with mental health, and some other results also pointed to the buffering role

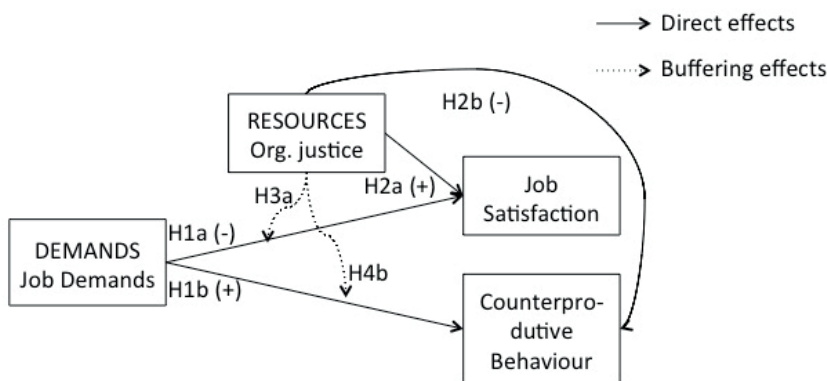
of this variable in order to explain job attitudes (Chen, Lin, Tung, & Ko, 2008). From this evidence although scarce, this paper seeks to test:

**Hypothesis 3a. Organizational justice will moderate the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction reducing the**

**negative effect of job demands on job satisfaction**

**Hypothesis 3b. Organizational justice will moderate the relationship between job demands and counterproductive behaviour reducing the negative effect of job demands on job satisfaction**

Graph 1. Direct and buffering effects between predictors and dependent variables.



**1. Method**

This research paper is part of a broader study on psychosocial risk factors, stress and their consequences both at individual and organizational levels within the framework of the Job demands and resources (JD-R) theory. The intention was to keep this study at the regional level, however having difficulties to achieve a minimum acceptable sample, the research team decided to extend the data collection to other social work associations.

The sample consisted of 213 social work professionals from various Spanish regions (Navarra, Guipuzcoa, Murcia, Valladolid) providing various types of social services both in private organizations and public entities. After selecting several associations based on their geographic proximity and/or size, the research team contacting them via the Internet and sent a cover letter and a paper-copy of the questionnaire to the ones that replied positively to our email. The professional associations provided their members with the link to the questionnaire in Google docs. Although the questionnaire was filled out only by the social workers who wanted to, this reply modality ensured anonymity as well as confidentiality. Then, the spreadsheet

created was exported to SPSS, tool with which the statistical analyses were carried out. Thus, this sample is a convenience sample since only the interested associations decided to cooperate, and then social workers themselves made the decision of filling in the questionnaire. Although this method entails some limitations, its application can be appropriate when collecting samples from actual professionals within given time constraints (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). After the descriptive analyses, and scales' reliabilities were estimated, hypotheses were tested by hierarchical regression analysis including direct and buffering effects (demand x resource). Gender and age were used as control variables in order to accurately assess the results from the hierarchical equations.

This sample was formed by 198 female representing 93% of the sample, the rest were men. Age mean was 40.56 years old (S.D.= 9.48) ranging from 23 to 61 years old, and ages between 33 and 39 years old were the highest reported. With regard to the time working in social services, 30.5% had worked for more than twenty years and 68% for more than eleven years. 48.4% reported university studies, 5% a Ph. D., and 28.2% high school or vocational training studies.

Job demands were measured by the version of Karasek, Pieper, and Schwartz (1993) of the Job Stress Questionnaire. This Likert-scale consists of 9 items ( $X= 4.60$ ;  $SD= 1.08$ ), with 7 anchors, (e.g., “My job frequently requires performing incompatible tasks”), from (1) “no tension at all” to (7) “extreme tension”. Reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was above the recommended value ( $\alpha= .83$ ).

Organizational justice was measured with the 11-item scale ( $\alpha= .91$ ), adapted to Spanish by Osca (2006) from the original Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001), which includes items asking for the three types of organizational justice: distributive justice (e.g., “Assessment results reflect the effort that you invest in your job”); procedural justice (e.g., “Assessment procedures are similarly applied to all the members of your organization”), and interactional justice (e.g., “When you are assessed, you receive some inappropriate remarks or observations”). Replies range from (1) “not at all” to (7) “yes, absolutely”. Mean was 3.98, and the standard deviation 1.39.

