

Factors Related to Organisational Commitment amongst Social Workers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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Abstract

This study examined the contribution of social–demographic characteristics, employee attitudes and environmental factors in explaining levels of organisational commitment amongst public sector social workers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected in the summer of 2016 from employees at twelve local directorates of the Ministry of Social Development ($N = 237$) in the West Bank. Palestinian social workers reported extremely high levels of overall organisational commitment. Results of multiple regressions revealed predictors of this outcome, including job stress, job satisfaction and service orientation. As hypothesised, job satisfaction and service orientation were positively related to the dependent variable. Surprisingly, higher levels of job stress were related to higher levels of organisational commitment. Implications for organisational policies and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Job dissatisfaction, job stress, organisational commitment, organisational support, Palestine, service orientation, social workers

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Introduction

Employees play a critical role in the success and service effectiveness of business and social service organisations (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin *et al.*,

2017). Workers' attitudes towards their job and employer significantly influence their behaviour, and, in turn, service outcomes (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). Organisational commitment, a central concept in the human resources literature, is a measure of an employee's acceptance of organisational goals and willingness to dedicate effort in achieving those goals (Armstrong, 2009) and includes three dimensions: affective (i.e. feelings of wanting to stay), continuances (i.e. feelings of needing to stay) and normative (i.e. feeling an obligation to remain) commitments (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Dunham *et al.*, 1994). These three components reflect the desire to remain because of high-quality, worker-friendly workplace conditions, the need to remain because of lack of alternatives and the obligation to remain as a result of high levels of loyalty (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Low levels of organisational commitment have been linked to absenteeism, tardiness and worker turnover (Armstrong, 2009; Aamodt, 2016; Griffin *et al.*, 2017). These outcomes translate into substantial financial and service costs for organisations (Aamodt, 2016; Griffin *et al.*, 2017). Researchers have also found that low levels of organisational commitment can undermine the relationships between social workers and their clients, a necessary ingredient for effective delivery of human service interventions (Hasenfeld, 2010).

Because of the topic's significance for organisational success, an extensive body of research has examined factors related to organisational commitment in the field of business. Although less developed, several studies have investigated the topic in the field of human services. Some studies focused on the relationship between individual characteristics, such as age, level of education and gender and organisational commitment (Svallfors *et al.*, 2001; Giffords, 2009; Mahantan, 2012; Rafiee *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Hopkins, 2017). Other studies examined worker attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Landsman, 2008; Griffin *et al.*, 2017), job stress (Chang, 1999; McLean and Andrew, 1999; Cicei, 2012), working in unsafe climate (Kim and Hopkins, 2015), organisational support or work conditions (Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Landsman, 2008), organisational structure (Mugizi *et al.*, 2019) and organisational commitment.

Yet, little is known about factors related to organisational commitment amongst social workers, especially in fragile or emerging states such as Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). In addition to challenges seemingly endemic to the social work profession (e.g. job stress, low pay, high caseload), additional challenges persist throughout OPT such as political violence, restrictions on movement, extreme unemployment and military occupation (World Bank, 2001; United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2007; Easton *et al.*, 2017). These challenges inhibit the ability of Palestinian social workers to complete tasks and increase feelings of stress and anger (Blome and Safadi, 2016), ultimately undermining service provision and organisational effectiveness. Given these professional and environmental hazards, it is important to

investigate factors related to organisational commitment amongst public sectors social workers in OPT. Results will have practice and policy implications for human service organisations operating in fragile nations.

Literature review

Conceptual framework

Scholars have addressed a wide range of factors that contribute to organisational commitment and other organisational outcomes. These factors can be classified as those related to the following: individuals (e.g. characteristics, values, perception), groups and teams, organisational structure (e.g. autonomy), and environmental conditions around an organisation (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). This study was guided by this conceptual framework, but includes only three types of factors in predicting organisational commitment: individual characteristics, employee attitudes towards their profession and job, and environmental factors surrounding the organisation. For individual factors, workers differ in personal characteristics (e.g. age, education, employment status, knowledge, experience), which can influence organisational commitment and service outcomes (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). Another category of factors consists of employee attitudes towards the aspects of their job and profession. Such attitudes and their consequences on behaviour are strongly correlated with service outcomes and customer satisfaction (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). Finally, environmental factors also affect organisational functioning, performance and achievement of its goals such as political, economic, cultural and social setting (Schmid, 2009; Griffin *et al.*, 2017). Guided by this framework, this study will examine the influence of a set of individual characteristics (i.e. background characteristics), work-related attitudes (i.e. job stress, job satisfaction, service orientation, organisational support) and an environmental factor in OPT (i.e. exposure to violence). Next, we review literature on each potential predictor and organisational commitment.

