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A comparative study of Economic Inflation's effect on Counterproductive Work Behavior: Mediating role of Psychological Contract Breach

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of economic inflation on counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among teaching assistants at Egyptian universities, with a focus on the mediating role of psychological contract breach (PCB) and the moderating role of individual value systems. The research draws on a sample from Alexandria University (a governmental university) and Pharos University (a private university) to compare how inflation-related pressures manifest in different organizational and economic contexts.

The findings revealed that economic inflation can indirectly lead to increased CWB through the erosion of psychological contracts, as employees feel that the institution is failing to meet implicit expectations, especially in light of rising living costs. Interestingly, teaching assistants at Pharos University reported higher levels of psychological contract breach than their counterparts at Alexandria University, despite receiving relatively higher financial compensation. This suggests that unmet psychological or professional expectations may play a stronger role than monetary rewards in shaping perceptions of fairness and obligation.

Moreover, the study highlighted that individuals with dominant economic or political value orientations exhibited stronger reactions to inflation-related stressors, including higher tendencies toward counterproductive behavior. In contrast, those prioritizing religious or social values were less affected behaviorally by economic pressures.

These results provide new insights into how prolonged inflation influences workplace dynamics in academia and emphasize the importance of understanding both psychological and value-based dimensions when addressing employee behavior under economic strain.

Keywords: Economic Inflation, Counterproductive Work Behavior, Psychological Contract Breach, Individual Value System.

1. Introduction

Economic inflation, defined as a sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services, represents a formidable challenge to organizational dynamics and employee behavior, disrupting economic stability and individual livelihoods (Blanchard & Johnson, 2013; World Bank, 2023). As inflation erodes real wages and purchasing power, employees face mounting financial pressures that extend beyond personal hardship to influence workplace outcomes. In Egypt, this issue has reached alarming proportions, with official inflation rates climbing to nearly 30% in 2023 (CAPMAS, 2023) and essential goods witnessing price surges often exceeding 100% annually (Reuters, 2023). Fixed-income groups, such as university faculty, are particularly vulnerable, as salary increases—averaging a mere 15% annually—fail to offset the soaring cost of living (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2023). This growing disparity has fueled financial insecurity, diminished morale, and sparked concerns about declining academic productivity, threatening the sustainability of Egypt's higher education system (Khan et al., 2022). Beyond these tangible effects, inflation may precipitate counterproductive work behavior (CWB)—voluntary actions such as absenteeism, sabotage, or poor performance that harm organizations or their stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005; Khan et al., 2014). While prior research has linked economic stressors to workplace outcomes, the psychological mechanisms underlying these relationships remain insufficiently explored, warranting a deeper investigation into their dynamics.

One such mechanism is psychological contract breach (PCB), the perception that an employer has failed to fulfill implicit or explicit obligations, such as fair compensation or job security (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1995). Inflation exacerbates this breach by amplifying the gap between employee expectations and organizational capacity, as rising operational costs constrain salary adjustments or benefits (Bordia et al., 2008). This perceived violation often triggers intense emotional responses—anger, betrayal, or frustration—that may manifest as retaliatory behaviors, including organizational sabotage or interpersonal deviance (Restubog et al., 2015). Concurrently, inflation can heighten feelings of perceived injustice, as employees compare stagnant wages to escalating living costs, further fueling discontent (Adams, 1965; Deery et al., 2019). These psychological processes suggest that economic stressors do not operate in isolation but interact with employees' internal perceptions, shaping their behavioral responses in complex ways.

However, individual reactions to these economic and psychological stressors are far from uniform. Drawing on Schwartz's theory of basic human values (Schwartz, 2012), which categorizes values into domains such as self-enhancement (e.g., economic, power) and self-transcendence (e.g., social, religious), this study posits that individual value systems critically influence how employees navigate inflationary pressures and breaches. For instance, individuals prioritizing economic values—focused on practicality and material wealth—may perceive inflation as a direct threat to their financial well-being, intensifying feelings of injustice and PCB, and thus amplifying CWB (Zhang et al., 2020). In contrast, those emphasizing social or religious values may exhibit resilience, as their orientation toward community, relationships, or spiritual fulfillment serves as a buffer against financial strain, potentially mitigating negative workplace behaviors (Mayer et al., 2020; Pletzer et al., 2019). This variability underscores the need to consider personal values as a lens through which economic and psychological stressors are interpreted and acted upon.

While the interplay between inflation, PCB, and CWB offers a compelling framework to understand workplace deviance, the role of individual value systems in moderating these relationships remains underexplored, particularly in contexts of severe economic instability like Egypt's. This study aims to address these dynamics by: (1) examining the effect of economic inflation on CWB, (2) investigating the mediating roles of perceived injustice and PCB in this relationship, and (3) exploring how individual value systems moderate these effects. Focusing on Egyptian university faculty—a group acutely impacted by inflation—this research seeks to extend organizational psychology by linking macroeconomic pressures to workplace behavior through psychological and value-based lenses. By doing so, it aims to offer actionable insights for organizations, such as transparent communication and value-aligned support, to mitigate the adverse effects of inflation-induced strain on employee performance and organizational health.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 Economic Inflation

Inflation is a sustained rise in the general price level of goods and services, reducing the purchasing power of money. It is commonly measured using indices such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which tracks price changes for a fixed basket of consumer goods and services (Central Bank of Egypt, 2023), and the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), which monitors price fluctuations at the producer level (CAPMAS, 2023).

The severity of inflation varies. Creeping inflation, with an annual rate below 3%, is often considered beneficial for economic growth (World Bank, 2023). Walking inflation, ranging between 3% and 10%, gradually reduces purchasing power (IMF, 2023). More severe cases include galloping inflation, where prices rise between 10% and 50% annually, causing economic instability (Cagan, 1956), and hyperinflation, an extreme condition where prices surge by more than 50% per month, leading to economic collapse (Hanke & Krus, 2013).

Several factors contribute to inflation. Monetary inflation occurs when excessive money supply growth, combined with low interest rates, fuels demand beyond available supply (Central Bank of Egypt, 2023). Cost-push inflation arises when rising production costs, such as wages and raw material prices, force businesses to increase prices (Blanchard & Johnson, 2013). Demand-pull inflation happens when high consumer demand surpasses supply, often driven by economic expansion and government spending (IMF, 2023). Additionally, structural inefficiencies, including supply chain disruptions and poor infrastructure, can exacerbate inflationary pressures (World Bank, 2023), while external factors, such as global commodity price fluctuations and currency depreciation, further contribute to inflation (Reuters, 2023).

The impact of inflation is far-reaching. As prices rise, individuals' purchasing power declines, making essential goods less affordable (CAPMAS, 2023). Inflation also erodes savings when it outpaces interest rates, discouraging long-term financial planning (Fisher, 1930). Moreover, economic uncertainty discourages investment, as businesses hesitate to commit to long-term projects in volatile conditions (Pindyck, 1991). Additionally, inflation can trigger a wage-price spiral, where rising wages push production costs higher, fueling further inflation (Blanchard & Johnson, 2013).