Job satisfaction was measured with a 6-item scale ( $\alpha= .76$ ). To keep the questionnaire as shorter as possible, items were selected from classic job satisfaction instruments (e.g., Spector, 1985), to measure most important work dimensions such as satisfaction with their tasks, peers, supervisors, training, salary, and their

general level of job satisfaction.. Similarly to the other scales, this one ranges from (1) “very dissatisfied” to (7) “very satisfied” ( $X= 4.42$ ;  $SD= 1.08$ ).

To assessed counterproductive behaviour, an *ad-hoc* developed scale was designed consisting of 10 items ( $\alpha= .92$ ), asking to what extend time was wasted at the workplace, whether organizational resources were used without formal authorization, employees intentionally arrived at work late, how badly users, their families and colleagues were treated or whether employees cheated on their supervisors in order to hide mistakes ( $X= 2.30$ ;  $SD= 1.25$ ). As an example of item we can cite: “The tasks are intentionally performed without meeting the quality standards”.

## 2. Results

Table 1 depicts each scale descriptive statistics, correlations among scales, and reliabilities. Mean values of job demands and organizational justice are clearly above their scales mid-point, whereas counterproductive behaviour is more than one point below its mid-point. Standard deviations are higher than one which points to a certain degree of dispersion in the sample responses. Scales’ reliabilities are all above the .70 that characterised a robust measurement instrument.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scales’ reliabilities.

Variable	Scale	Items	X	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Job Demands	1-7	9	4.60	1.08	.83			
2 Org. Justice	1-7	11	3.98	1.39	-.14*	.91		
3 Satisfaction	1-7	6	4.42	1.08	-.13	.64***	.78	
4 Counterprod. B.	1-7	10	2.30	1.25	.13	-.25***	-.21**	.92

N = 213; \*  $p<.05$  \*\*  $p<.01$  \*\*\*  $p<.001$

NOTE: Scalesreliability (Cronbach’salpha) in the diagonal.

As Table 2 shows the proposed final model in order to predict job satisfaction, explains 44% of this dependent variable variance. First step consisting of socio-demographic variables is significant ( $F= 4.24$ ;  $p< .05$ ) and specifically age ( $\beta= .16$ ;  $p< .05$ ), explains 4% of the overall variance. Second step incorporating job demands ( $\beta=-.14$ ;  $p< .05$ ) is also significant ( $F= 4.39$ ;  $p< .01$ ), and the added variance explained (2%) is significant too.

Third step including organizational justice ( $\beta= .62$ ;  $p< .001$ ), establishes an appreciable relationship with job satisfaction ( $F=30.14$ ;  $p< .001$ ). In fact this step alone explains 43% of the dependent variable. Fourth step ( $F=19.43$ ;  $p< .001$ ), adds the interaction effect between job demands and organizational justice but this relationship is not significant ( $\beta= .28$ ;  $p> .05$ ) to predict job satisfaction. Furthermore, the

amount of variance added, representing only 1%, is not significant.

From these results hypothesis 1a and 2a for direct effects can be accepted but hypo-

thesis 3a related to buffering effects of organizational justice on the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction has to be rejected.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression to predict Job Satisfaction

Variable	STEPS			
	I	II	III	IV
Gender	-.11	-.12†	-.03	-.04
Age	.16*	.16*	.12*	.12*
Job Demands		-.14*	-.04	.06
Org. Justice			.62***	.63*
Job Demands x Org. Justice				.28
F	4.24*	4.39**	30.14***	19.43***
R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.06	.43	.44
Δ R <sup>2</sup>	.04*	.02*	.37***	.01
N= 213; Poner Gender: 0 = ; 1 = ; †<.10 * p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001				

Table 3 displays the results of the hierarchical regression analysis in order to explain counterproductive behaviour. The overall proposed model predicts 14% of this dependent variable. First and second steps are not significant (F= .33, p> 0.05; F= 1.11, p> 0.05). Conversely, the third step, which adds organizational justice establishes significant relationships (β= -.25; p< .001), and predicts 10%

of counterproductive behaviour variance (F= 4.92; p< .001). Fourth step (F= 4.12; p< .001) including the interaction effect between job demands and organizational justice also turns out significant (β= -.85; p< .05) and explains 4% of the dependent variable variance. Except for age the rest of the variables establish significant relationships with counterproductive behaviour.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression to predict Counterproductive Behaviour.