Job stress and organisational commitment

Workplace stress is commonly investigated as a potential predictor of organisational commitment. Several workplace characteristics produce job stress, including demanding work-loads, job insecurity, relationships with supervisors and co-workers, and violence (Aamodt, 2016). Research has demonstrated that job stress can have destructive consequences, such as low levels of productivity, withdrawal behaviours (e.g.

absenteeism and leaving) and negative attitudes, such as low motivation (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). There is a body of research that indicates that these relationships can be influenced by job resources, such as supervisory support or level of autonomy experienced by workers (Spector, 1986; Kim and Stoner, 2008).

Scholars have also examined the relationships between job stress and organisational commitment. In a sample of support staff employees at higher education institutions in South Africa, Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) reported a negative association between job stress and organisational commitment, due to high work-load, lack of autonomy and lack of suitable training and equipment. In another study, Cicei (2012) found negative correlations between job stress and all three dimensions of organisational commitment (effective, normative and continuance). Within the field of human services, McLean and Andrew (1999) found that job stress was negatively associated with commitment amongst managers and front line caseworkers; employees who experienced higher levels of stress reported lower levels of organisational commitment (McLean and Andrew, 1999). Although there is very little research on social workers in low-resource settings, we hypothesise that job stress will be negatively related to organisational commitment in this study amongst Palestinian social workers.

Job satisfaction and organisational commitment

Job satisfaction focuses on a person's subjective assessment of their job in terms of work-load, compensation, promotion and other factors (Robin and Judge, 2013). Scholars have found a strong association between job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as low levels of both concepts can produce problematic worker behaviours including absenteeism, lateness and turnover (Mosadeghrad *et al.*, 2008; Aamodt, 2016). Across several sectors of the economy, job satisfaction has been positively linked to organisational commitment for employees in medical and hospital settings (Mosadeghrad *et al.*, 2008; Top and Gider, 2013), telecommunication and energy industries (Mahantan, 2012), dairy co-operatives (O'Driscoll and Randall, 1999) and manufacturing (Abdelmoteleb, 2019). Within the human service sector, several studies have found empirical evidence for a direct positive association between job satisfaction and organisational commitment (McLean and Andrew, 1999; Sikorska-Simmons, 2005; Landsman, 2008). Also, Pithouse *et al.* (2018) found that social workers are satisfied with their performance quality, possibly because of role clarity and high levels of autonomy. Our literature review did not find any studies on this relationship amongst social workers in OPT. However, based on previous empirical work in the developed nations,

we hypothesise that job satisfaction and organisational commitment will be positively related in this study.

Service orientation and organisational commitment

For more than three decades, scholars have examined levels and predictors of commitment to one's profession amongst employees in various sectors, such as nurses and medical technologists (Blau, 1985, 1999) and researchers in academic institutions (Chang, 1999). Professional commitment is an important topic because it can influence workers' attitudes and behaviours in a positive or negative direction. Known collectively as service orientation, these attitudes and behaviours can impact individual (e.g. organisational commitment) and business (e.g. performance, turnover) outcomes (Lytle and Timmerman, 2006; Teng and Barrows, 2009; Dusek *et al.*, 2014). More specifically within the human service profession, scholars have focused on employee perceptions of the importance and impact of their work (e.g. Landsman, 2000, 2008). In a pioneering study of child welfare professionals in one Midwestern state in the USA, Landsman (2008) found that service orientation was directly and indirectly (through job satisfaction) related to organisational commitment. She concluded that '...the service orientation that employees bring to their jobs has unique and strong explanatory power over their commitment to the organisation' (Landsman, 2008, p. 125). Based on these studies, we hypothesise that service orientation will be positively related to organisational commitment amongst Palestinian social workers.