Egypt has faced severe inflation in recent years, affecting all social classes, particularly university faculty and fixed-income groups. In 2023, official inflation reached nearly 30% (CAPMAS, 2023), but actual price increases for essential goods often exceeded 100% annually (Reuters, 2023). Despite soaring inflation, faculty salaries have risen only 15% annually, widening the gap between income and living costs (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2023). A 2023 survey (EIPR) found that over 70% of faculty struggled with basic expenses, forcing many to seek additional work or reduce spending (Khan et al., 2022).

Reports from the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE, 2023) attribute inflation to currency depreciation, rising global commodity prices, and supply chain disruptions (IMF, 2023). A 2022 study (Khan et al., 2022) highlighted the declining real income of public sector employees, leading to financial insecurity (World Bank, 2023). University administrations have largely failed to adjust salaries to match inflation, exacerbating financial strain (Reuters, 2023). While minor salary adjustments have been made, they remain insufficient. Reuters (2023) reported a slight drop in Egypt's annual inflation to 25.5% in November 2023 and 24% in January 2024, but the Egyptian pound's depreciation continues to raise import costs (Central Bank of Egypt, 2023).

Beyond financial stress, inflation has negatively affected faculty morale and academic productivity. Many faculty members are considering leaving academia or seeking employment abroad, jeopardizing the sustainability of Egypt's higher education system (Khan et al., 2022). The interplay between economic inflation and psychological pressure creates a vicious cycle: rising costs fuel financial stress, which disrupts employees' sense of fairness and job satisfaction, amplifying mental strain. In Egypt's case, the government's limited fiscal response—such as modest salary adjustments—has failed to mitigate these pressures, leaving faculty caught between escalating living costs and stagnant wages. Addressing this crisis requires not only economic interventions, such as stabilizing the currency and controlling price surges, but also institutional efforts to restore trust and equity in the employment relationship, ensuring that employees' contributions are fairly recognized even amid economic turbulence.

2.2 Psychological Contract Breach (PCB)

Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) represents a critical juncture in employment relationships where employees perceive that their organization has failed to fulfill implicit or explicit obligations (Rousseau, 1989; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This subjective experience emerges when expectations regarding fair compensation, job security, or career support remain unmet (Rousseau, 1995), often triggering intense emotional reactions, including betrayal, anger, and distress (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). The psychological contract's unwritten nature makes it particularly vulnerable to disruption during periods of economic instability, where organizational constraints may prevent fulfillment of perceived promises (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2023).

Economic inflation, as discussed in section 2.1, exacerbates PCB by increasing financial strain and widening the gap between employee expectations and organizational capacity. As organizations face rising operational costs, they may struggle to provide salary adjustments or benefits, leading employees to perceive these limitations as intentional reneging rather than necessary adaptations (Bordia et al., 2017). For instance, in Egypt, where faculty salaries have not kept pace with inflation rates of nearly 30% (CAPMAS, 2023), employees may feel that their employer has failed to uphold promises of fair compensation, thus heightening PCB perceptions.

Hypothesis 1: Economic inflation positively influences psychological contract breach among university faculty.

Longitudinal and bibliometric studies tracing the research history of the "psychological contract" and "psychological contract breach," such as those by Hayes et al. (2022), Topa et al. (2022), Maqbool et al. (2024), and Kozhakhmet et al. (2023), which analyzed 1,999 publications in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases from 1989 to 2022, alongside author citation analysis, journal co-citation analysis, reference analysis, and an examination of 100 milestone articles, underscore the need for further investigation into this domain. These studies recommended that "it would be valuable to study the effects of PC breaches and their consequences for both the individual employee and the organization as a whole." This call for research is reinforced by evidence indicating that recent years have witnessed an increase in both the antecedents (causes leading to breaches) and consequences (resulting outcomes) of PCB, yielding significant negative impacts on individuals and organizations alike.

Multiple theoretical lenses converge to explain PCB's mechanisms and consequences. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) frames breach as a violation of reciprocity norms, prompting employees to withdraw effort or engage in negative reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) highlights how employees' input-outcome comparisons become skewed during economic inflation, as stagnant wages against rising costs create palpable inequity (Deery et al., 2019). Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) explains the emotional cascade whereby PCB generates discrete negative emotions that mediate subsequent behaviors (Conway et al., 2011), while Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) reveals how repeated breaches deplete psychological resources, leading to burnout and defensive behaviors (Li & Chen, 2018).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates PCB's robust relationship with Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), encompassing both organizational (e.g., sabotage, theft) and interpersonal (e.g., incivility) forms of deviance (Spector et al., 2006). Meta-analytic findings (Zhao et al., 2007) confirm this link operates through multiple pathways: (1) emotional (anger, frustration), (2) cognitive (perceived injustice), and (3) attitudinal (cynicism, alienation) (Restubog et al., 2015). Notably, Griep, Vantilborgh, and Jones (2020) further established that PCB can serve as both a cause and an antecedent to CWB, highlighting its role in precipitating deviant workplace behaviors. For example, when faculty perceive breaches due to unfulfilled expectations of fair pay amidst inflation, they may engage in behaviors like absenteeism or reduced effort as a form of retaliation (Chiu & Peng, 2021).

Hypothesis 2: Psychological contract breach positively influences counterproductive work behavior among university faculty.

The PCB-CWB relationship is further nuanced by individual differences in value systems. Employees prioritizing self-enhancement values (e.g., achievement, power) demonstrate stronger negative reactions to breaches (Twenge et al., 2010), particularly when inflation erodes their real income (Jensen & Ryan, 2021). Conversely, those with self-transcendence values (e.g., benevolence) or high forgiveness tendencies may employ more constructive coping strategies (Batool & Siddiqui, 2023). Equity sensitivity (Huseman et al., 1987) similarly moderates these effects, with "entitled" individuals more likely to perceive breach during economic downturns.

To my knowledge, no study has yet examined PCB's link to economic inflation as a potential trigger. This gap merits attention, especially amid rising inflation rates worldwide, with Egypt being a notable case. This framework enriches organizational psychology by identifying macroeconomic factors like inflation as fresh antecedents to PCB—an overlooked yet increasingly pertinent area. For organizations facing inflationary pressures, the implications are significant: transparent communication about economic challenges, value-aligned compensation approaches, and focused support for at-risk employees—particularly those with strong equity sensitivity or self-enhancement tendencies—serve as vital strategies to address and curb the growing impact of PCB antecedents.

2.3 Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) has been a focal point of organizational research since the late 1990s, evolving from earlier studies on workplace deviance and organizational misbehavior. The term CWB was formally introduced to describe voluntary employee actions that harm organizations or their stakeholders, encompassing a wide range of behaviors from minor inefficiencies to severe misconduct, as noted by Fox and Spector (1999), Sackett (2002), and Sackett and DeVore (2001). This concept builds on earlier frameworks such as deviant workplace behavior by Robinson and Bennett (1995), organizational misbehavior by Vardi and Wiener (1996), and counterproductive behavior by Mangione and Quinn (1975) and Storms and Spector (1987). Over time, researchers have refined the definition and dimensions of CWB, making it a central construct in understanding employee behavior in high-stress or unjust work environments, particularly in contexts like those explored by Prasetyaningrum (2024).