Variable	STEPS			
	I	II	III	IV
Gender	-.06	-.05	-.11	-.12†
Age	.02	.02	.04	.05
Job demands		.11	.16*	.60*
Org. Justice			-.25***	.57†
Job Demands x Org. Justice				-.85*
F	.33	1.11	4.92***	4.12***
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.01	.10	.14
Δ R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.01	.09***	.04†
N= 213; Poner Gender: 0 = ; 1 = ; †<.10 * p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001				

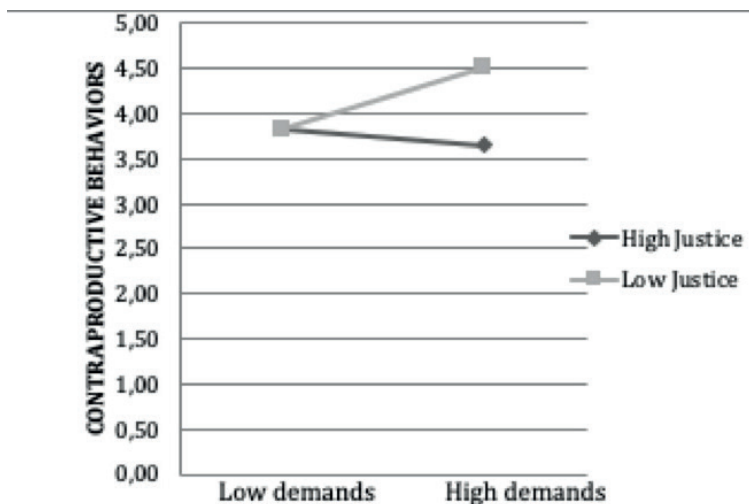
Graph 2 depicts the interaction between job demands and organizational justice to predict counterproductive behaviour. It shows that when job demands are low, organizational justice does not influence counterproductive behaviour whereas when job de-

mands are high then subjects, who perceive lower levels of organizational justice, could display more counterproductive behaviour compared to the professionals who perceived higher levels of organizational justice. Organizational justice then, moderates the

effect of job demands on counterproductive behaviour. From the above-mentioned results, and for direct effects hypothesis 1b has

to be rejected whereas 2b can be accepted as well as hypothesis 3b comprising buffering effects.

Graph 2. Interaction effect of Organizational Justice on the relationship between Job Demands and Counterproductive Behaviour.



### 3. Discussion

This research paper tested part of the job demands and resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) within a social workers sample. As a resource, organizational justice was chosen since social justice is one of the underpinnings of the social work discipline, and social and organizational justices could be similarly conceptualized (Lambert, et al., 2005). This paper studied direct effects of job demands and organizational justice on job satisfaction and on counterproductive behaviour at social workers’ work place. Main contributions were, firstly to analyse counterproductive behaviour since it has not been widely studied in this collective. Secondly, it sought to examine direct relationships between organizational justice and both criteria variables. Thirdly, this work studied whether organizational justice as a resource would moderate the relationships between job demands and job satisfaction, and between the same predictor and counterproductive behaviour.

Although the nature of the sample impose some limitations to the generalization of these results, after controlling socio-demographic variables, four main findings are worth mentioning. Except for the direct relationship between job demands and coun-

terproductive behaviour, the other three direct effects on the dependent variables were confirmed. The former result is important since extant research consistently reports significant links between job demands and job outcomes. Another important consequence is the amount of variance explained by organizational justice compared to job demands when it comes to predict both dependent variables, particularly job satisfaction (40%). This evidence points to the central role that resources, in this case organizational justice, could play due to the fact that its influence is stronger than job demands in order to explain job satisfaction as well as counterproductive behaviour. This finding could be aligned with the importance that resources could hold by themselves, and/ or when these interact with job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Furthermore, the buffering role of the organizational resource on the relationship between job demands and counterproductive behaviour was also confirmed. Finally, although some extant evidence exists on the preventive role of organizational justice on the negative effects of job demands on job satisfaction, this relationship was not found in this sample (Haynie et al., 2016; Heffernan & Dundon, 2016). Thus, from the six hypotheses tested, four were accepted.