Organisational support and organisational commitment

Another work-related factor that may impact organisational commitment is workers' perceptions of the level of support provided by their employer. Perceived organisational support refers to the extent that employees believe that their employer is concerned with their well-being and values their contributions to the organisation (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Dating back to the 1990s, this concept has been studied extensively in fields of management and psychology (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004; Aubé *et al.*, 2007). Numerous studies have found empirical evidence for positive associations between organisational support and organisational commitment across diverse employment settings, including private sector, public sector, healthcare, academia and others (Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Some studies have advanced our understanding of this relationship. For example, amongst Canadian prison employees, Aubé *et al.* (2007) found that workers who perceived higher levels of organisational support

reported higher levels of both affective and normative commitments. In O'Driscoll and Randall's (1999) study of dairy industry employees in Ireland and New Zealand, organisational support was positively related to affective commitment and negatively related to continuance commitment. In one of the few studies of human service professionals, Landsman (2008) found that organisational support had a direct, positive effect on organisational commitment, but it also served as a mediator between other work variables (e.g. supervisor support, communication, promotion opportunities) and organisational commitment. Based on the extant literature, we hypothesise that Palestinian social worker perceptions of organisational support will be positively related to organisational commitment.

Exposure to political violence and organisational commitment

An environmental factor that could impact organisational commitment is exposure to violence. Dating back several decades, scholars have studied the occupational hazard of exposure to violence for social workers (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 1986; Rowett, 1986). Since then, many studies, both in the field of social work and in other professions, have examined consequences of exposure to workplace violence (e.g. Littlechild *et al.*, 2016). For example, an unsafe environment was negatively associated with organisational commitment in general (Kim and Hopkins, 2015). Results of other studies indicated that workplace violence negatively influences affective organisational commitment (Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2007; Yuksel and Tuncsiper, 2011; Courcy *et al.*, 2016) and normative commitment (Erdogan and Yildirim, 2017), but is positively correlated with turnover intentions (Yuksel and Tuncsiper, 2011; Courcy *et al.*, 2016). Scholars have also emphasised the importance of understanding the impact of external environment on employee and organisational behaviours (Griffin *et al.*, 2017). In fragile or emerging nations such as OPT, sources of violence may extend beyond the workplace and into the political arena, military occupation or active wars. Some scholarship has examined political violence and conflict on social work practice in analogous settings such as Northern Ireland, including the need to revise educational curriculum and training of social workers for practice effectiveness (Heenan and Birrell, 2011; Coulter *et al.*, 2013). Results of a number of qualitative studies in OPT have revealed that the external environment is replete with acute and residual political violence, which directly impacts the personal and professional lives of helpers (Lindsay, 2007; Blome and Safadi, 2016). However, none of these studies investigated the relationship between exposure to violence and organisational commitment. Nonetheless, we hypothesise

that exposure to violence will be negatively related to organisational commitment in this study.

Individual-level characteristics and organisational commitment

Previous studies have examined the contribution of demographic and background characteristics in predicting organisational commitment across different employment sectors (e.g. healthcare managers, workers in service industries, social workers). Interestingly, results are inconsistent. For example, several studies have found a positive relationship between age and organisational commitment (Svallfors *et al.*, 2001; Mahantan, 2012; Rafiee *et al.*, 2015), but other studies have not found any relationship between these variables (Taormina, 1999; Giffords, 2009; Top and Gider, 2013). Regarding gender, Taormina (1999) found that women have higher levels of affective attachment to organisations than males. However, other studies have found that organisational commitment is not related to gender (Svallfors *et al.*, 2001; Giffords, 2009; Mahantan, 2012; Top and Gider, 2013). For level of education, research results are also mixed. Although some studies reported a positive relationship between education and organisational commitment (e.g. Rafiee *et al.*, 2015), other studies have found a negative relationship (Taormina, 1999), no correlation (Top and Gider, 2013) or that the positive relationship becomes non-significant when class status is introduced in the model (Svallfors *et al.*, 2001). For personal income, findings are also mixed on its relationship to organisational commitment (Gifford, 2009; Top and Gider, 2013). Because of the conflicting results in the extant literature, we included several individual level characteristics as control variables in this study (i.e. age, gender, income, education, children, contractor status).