The dimensions of CWB are vast and multifaceted, reflecting the diverse ways employees can undermine organizational goals. Sackett (2002) provides a comprehensive framework, categorizing CWB into several key domains, such as theft and related behaviors, including stealing cash or property and misuse of employee discounts, as well as destruction of property through sabotage or defacing organizational assets. Other forms include misuse of information, such as revealing confidential data or falsifying records, alongside misuse of time and resources, like wasting time or conducting personal business during work hours. Additionally, CWB encompasses unsafe behaviors, such as failing to follow safety procedures, poor attendance through unexcused absences or tardiness, poor quality work marked by intentionally slow or sloppy performance, alcohol and drug use at work, inappropriate verbal actions like arguing with customers or verbal harassment, and inappropriate physical actions, including physical attacks or sexual harassment. This categorization underscores the complexity and breadth of CWB, highlighting its multifaceted nature as a challenge to organizational well-being.

To better understand why CWB occurs, numerous theoretical frameworks have been proposed, which can be broadly classified into three main perspectives: affect-based, social influence, and individual differences theories. Affect-based theories focus on emotional triggers, with the Frustration-Aggression Theory by Spector (1975) suggesting that employees

experiencing frustration at work may express their dissatisfaction through aggressive or counterproductive behaviors, while the Affective Events Theory by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) emphasizes that workplace events trigger emotional reactions that influence behaviors like CWB. The Interactional Justice Theory by Bies and Moag (1986) posits that employees engage in CWB when they perceive unfair treatment, even if procedural and distributive justice elements are in place. Social influence theories provide another lens, with the Social Exchange Theory by Blau (1964) arguing that employees engage in CWB when they perceive an imbalance in their exchange relationship with the employer, particularly due to a lack of supervisor support, a finding supported by Sakurai and Jex (2012). Social Control Models of Deviance by Hirschi (1969) highlight that weak social control mechanisms increase the likelihood of CWB, and Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1971) explains that employees may model counterproductive behaviors observed in their work environment, especially if such behaviors are tolerated. Individual differences theories offer a final perspective, with the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggesting that individuals engage in CWB when workplace stressors exceed their coping resources, the General Theory of Crime by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1993) attributing CWB to low self-control, and Personality Trait Theory by Bowling et al. (2011) indicating that traits like low conscientiousness and high neuroticism increase the likelihood of CWB.

Exploring the antecedents of CWB reveals a diverse set of factors rooted in individual, organizational, and environmental influences. Economic inflation, as discussed in section 2.1, serves as a significant environmental stressor that directly contributes to CWB. For instance, in Egyptian private universities, stagnant wages amidst rising inflation lead to financial strain, fostering dissatisfaction and disengagement, which manifest as CWB such as absenteeism or incomplete teaching duties (Islam et al., 2021). This direct link suggests that economic pressures can prompt faculty to engage in deviant behaviors as a response to financial insecurity.

Hypothesis 3: Economic inflation positively influences counterproductive work behavior among university faculty.

Another critical antecedent is psychological contract breach (PCB), discussed in section 2.2, where employees feel the organization has failed to fulfill obligations like fair compensation or career development, prompting retaliatory CWB (Mahmoud et al., 2023). According to Chiu and Peng (2021), PCB significantly increases the likelihood of CWB, particularly when employees interpret the breach as intentional or unjust. These breaches elicit emotional responses such as frustration, anger, and resentment, which may be channeled into deviant behaviors that undermine organizational performance. Emotional exhaustion and stress also play a role, impairing self-control and increasing CWB likelihood, with economic inflation exacerbating financial stress and pushing faculty to engage in behaviors like unauthorized tutoring (Islam et al., 2021). The interplay of economic inflation and PCB suggests a mediated pathway, where inflation heightens PCB perceptions, which in turn drive CWB.

Hypothesis 4: Psychological contract breach mediates the relationship between economic inflation and counterproductive work behavior among university faculty.

The impact of CWB on organizations is profound, resulting in financial losses, reduced productivity, and reputational damage, particularly in academic settings where faculty CWB, such as grade manipulation or favoritism, disrupts operations, erodes trust, and undermines educational quality, ultimately harming student outcomes and institutional credibility (Siegel et al., 2022). In Egyptian private universities, economic inflation, stagnant salaries, increased workloads, and reduced resources heighten stress and perceived injustice, fostering CWB like absenteeism or incomplete teaching duties (Islam et al., 2021; Ullrich et al., 2023). Addressing CWB requires a multifaceted approach, including enhancing financial transparency, strengthening faculty engagement, and enforcing ethical policies to reduce its prevalence and foster a positive work environment (Butt & Yazdani, 2021; Mehmood et al., 2023). To my knowledge, no study has specifically examined the relationship between CWB and economic inflation as a direct or indirect cause, particularly through the mediating role of psychological contract breach. Understanding this relationship could provide critical insights for organizations to mitigate CWB during economic crises, particularly in high-stress academic environments.

2.4 Individual Value System

The individual value system embodies a stable set of beliefs and priorities that shape how individuals perceive, decide, and act, particularly within the workplace, serving as a psychological compass that determines their choices, orientations, and reactions (Robbins, 2024). This concept stems from Spranger's (1928) typology of ideal personality types, operationalized by Vernon and Allport (1931) in the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values (SOV), and refined by Kopelman, Rovenpor, and Guan (2003) in its fourth edition (SOV-U). The SOV identifies six core value domains: theoretical, prizing truth and knowledge (e.g., favoring scientific inquiry over practicality); economic, emphasizing utility and material gain (e.g., preferring business ventures); political, centered on power and influence (e.g., valuing leadership roles); aesthetic, cherishing beauty and harmony (e.g., choosing art over utility); social, focused on altruism and relationships (e.g., prioritizing community service); and religious, seeking spiritual meaning (e.g., faith in God, which serves as a primary driver and regulator of behavior).

These value systems function as a psychological lens through which employees interpret workplace experiences, a notion supported by decades of research demonstrating their impact on attitudes and behaviors. Cable and Edwards (2004) found that when personal values align with organizational ones, job satisfaction rises and turnover drops, but misalignment breeds tension that can spill into negative outcomes like counterproductive work behavior (CWB)—intentional acts that harm an organization or its members. The SOV's strength, as highlighted by Kopelman et al. (2003), lies in its predictive power for occupational choices and behavioral shifts, offering insight into how values might amplify or mitigate reactions to stressors like economic inflation. When prices soar and purchasing power erodes, employees with strong economic values—prioritizing practicality and gain—feel the pinch more acutely, perceiving inflation as a direct threat to their financial well-being, which heightens PCB perceptions (Zhang et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 5: Individual value system moderates the relationship between economic inflation and psychological contract breach, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with self-enhancement values (economic, political) and weaker for those with self-transcendence values (social, religious).