With regard to job satisfaction and in line with other studies, a direct relationship between age and this criteria variable was observed since the older the individuals, the higher the reported level of satisfaction (Cohrs, Abele, & Dette, 2006). In this sample it was also confirmed, that job demands positively relate to job dissatisfaction in line with most theories (e.g., JD-R) and extant studies on the subject, social work included (Allen et al., 2004). However, the link between job demands (although high) and job satisfaction is not strong in this sample, as bivariate correlations show (Table 1). This finding could indicate how common it could be for social workers to work in an over-demanding job environment, a widespread idea within this profession. Additionally, social work practice tends to be a vocational profession and this conviction could reduce the negative effect of job demands on their level of satisfaction (Puig i Cruells, 2011). These ideas jointly with the mean-age of this sample could help explain this result. It is also worth mentioning the strength (both the link and the degree of strength) of the relationship between organizational justice and job satisfaction that has also been reported by other researchers in related contexts such as education (Malik & Naeem, 2011; Patlán-Pérez, Martínez Torres, & Hernández, 2012). With regard to the buffering effects, organizational justice did not moderate job demands when predicting job satisfaction. As a tentative explanation we could state that since the direct effect of organizational justice on job satisfaction is so prominent, this link could hide any other indirect relationship.

Furthermore counterproductive behaviour and job demands did not establish any direct relationship, contrary to extant research on this subject that gives support to this link (Smithkrai, 2014). Conversely, job demands established a negative strong link with organizational justice, and this latter variable was also negatively related to counterproductive behaviour. It is important to underline that organizational justice is also the variable that best explains counterproductive behaviour, in line with extant research in various organizations both private and public (Devonish & Greenidge, 2010). Moreover, it is when job demands were jointly analysed with organizational justice when the negative effect of demands on counterproductive behaviour emerged. So that the effect of job demands on counterproductive behaviour

is through justice, or to be more precise, through injustice. So in this sample although job demands are perceived as high these do not directly “provoke” any counterproductive behaviour, but only when justice is also included, the positive relationship between job demands and counterproductive behaviour is revealed. These findings could reinforce the hypothesis of indirect relationship between job demands, organizational justice and counterproductive behaviour, and the key role that organizational justice plays. If employees think they are exploited, they could initiate some counterproductive behaviour in order to correct inequity perceptions. Bechtoldt, Welk, Zaph, and Hartig (2007) gave some ground to the role that on those perceptions of unfairness job demands as well as other beliefs (e.g., self-esteem or dignity at work) could play.

As any other empirical study, this paper has its limitations. In order to overcome them, further research studies could be conducted in order to clarify the relationships between these variables over time as well as how some personal attitudes towards justice could exert some influence on them. These studies should ensure that data is randomly collected in order to avoid the biases that convenience samples impose to the generalization of the results derived from them. Extant studies reported that personal beliefs in a “just world” increases the perception of organizational justice, that in turn increases job satisfaction one year later (Johnston, Krings, Maggiori, Meier, & Fiori, 2016). This line of work could be relevant in social work since these professionals have to deal with “unjust” situations on a daily basis. Their job content then might reinforce the importance of justice so that this aspect would become more salient resulting in higher sensibility to organizational justice. Conversely, and also due to their job content, they might be so certain that injustice “does exist” than this belief might cause insensibility to organizational justice. Further studies should also examine in more depth why organizational justice does not buffer the negative effect of demands on job satisfaction as well as conduct a similar study at the team level. Additionally, relationships between job demands, organizational justice, and counterproductive behaviour should be studied in more depth since apart from buffering effects, mediated relationships could also arise.

From an applied perspective organizations should be aware of the negative effect of “imposing” (directly or indirectly) long working schedules, be engaged in job activities outside the work place, or a continuous over-effort on their employees. These widespread practices could reinforce the use of counterproductive behaviour, although not directly through their effects on other variables (resources) such as organizational justice (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Furthermore, these results give some good support to the role of organizational justice on social workers job satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour, since most of the attention of the profession is focused on the fair treatment social workers should provide to their users. According to these results, organizational justice is so important for social workers that if an organizational change process would be carried out within a social work organization, and only one variable could be manipulated, organizational justice should be that one.

#### 4. Conclusion

Organizational justice exerts an important role to explain social workers’ job satisfaction and counterproductive behaviour. Unexpectedly and contrary to mainstream research and theory, job demands do not directly predict counterproductive behaviour. It is when organizational justice is taken into account when the negative effect of job demands emerged. These results underline the importance that resources (i.e., organizational justice) could have when it comes to explain social workers attitude and behaviour. From an applied perspective, these variables could also be of some use to social work organizations in order to design their jobs considering the role that some organizational characteristics could play on social workers wellbeing and effectiveness. Further research studies should focus their attention on this subject in order to clarify these relationships.

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