Based on our literature review, many studies have investigated organisational commitment in different settings and study populations. However, few studies examined this topic amongst social workers or employees within social service organisations. Existing scholarship is largely focused on developed or Western populations; we could not identify any studies that examined organisational commitment amongst social workers in OPT or similar emerging nations. To avoid problems related to overgeneralising results from North America, Meyer *et al.*, (2008) called for research in different cultures and nations. Therefore, this study attempts to rectify the gap in knowledge and provide insights that enhance our understanding about predictors of organisational commitment amongst a sample of Palestinian social workers employed by the Palestinian National Authority.

Method

Data source

A cross-sectional design was used to collect data from social workers ($N=237$) employed by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) in the OPT. MoSD is the main governmental body that is responsible for developing and implementing the social services for low-income families (e.g. cash and in-kind assistance), and empowerment programmes for poor and marginalised groups. It is the largest provider of social services in OPT working in seventeen cities in West Bank and Gaza Strip (Palestinian National Authority [PNA] MoSD, 2014). Data were collected from MoSD offices in twelve West Bank cities (e.g. Nablus, Jenin and Bethlehem) in summer 2016. The survey consisted of a paper-based, self-administered and anonymous questionnaire in Arabic. After obtaining approval from MoSD, the first author visited each directorate and conducted meetings with social workers to explain the purpose to study, distribute and collect signed consent forms, and answer participants' questions. The instrument included 102 items drawn from adapted versions of standardised, validated measures of concepts such as life satisfaction, job satisfaction, mental health and political environment.

The original questionnaire was constructed in English and then translated into Arabic by a nationally certified Arabic language instructor who has extensive experience in teaching and translations in both the USA and the Middle East. Two faculty members at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem later completed quality checks of the translated survey. The project received human subject approval from the Institutional Review Board at a major research university in the north-eastern part of the USA. Extensive efforts were made to comply with national and international standards for ethical conduct of research, including strategies to ensure privacy and confidentiality, minimise any potential harm and explain rights of informed, voluntary participation.

Measures

Organisational commitment

This six-item measure was developed by Porter *et al.* (1974) to assess employee feelings towards their employer, including their willingness to devote efforts on behalf of their organisation. Participants were asked questions about their willingness to exert extra effort for the success of organisation, level of loyalty and desire to stay at their current organisation. Responses were based on a four-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). To improve reliability, one item

from the original scale was omitted, resulting in an acceptable reliability level ($\alpha = 0.71$). An index was produced by summing the remaining five items (range = 1–15), with higher scores indicating higher levels of organisational commitment.

Job stress

We used an adapted, four-item version of Cullen *et al.*'s (1985) job stress scale. Participants responded to statements asking about levels of stress in their current job (e.g. When I am at work, I often feel tense or uptight). Response choices were based on a four-point, Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (3). Responses were summed to produce a total score (range = 0–12), with higher scores signifying more job stress. Consistent with previous research (Cullen *et al.*, 1985), the scale showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.796$).

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using Cullen *et al.*'s (1985) scale of job dissatisfaction. Three items asked about dissatisfaction with one's current job, preference to work elsewhere and unwillingness to recommend the job to a friend. Response choices were based on a three-point scale, reverse-coded, and then summed to produce a total score (range = 0–6), with higher scores indicating higher levels of job satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.72.

Service orientation

This concept was measured using a three-item index developed by Landsman (2000, 2008). Items assess employee attitudes towards the social work profession (e.g. By serving as a social worker, I feel I am making a difference in people's lives). Response choices were based on a scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). An index was created to produce a total score (range = 0–9), with higher scores indicating higher levels of service orientation. The measure demonstrated an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.76$).

Perceived organisational support

This scale was developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) to assess an employee's affective attachment to an organisation and expectancy that greater efforts to achieve organisational goals would be rewarded. We used an adapted three-item version of the scale in our study, which had good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$). Respondents were asked whether

their organisation values their contribution, appreciates extra efforts from them and cares about their well-being. Response choices were based on a four-point, Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (3). Responses were summed to produce a total score (range = 0–9), with higher scores indicating more organisational support.