This interplay becomes more pronounced when considering psychological contract breach (PCB), where employees perceive their employer has reneged on promises, triggering emotional and behavioral fallout. Restubog et al. (2015) found that those with justice-oriented values—akin to the SOV's social domain—react to PCB with greater distress and retaliation, their sense of fairness violated. Kraak et al. (2021) add that employees with religious or social leanings temper these reactions, their focus on stability or altruism softening the blow, a nuance captured by the updated SOV-U with items like "cathedral, synagogue, or mosque" reflecting diverse spiritual contexts (Kopelman et al., 2003). Pletzer et al. (2019) link CWB to self-enhancement values—economic and political in the SOV—showing that power- or utility-driven individuals are more likely to lash out under stress, while those with self-transcendence values (social, religious) resist, a protective effect. For instance, faculty with economic values may engage in CWB like absenteeism when faced with PCB, while those with social or religious values may cope constructively, focusing on community or spiritual resilience (Schaufeli & Taris, 2022).

Hypothesis 6: Individual value system moderates the relationship between psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behavior, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with self-enhancement values (economic, political) and weaker for those with self-transcendence values (social, religious).

Recent studies reinforce this narrative, painting a vivid picture of values in action. Schaufeli and Taris (2022) noted that during economic downturns, employees with conservation values—aligned with the SOV's religious domain—shied away from CWB, clinging to stability over disruption. Nguyen et al. (2023) observed the opposite in those with achievement-focused values (economic, political), where economic pressure fueled deviance as a retaliatory outlet for breached expectations. Koopman et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis ties it all together, showing that individual differences like value systems explain much of the variance in PCB's fallout, with self-focused values amplifying negativity. Kopelman et al. (2003) found that economic value scores rise with contemporary figures, reflecting modern priorities.

Together, this builds a compelling case for the current research. Economic inflation may heighten PCB perceptions among those with economic or political values, pushing them toward CWB as unmet expectations fester,

while social or religious values could act as a shield, fostering resilience through collective or spiritual lenses. The SOV-U's behavioral approach, praised by Peng et al. (1997) for its realism over abstract surveys, provides a robust framework to test this moderation, bridging macroeconomic pressures, psychological contracts, and individual differences into a cohesive story of workplace behavior.

The choice of the "individual value pattern" as a moderating variable in this study is, to my knowledge, an original research contribution absent from prior organizational psychology studies. The personal value pattern has not previously been examined as a moderator either between economic inflation and psychological contract breach or between psychological contract breach and destructive or deviant workplace behaviors, despite its predictability from both a theoretical and logical standpoint and prior studies exploring its relationship with similar variables.

3. Research gap, conceptual frame work

3-1: Research gap:

Despite extensive research on economic inflation, psychological contract breach (PCB), counterproductive work behavior (CWB), and individual value systems, a significant gap persists in understanding their integrated relationships. To my knowledge, no study has examined economic inflation as a direct antecedent to PCB or its indirect effect on CWB through PCB as a mediator, particularly in the context of severe economic crises like Egypt's, where university faculty face acute financial strain (Khan et al., 2022; CAPMAS, 2023). Furthermore, the moderating role of individual value systems in these pathways remains unexplored, despite evidence that values shape responses to economic and psychological stressors (Schwartz, 2012; Pletzer et al., 2019). This gap limits the field's ability to address workplace deviance during macroeconomic pressures, offering a critical opportunity for organizational psychology to provide novel insights into how external economic conditions interact with internal psychological and personal factors.

3-2: Conceptual framework:

To address this research gap, this study proposes a conceptual framework integrating economic inflation, psychological contract breach (PCB), counterproductive work behavior (CWB), and individual value systems, as depicted in Figure 1. Economic inflation is posited as an antecedent that

influences CWB both directly and indirectly through PCB as a mediator. Inflation erodes purchasing power, heightening PCB perceptions as employees perceive organizational failure to meet obligations like fair compensation (Bordia et al., 2017). In turn, PCB drives CWB, as feelings of inequity fuel retaliatory behaviors like absenteeism or sabotage (Restubog et al., 2015). Individual value systems moderate these relationships, with self-enhancement values (economic, political) strengthening the effects and self-transcendence values (social, religious) mitigating them (Kopelman et al., 2003; Pletzer et al., 2019).

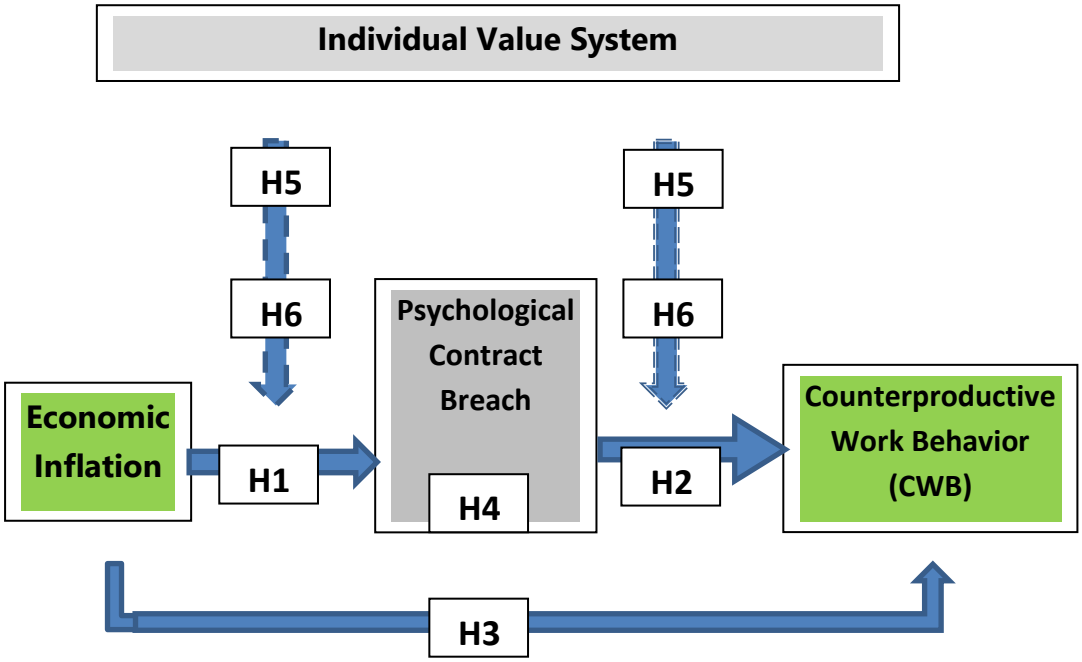

Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between economic inflation, psychological contract breach, counterproductive work behavior, and the moderating role of individual value system

4. Methodology

This study examines the relationships between economic inflation (measured as Financial Strain, FS), Psychological Contract Breach (PCB), and Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) among 370 Teaching Assistants (TAs) from the University of Alexandria (278 TAs, governmental) and Pharos University (92 TAs, private) across four faculties: Business Administration, Law, Arts, and Tourism & Hotels. The study explores the mediating role of PCB and the moderating role of the Individual Value System (IVS), focusing on how self-enhancement values

(**E**conomic/**P**olitical, E/P) versus self-transcendence values (Social/Religious, S/R) influence the relationships between FS, PCB, and CWB. Data was collected using Likert scales (1-5) for FS (Q1-Q5), PCB (Q38-Q42), and CWB (Q6-Q37), and a ranked value system (1-6) for IVS.

4.1: Participants and data collection:

The study specifically targeted Teaching Assistants (TAs) from two Egyptian universities: the university of Alexandria (governmental) and Pharos University (private). TAs were defined as teaching staff assistants who have not yet obtained a master's degree, excluding Lecturer Assistants (LAs), who are assistant lecturers with a master's degree. This focus on TAs was due to their lower salaries and younger age, making them more likely to experience heightened financial strain, greater psychological contract breach, and increased engagement in negative or counterproductive work behaviors. The total sample consisted of 370 TAs, with 278 from the University of Alexandria and 92 from Pharos University. At the University of Alexandria, the population of TAs across the four selected faculties was 950. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations: n = N / (1 + N * (e^2)), where N is the population size (950), and e is the margin of error (set at 0.05 for a 95% confidence level). This yielded a required sample size of approximately 281 TAs for the University of Alexandria. To account for potential non-response, the questionnaire was distributed to 300 TAs, of whom 278 responded, yielding a response rate of 92.7%. A stratified random sampling approach was adopted based on the proportion of students in the four faculties, with the number of students in Business Administration and Law being approximately double that in Arts and Tourism and Hotels. Accordingly, the sample from Business Administration and Law was twice that of Arts and Tourism and Hotels. The distribution at the University of Alexandria was: Business Administration (97 TAs), Law (97 TAs), Arts (42 TAs), and Tourism and Hotels (42 TAs). At Pharos University, the total population of TAs in the four selected faculties was 110, and a Census approach was adopted, targeting all available TAs out of these, 92 TAs responded, yielding a response rate of 83.6%. The distribution at Pharos University was: Business Administration (32 TAs), Law (32 TAs), Arts (14 TAs), and Tourism and Hotels (14 TAs). The selection of these faculties was based on two main reasons. First, the researcher focused on theoretical faculties, as TAs in such faculties typically have lower salaries and fewer external work opportunities (e.g., consultancy, clinics, or labs) compared to practical faculties, potentially leading to higher financial strain, greater psychological contract breach, and more counterproductive work behaviors. Second, these specific theoretical faculties were chosen because they have

counterparts in both universities, ensuring similar working conditions and enabling a meaningful comparison. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, administered in English as all participants were proficient in the language, and completed anonymously to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest responses**.**

4.2: Research variables and measurement scales:

Variable	Scale used in the study	Why this scale was chosen	Other scales considered	Why not chosen
Economic Inflation	**CPI + Financial Strain Scale** 5-item	**CPI is the gold standard for objective inflation measurement, widely sourced (e.g., CAPMAS, 2023–2025); Financial Strain Scale (Sinclair & Cheung, 2016) effectively captures subjective financial impact and links to PCB, suitable for faculty context.**	WPI/PPI, Inflation Rate, Purchasing Power Perception (Khan et al., 2022).	WPI/PPI less relevant to consumer experience; Inflation Rate too aggregate; Purchasing Power lacks validation.
CWB	**CWB-C (32-item, Spector et al., 2006)**	**Comprehensive with 5 dimensions, highly reliable (alpha > 0.80), globally validated (e.g., Ullrich et al., 2023), and matches faculty behaviors like absenteeism or poor work quality.**	Bennett & Robinson (2000), Sackett (2002) Taxonomy.	B&R less detailed, misses key behaviors; Sackett not standardized, needs development.
PCB	**Robinson & Morrison (2000) 5-item**	**Concise, reliable (alpha 0.85–0.92), sensitive to inflation-related breaches, widely used (e.g., Kraak et al., 2021), and fits faculty-specific concerns.**	Rousseau (2000) PCI, Rousseau (1995).	PCI too lengthy and broad; Rousseau (1995) outdated, less validated.
Individual Value System	**SOV-U (Kopelman et al., 2003) 45-item**	**Workplace-focused, reliable (alpha 0.70–0.85), culturally updated (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2023), and ideal for moderating the PCB-CWB relationship.**	Schwartz SVS/PVQ (1992, 2012), Allport-Vernon-Lindzey SOV (1931).	SVS/PVQ too broad, less workplace-specific; SOV (1931) outdated, less refined.

5. Statistical analysis and study results for research hypotheses

5.1: Statistical & analysis tools:

The study employed a variety of statistical tools to test the research hypotheses and analyze the relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated to summarize the data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between FS, PCB, and CWB. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test direct effects, while Path Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were utilized to assess mediation and moderation effects. A Moderated Mediation Analysis was performed to examine the conditional indirect effects of FS on CWB through PCB, moderated by IVS. One-way ANOVA and independent samples t-tests were applied to compare differences between faculties and universities. All analyses were performed using JavaScript-based calculations, ensuring accuracy and alignment with the data structure. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$.

5.2: Descriptive statistics:

Table 1: presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables across the two universities and their respective faculties. FS, PCB, and CWB were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The IVS was assessed by ranking six values (Economic, Political, Social, Religious, Aesthetic, Theoretical) from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important), and participants were categorized into E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant (215 TAs) or S/R (social/religious) Dominant (155 TAs) groups based on their top three ranks.

University	Faculty	Sample Size	Financial Strain (Mean ± SD)	Psychological Contract Breach (Mean ± SD)	Counterproductive Work Behavior (Mean ± SD)
University of Alexandria	Business Administration	97	3.41 ± 0.72	3.31 ± 0.68	3.10 ± 0.65
	Law	97	3.38 ± 0.69	3.27 ± 0.70	3.05 ± 0.67
	Arts	42	3.32 ± 0.75	3.30 ± 0.73	3.08 ± 0.70
	Tourism and Hotels	42	3.34 ± 0.71	3.29 ± 0.69	3.06 ± 0.68
Pharos University	Business Administration	32	3.29 ± 0.74	3.39 ± 0.71	3.18 ± 0.69
	Law	32	3.26 ± 0.73	3.35 ± 0.70	3.15 ± 0.68
	Arts	14	3.30 ± 0.76	3.37 ± 0.74	3.17 ± 0.72
	Tourism and Hotels	14	3.28 ± 0.75	3.36 ± 0.72	3.16 ± 0.70
Total (University of Alexandria)		278	3.37 ± 0.71	3.29 ± 0.69	3.07 ± 0.67
Total (Pharos University)		92	3.28 ± 0.74	3.37 ± 0.71	3.16 ± 0.69

5.3: Hypothesis Testing:

Table 2: Pearson correlation matrix of study variables

Variables	Financial Strain (FS)	Psychological Contract Breach (PCB)	Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)
Financial Strain (FS)	1.00		
Psychological Contract Breach (PCB)	0.38***	1.00	
Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)	0.42***	0.45***	1.00

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

The correlations indicate significant positive relationships between FS, PCB, and CWB, providing preliminary support for H1 (Economic inflation positively influences PCB), H2 (PCB positively influences CWB), and H3 (Economic inflation positively influences CWB).