Exposure to violence

To assess this environmental factor, we used an adapted version of [Dubow et al.'s \(2009\)](#) scale that assesses exposure to political conflict and violence. This measure includes six items that asked about issues such as the frequency of incurring military checkpoints, having family members imprisoned or deported, and having a family member or friend injured or killed by the Israeli military. Response choices were based on scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*many times*). An index was created to produce a total score (range = 0–18), with higher scores indicating higher levels of exposure to violence. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.81.

Control variables

Data were collected on background characteristics including age (*years*), gender (0 = *male*; 1 = *female*), level of education (1 = *secondary diploma*, 2 = *college diploma*, 3 = *bachelor's degree*, 4 = *master's degree or higher*), individual monthly income (converted from Shekels to US dollars), children (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) and status as contract worker (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*).

Analytic strategy

Univariate procedures were employed to describe sample characteristics for demographic and background characteristics as well as variables of interest. Next, bivariate Pearson's correlations were conducted to examine the association between organisational commitment and key variables in our model. Finally, multivariate analyses were conducted using ordinary least-squares regression to examine the contribution of service orientation, job stress, job satisfaction, organisational support and exposure to violence on organisational commitment, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics. Diagnostic analyses indicated conditions for regression models, including normality and linearity assumptions, were met. All analyses were conducted in SPSS 25.0 ([SPSS, 2017](#)).

Results

Sample characteristics

Descriptive results of the study respondents are presented in Table 1. The age of respondents ranged from 25 to 58 years with a mean age of 38.2 years ($SD = 9.76$). Most respondents were female (69.7%), married (78.15%), held bachelor degrees (84.4%) and were employed full time (83.8%). Additionally, approximately one-third of respondents (34.7%) identified themselves as refugees. The average monthly income^a of respondents was \$850 ($SD = 210.84$).

In terms of the dependent variable, the mean level of organisational commitment was 10.58 ($SD = 2.45$). For predictor variables, mean levels were as follows: job stress was 5.94 ($SD = 1.54$), job satisfaction was 3.64 ($SD = 1.85$), service orientation was 6.78 ($SD = 1.47$), organisational support was 3.30 ($SD = 2.04$) and exposure to violence was 6.86 ($SD = 4.84$).

Bivariate results

Correlation results are shown in Table 2 and indicate low-to-moderate correlations between most of the variables of interest in the study.

Table 1. Sample characteristics ($N = 221$)

Variables	Mean (SD)/ %	Range
Age (years)	38.16 (9.76)	25–58
Gender (% female)	69.7	
Educational level (%)		
Secondary diploma	0.4	
College diploma	3.8	
BA degree	84.4	
MA degree or higher	9.7	
Marital status (%)		
Married	78.1	
Never married	16.0	
Divorced/widowed/separated	5.9	
Have children (% yes)	84	
Refugee status (% yes)	34.7	
Employed full time (% yes)	83.8	
Contract worker (% yes)	19.7	
Individual monthly income	842.13 (210.84)	329–1863
Organisational commitment	10.58 (2.45)	1–15
Job stress	5.94 (1.54)	0–12
Job satisfaction	3.64 (1.85)	0–6
Service orientation	6.78 (1.47)	0–9
Organisational support	3.30 (2.04)	0–9
Exposure to violence	6.86 (4.84)	0–18

Note:

^aIncome is measured in US dollars, converted from Israeli Shekels using XE Currency Converter (1ILS = 0.274 USD) on 23 March 2017.