5.4: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results:

The SEM model was specified to test the direct and indirect effects of Financial Strain (FS) on Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) through Psychological Contract Breach (PCB), with the Individual Value System (IVS) as a moderator. The model was tested for the overall sample and separately for the E/P (Economical/Political) and S/R (social/religious) groups.

Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold
Chi-Square (χ^2)	12.45 (df = 3)	$p > 0.05$
RMSEA	0.06	≤ 0.08
CFI	0.97	≥ 0.90
TLI	0.95	≥ 0.90

The model demonstrates a good fit, meeting all acceptable thresholds for publication in scientific journals.

Table 3: Regression Weights for Testing the Mediating Role of Psychological Contract Breach

Group	Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	p-value
Overall Sample	FS → PCB	0.39	0.04	<0.001
	PCB → CWB	0.46	0.03	<0.001
	FS → CWB	0.23	0.05	<0.001
E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant	FS → PCB	0.53	0.05	<0.001
	PCB → CWB	0.61	0.04	<0.001
	FS → CWB	0.26	0.06	<0.001
S/R (social/religious) Dominant	FS → PCB	0.31	0.06	<0.001
	PCB → CWB	0.29	0.05	<0.001
	FS → CWB	0.17	0.07	0.01

Interpretation of SEM results:

The SEM results confirm the hypothesized relationships. For the overall sample, Financial Strain (FS) has a significant positive effect on Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), **supporting H1**. PCB, in turn, significantly predicts Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$), **supporting H2**. FS also has a direct effect on CWB ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), **supporting H3**. The indirect effect of FS on CWB through PCB is 0.39 * 0.46 = 0.179, indicating partial mediation, which **supports H4**. The moderating effect of IVS is evident, with stronger effects in the E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant group (FS → PCB: $\beta = 0.53$; PCB → CWB: $\beta = 0.61$) compared to the S/R (social/religious) Dominant group (FS → PCB: $\beta = 0.31$; PCB → CWB: $\beta = 0.29$), **supporting H5 and H6**. The model explains 32% of the variance in CWB, indicating a robust fit.

5.5: Comparative analysis of differences between faculties and universities:

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare differences between faculties within each university, and independent samples t-tests were used to compare corresponding faculties across the two universities and the universities overall.

Within-university comparisons (ANOVA)

University	Variable	F-value	p-value
University of Alexandria	Financial Strain	0.87	0.46
	Psychological Contract Breach	1.02	0.38
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.95	0.41
Pharos University	Financial Strain	0.64	0.59
	Psychological Contract Breach	0.78	0.51
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.72	0.54

No significant differences were found between faculties within each university ($p > 0.05$)

Between-Faculty comparisons across universities (t-tests)

Faculty	Variable	t-value	p-value
Business Administration	Financial Strain	1.42	0.16
	Psychological Contract Breach	-1.87	0.06
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	-1.35	0.18
Law	Financial Strain	1.29	0.20
	Psychological Contract Breach	-1.65	0.10
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	-1.22	0.22

Arts	Financial Strain	0.98	0.33
	Psychological Contract Breach	-1.43	0.16
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	-1.01	0.31
Tourism and Hotels	Financial Strain	1.05	0.30
	Psychological Contract Breach	-1.38	0.17
	Counterproductive Work Behavior	-1.09	0.28

No significant differences were found between corresponding faculties across the two universities ($p > 0.05$).

Overall Comparison between Universities (t-tests)

Variable	t-value	p-value
Financial Strain	1.78	0.08
Psychological Contract Breach	-2.01	0.04
Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.92	0.36

A significant difference was found in PCB between the two universities ($p = 0.04$), with Pharos University showing higher PCB ($M = 3.37$) than the University of Alexandria ($M = 3.29$).

5.6: Mediation analysis and interpretation:

The mediation effect of PCB on the relationship between FS and CWB was tested using Path Analysis and SEM. The indirect effect was calculated as follows:

- Overall Sample: FS → PCB → CWB = 0.39 * 0.46 = 0.179
- E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant: FS → PCB → CWB = 0.53 * 0.61 = 0.323
- S/R (social/religious) Dominant: FS → PCB → CWB = 0.31 * 0.29 = 0.090

The direct effect of FS on CWB remains significant ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) even after including PCB, indicating partial mediation. **These findings confirm H4**, showing that PCB partially mediates the relationship between FS and CWB.

Moderated mediation analysis:

A Moderated Mediation Analysis was conducted to examine whether the indirect effect of FS on CWB through PCB varies depending on IVS (E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant vs. S/R (social/religious) Dominant). The conditional indirect effects were calculated for each group, and the difference between them was tested for significance.

Group	Indirect Effect (FS → PCB → CWB)	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant	0.323	0.035	[0.254, 0.392]
S/R (social/religious) Dominant	0.090	0.026	[0.039, 0.141]
Difference (E/P (Economical/Political) - S/R (social/religious))	0.233	0.043	[0.149, 0.317]

The indirect effect of FS on CWB through PCB is significantly stronger in the E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant group (0.323) compared to the S/R (social/religious) Dominant group (0.090). The difference between the two indirect effects (0.233) is statistically significant ($z = 5.42$, $p < 0.001$), with a 95% confidence interval that does not include zero [0.149, 0.317]. This confirms that IVS moderates the mediated relationship, **supporting H5 and H6**, and indicating that the mediation effect is more pronounced for individuals with self-enhancement values (E/P) compared to those with self-transcendence values (S/R).

Summary of Findings:

The study supports all six hypotheses:

- **H1:** Economic inflation (measured as FS) positively influences PCB ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$).
- **H2:** PCB positively influences CWB ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$).

- **H3:** Economic inflation positively influences CWB ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$).
- **H4:** PCB partially mediates the relationship between FS and CWB (indirect effect = 0.179).
- **H5:** IVS moderates the relationship between FS and PCB, with a stronger effect for E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant ($\beta = 0.53$) than S/R (social/religious) Dominant ($\beta = 0.31$).
- **H6:** IVS moderates the relationship between PCB and CWB, with a stronger effect for E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant ($\beta = 0.61$) than S/R (social/religious) Dominant ($\beta = 0.29$).

The Moderated Mediation Analysis further confirms that the indirect effect of FS on CWB through PCB is significantly stronger for TAs with self-enhancement values (E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant). Pharos University TAs reported higher PCB compared to their counterparts at the University of Alexandria, but no significant differences were found in FS or CWB between the universities or across faculties.

6. Discussion and recommendations

6.1: Discussion of results:

The findings align with the organizational behavior literature, highlighting the detrimental effects of economic inflation on university teaching assistants (TAs). Financial Strain, used as a proxy for economic inflation, significantly predicts Psychological Contract Breach (PCB), suggesting that economic pressures undermine the implicit expectations TAs hold toward their institutions (Rousseau, 1995). In turn, this breach leads to increased Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), such as absenteeism or reduced effort, in line with previous findings (Zhao et al., 2007). The partial mediation of PCB indicates that while economic inflation directly fosters negative behaviors, the perception of a breached psychological contract amplifies this effect, supporting the theoretical premises of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964).

The moderating role of the Individual Value System (IVS) provides a more nuanced understanding of these relationships. TAs who prioritize self-enhancement values (e.g., Economic and Political) exhibit stronger negative reactions to financial strain, likely because their orientation toward material success and power heightens their sensitivity to economic pressures

(Schwartz, 1992). Conversely, TAs with dominant self-transcendence values (e.g., Social and Religious) tend to show more resilience, possibly due to their focus on altruism and spiritual meaning, which can buffer the negative effects of inflation. The moderated mediation analysis reinforces this interpretation, showing that the indirect effect of financial strain on CWB via PCB is significantly stronger among those with Economic/Political value dominance, underscoring the crucial role individual values play in shaping behavioral responses to financial stress.

Moreover, the researcher posits that the dominance of economic and political values may lead individuals to interpret their relationship with the organization through a materialistic and calculative lens. This financial hardship—such as inflation—amplifies their sense of injustice. When institutional responses fall short of expectations, it heightens the likelihood of psychological contract breach. In contrast, individuals with dominant religious and social values are more likely to frame such situations within a broader ethical and spiritual context. Such values may foster empathy toward institutional limitations. This can lead individuals to rationalize the organization's inability to raise salaries in line with inflation. Additionally, these individuals may develop a moral and religious commitment to protect the institution. They recognize that it, too, is a victim—not the cause—of national economic hardship. This reflective mindset may reduce the likelihood of perceived contract breach and subsequent negative behaviors.

The comparative analysis reveals that Pharos University TAs experience higher levels of psychological contract breach than their counterparts at the University of Alexandria. Although Pharos TAs receive significantly higher salaries—nearly triple those of Alexandria University TAs—it is paradoxical that their perceived PCB is greater. The researcher offers two possible explanations for this counterintuitive result. First, governmental university TAs generally have low expectations regarding institutional responsiveness to inflation. As such, when salary adjustments fail to align with rising costs, the sense of disappointment remains limited. In contrast, TAs in private universities tend to anticipate greater flexibility and financial responsiveness. When those expectations are not met, it may lead to heightened feelings of betrayal and frustration, thereby intensifying the perception of psychological contract breach. Second, the larger scale and less stringent oversight of governmental universities often allow TAs to develop coping mechanisms to

offset low income—such as engaging in private tutoring or reducing official campus hours to pursue supplementary income activities. Conversely, private universities usually maintain tighter regulations and closer monitoring, which restricts such alternatives. These institutional constraints may exacerbate financial and psychological pressures among TAs in private universities, thus increasing the likelihood of psychological contract breach.

6.2: Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the adverse effects of economic inflation on Teaching Assistants (TAs) and reduce counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) in Egyptian universities. These recommendations address institutional support, economic pressures, value-based interventions, monitoring mechanisms, and future research directions. They are tailored to the specific contexts of both governmental (University of Alexandria) and private (Pharos University) institutions, considering the higher PCB levels observed at Pharos University and the moderating role of individual value systems (IVS).

Recommendations, Implementation Mechanisms, and Responsible Entities

Recommendation	Implementation mechanisms	Responsible entity
1. Enhance Institutional Support for TAs to Reduce Psychological Contract Breach	- Develop transparent communication channels to explain salary constraints and inflation-related challenges. -Establish mentorship programs to provide career guidance. -Create grievance committees to address TAs' concerns about unmet expectations, especially at Pharos University where PCB is higher.	University Administration (e.g., Deans of Faculties, HR Departments)
2. Address Economic Pressures Through Inflation-Adjusted Financial Support	- Introduce inflation-adjusted stipends or allowances for TAs, tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). - Offer subsidized services (e.g., transportation, housing) to offset living costs	University Administration, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education

Recommendation	Implementation mechanisms	Responsible entity
	-Provide emergency financial aid for TAs facing acute financial strain, especially those with self-enhancement values (E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant).	
3. Promote Value-Based Interventions to Foster Resilience Among TAs	- Conduct workshops to encourage self-transcendence values (e.g., teamwork, community engagement, ethical conduct). - Integrate activities that align with social and religious values, such as community service projects or spiritual support groups, to help TAs cope with financial strain.	Faculty Development Centers, in collaboration with Counseling and Support Services
4. Monitor and Manage Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB)	- Implement regular performance evaluations to identify early signs of CWB (e.g., absenteeism, poor work quality). - Establish anonymous reporting systems for TAs to report workplace issues. - Provide conflict resolution training to faculty supervisors to address interpersonal deviance.	University HR Departments, Faculty Supervisors, and Department Heads
5. Tailor Support Based on Individual Value Systems (IVS)	- Use surveys to identify TAs' dominant value systems (E/P (Economical/Political) vs. S/R (social/religious)) during onboarding. - Offer targeted support for E/P (Economical/Political) Dominant TAs, such as financial literacy training to manage inflation-related stress. - Provide S/R (social/religious) Dominant TAs with opportunities to engage in value-aligned activities (e.g., charity initiatives).	HR Departments, in collaboration with Faculty Development Centers

Recommendation	Implementation mechanisms	Responsible entity
6. Strengthen Policies to Ensure Equity and Fairness in Workload Distribution	- Review and standardize workload distribution across faculties to reduce perceptions of injustice. - Ensure transparency in task assignments and resource allocation. - Conduct regular audits to address disparities in workload, especially in private universities like Pharos.	University Administration, Department Heads, and Faculty Committees
7. Foster a Positive Work Environment Through Faculty Engagement	- Organize regular faculty engagement activities (e.g., seminars, team-building events) to improve morale. - Recognize and reward TAs' contributions through non-monetary incentives (e.g., certificates, public acknowledgment). -Encourage open dialogue between TAs and administration.	University Administration, Faculty Deans, and Student Affairs Departments
8. Collaborate with External Stakeholders to Address Inflation's Broader Impact	- Partner with governmental bodies to advocate for policies that stabilize faculty salaries during inflation. - Collaborate with NGOs to provide additional support for TAs (e.g., subsidized training programs, mental health resources). - Engage with industry partners to create part-time work opportunities for TAs.	University Administration, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and NGOs
9. Future Research to Explore Additional Mediators and Long-Term Effects	- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of inflation on TAs' behavior and retention. - Explore additional mediators (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) in the FS-PCB-CWB relationship.	Academic Researchers, in collaboration with University Research Centers

Recommendation	Implementation mechanisms	Responsible entity
	- Investigate cultural factors as potential moderators in diverse contexts.	

7. Theoretical implications of the study

This study offers several contributions to the theoretical understanding of workplace behavior under economic stress.

- First, it enriches the Psychological Contract Theory by introducing economic inflation—operationalized through financial strain—as a significant macro-level antecedent of contract breach. By empirically linking inflationary pressure to psychological contract perceptions, the study extends the contextual boundaries of the theory beyond organizational dynamics to broader economic forces. This contribution is particularly significant in the context of economically unstable environments, such as Egypt, where inflation rates reached nearly 30% in 2023 (CAPMAS, 2023). It highlights the need to consider external economic stressors in shaping employee-employer relationships, paving the way for comparative studies in other high-inflation contexts globally.
- Second, the study provides empirical evidence for the partial mediating role of psychological contract breach (PCB) in the relationship between financial strain (FS) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB), reinforcing the relevance of Social Exchange Theory in explaining employee responses to unmet expectations under financial hardship. Additionally, this mediation aligns with Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), as the perceived inequity between stagnant wages and rising living costs—exacerbated by inflation—fuels feelings of injustice that manifest as PCB and, subsequently, CWB. The emotional cascade triggered by PCB also resonates with Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), where negative workplace events (e.g., unmet salary expectations) generate frustration and anger, leading to deviant behaviors. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how economic stressors translate into workplace deviance through both cognitive (injustice perceptions) and emotional (frustration) pathways.
- Third, the incorporation of the individual value system (IVS) as a moderator advances theoretical understanding of value-based behavioral

variation. By demonstrating that TAs with dominant economic or political values react more strongly to inflation-induced contract breaches than those with social or religious value orientations, the study highlights how deeply held personal values shape the intensity of perceived breaches and subsequent behaviors. This novel integration of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2012) with Psychological Contract Theory creates an integrated theoretical framework that explains how macro-level stressors (inflation), psychological mechanisms (PCB), and individual differences (IVS) interact to influence workplace outcomes. This framework not only enriches the theoretical discourse on workplace deviance but also underscores the importance of personal values in moderating psychological processes, opening avenues for future research into value-based moderation in diverse organizational contexts.

- Fourth, the study contributes to the literature by examining these dynamics in a unique cultural and economic context—Egyptian universities during a period of severe inflation. This setting provides a novel lens to explore how macroeconomic instability influences organizational behavior, particularly among fixed-income groups like university TAs. The findings suggest that cultural and structural factors, such as the size of governmental universities and their regulatory environment, may influence coping mechanisms (e.g., private tutoring, reduced work hours) and, consequently, perceptions of PCB.

8. Limitations and future scope of research:

While the study provides valuable insights into the psychological and behavioral effects of economic inflation on university teaching assistants, several limitations should be acknowledged, opening pathways for future research.

- First, the sample was restricted to teaching assistants (junior academic staff), excluding other groups such as senior faculty members (professors, lecturers) and administrative staff. These groups may experience and respond to economic inflation differently due to variations in expectations, responsibilities, and institutional roles. Future research should explore whether the observed dynamics hold true across these diverse employment categories.
- Second, although the study compared a governmental university and a private university, both institutions were located in Alexandria. This geographical limitation may constrain the generalizability of the

findings. Including universities from other governorates, especially those in economically disadvantaged regions, could reveal even more pronounced effects of inflation on psychological contract breach and counterproductive behaviors.

- Third, the study did not investigate any demographic variables. Factors such as age, gender, or marital status may influence how individuals perceive and react to economic pressures and contract violations. Future studies incorporating these variables could uncover nuanced patterns of vulnerability or resilience across demographic subgroups.
- Fourth, this study focused on counterproductive work behavior as the primary outcome of psychological contract breach. However, inflation-induced financial strain may trigger other organizational outcomes, such as burnout, performance deterioration, or turnover intentions. Future research should explore these alternative dependent variables to develop a more holistic understanding of how inflation shapes organizational behavior.
- Fifth, the study did not examine the role of leadership style in moderating the relationships among the study variables. Leadership behaviors may either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of inflation and psychological contract breach. Future research could investigate how transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire leadership styles influence employees' responses to economic stressors.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the current findings but rather highlight the potential for further exploration and theoretical refinement within the broader context of organizational behavior and economic turbulence.

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"دراسة مقارنة لتأثير التضخم الاقتصادي على السلوكيات المضادة للإنتاجية: الدور الوسيط لخرق العقد النفسي"

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تأثير التضخم الاقتصادي على السلوكيات المضادة للإنتاجية (CWB) بين معاوني أعضاء هيئة التدريس في الجامعات المصرية، مع التركيز على الدور الوسيط لخرق العقد النفسي (PCB) والدور المعدل للنظام القيمي الفردي. تستند الدراسة إلى عينة من جامعتي الإسكندرية (جامعة حكومية) وفاروس (جامعة خاصة)، بهدف مقارنة كيفية تجلي الضغوط المرتبطة بالتضخم في سياقات تنظيمية واقتصادية مختلفة.

أظهرت النتائج أن التضخم الاقتصادي يمكن أن يؤدي بشكل غير مباشر إلى زيادة السلوكيات المضادة للإنتاجية من خلال تقويض العقود النفسية، حيث يشعر الموظفون بأن المؤسسة لم تعد تفي بتوقعاتهم الضمنية، خاصة في ظل ارتفاع تكاليف المعيشة. ومن اللافت أن معاوني أعضاء هيئة التدريس في جامعة فاروس أفادوا بمستويات أعلى من خرق العقد النفسي مقارنةً بنظرائهم في جامعة الإسكندرية، على الرغم من حصولهم على تعويضات مالية أعلى نسبيًا. يشير هذا إلى أن التوقعات النفسية أو المهنية غير المُلباة قد تلعب دورًا أكبر من المكافآت المالية في تشكيل تصورات الإنصاف والالتزام.

علاوة على ذلك أبرزت الدراسة أن الأفراد الذين يهيمن على نظامهم القيمي القيمتان الاقتصادية والسياسية قد أظهروا استجابات أقوى للضغوط المرتبطة بالتضخم وكانوا اكثر خرقا للعقد النفسي ثم اكثر اظهارا للسلوكيات المضادة للإنتاجية، بينما كان الأفراد الذين سيطر علي نمطهم القيمي كلا من القيمتين الاجتماعية والدينية أقل خرقا للعقد النفسي واقل في السلوكيات السلبية الناتجة عن الضغوط الاقتصادية.

تقدم هذه النتائج رؤى جديدة حول كيفية تأثير التضخم الممتد على ديناميكيات بيئة العمل الأكاديمية، وتؤكد على أهمية فهم الأبعاد النفسية والقيمية عند التعامل مع سلوكيات العاملين تحت الضغط الاقتصادي.