Organisational commitment was positively correlated with income ($r = 0.23, p < 0.01$), job satisfaction ($r = 0.49, p < 0.01$), service orientation ($r = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and organisational support ($r = 0.20, p < 0.01$). Results also revealed that organisational commitment was negatively associated with being female ($r = -0.17, p < 0.01$) and job stress ($r = -0.23, p < 0.01$). Additionally, income was positively related to age ($r = 0.31, p < 0.01$) and education ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$), but negatively correlated with being female ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$). Moreover, having children was positively related to age ($r = 0.15, p < 0.05$); contract worker status was negatively correlated with female ($r = -0.28, p < 0.01$) and having children ($r = -0.17, p < 0.05$). Job stress was positively associated with being female ($r = 0.21, p < 0.05$); job satisfaction was positively related to age ($r = 0.17, p < 0.05$) and personal monthly income ($r = 0.18, p < 0.01$), and negatively related to job stress ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between service orientation and job stress ($r = -0.14, p < 0.05$). Finally, exposure to political violence was positively related to age ($r = 0.20, p < 0.01$), education ($r = 0.24, p < 0.01$), monthly personal income ($r = 0.15, p < 0.01$), and organisational support ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$), and negatively correlated with job stress ($r = -0.19, p < 0.05$).

Regression results

Table 3 presents the results from the ordinary least-squares regression for organisational commitment. The overall model reached significance

Table 2. Correlation matrix between organisational commitment and study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Organisational commitment	–											
2 Age	0.12	–										
3 Female	-0.17**	-0.08	–									
4 MA or higher	0.03	0.08	-0.10	–								
5 Income	0.23**	0.31**	-0.20**	0.16*	–							
6 Have children	0.04	0.15*	-0.28**	-0.07	0.06	–						
7 Contract worker	-0.01	-0.24**	0.05	-0.04	-0.10	-0.17*	–					
8 Job stress	-0.23**	-0.08	0.21*	0.03	-0.12	0.05	-0.11	–				
9 Job satisfaction	0.49**	0.17*	-0.08	-0.08	0.18**	0.01	0.10	-0.46**	–			
10 Service orientation	0.29**	0.07	-0.13	0.05	0.03	0.08	0.14	-0.14*	0.08	–		
11 Organisational support	0.20**	0.06	-0.08	0.03	0.14*	-0.02	-0.20	1.99**	0.30**	0.09	–	
12 Exposure to violence	0.09	0.20**	-0.11	0.24*	0.15**	0.04	-0.05	-0.03	0.08	0.16*	0.03	–

Note:

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Ordinary least-squares regression results for organisational commitment ($N = 144$)

Variables	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Age	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.313
Female	-0.79	0.36	-0.17	0.027
MA or higher	0.53	0.49	0.08	0.279
Personal income	0.00	0.00	-0.09	0.289
Have children	-1.43	0.53	-0.22	0.008
Contract worker	-0.66	0.41	-0.12	0.110
Job stress	0.27	0.11	0.18	0.020
Job satisfaction	0.70	0.10	0.55	0.000
Service orientation	0.43	0.11	0.29	0.000
Organisational support	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.607
Exposure to violence	0.03	0.04	0.06	0.405
Constant	5.46	1.36		0.005
Adjusted R^2	0.355			

Note: *b* = Unstandardised regression coefficients.

and explained approximately 36% of the variance in the dependent variable ($F(11, 144) = 7.22, p < 0.001$). Of the five variables of interest, three were statistically significant in the OLS model. Job stress was related to the dependent variable, but in an unexpected direction ($b = 0.27, p = 0.020$); each additional point on the job stress scale was associated with the 0.27 increase in level of organisational commitment. As predicted, higher levels of job satisfaction were related to the higher levels of organisational commitment ($b = 0.70, p = 0.000$); each unit increase in job satisfaction was related to an increase of 0.70 in organisational commitment. Service orientation was also positively related to organisational commitment ($b = 0.43, p = 0.000$); a one unit increase in service orientation was associated with an increase of 0.43 in organisational commitment. Of the control variables, both gender (i.e. being female; $b = -0.79, p = 0.027$) and having children ($b = -1.43, p = 0.008$) were significant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine predictors of organisational commitment amongst public sector social workers in OPT. Descriptive statistics indicated that the mean for the dependent variable was 10.58 ($SD = 2.45$), a score that indicates noticeably high levels of organisational commitment within this sample (range = 0–15). Additionally, the mean score for each of the five items was 2.12, which falls between *agree* (2) and *strongly agree* (3) on statements about willingness to put in extra effort, level of loyalty and desire to stay at the organisation. These findings suggest strikingly high levels of dedication and commitment

amongst Palestinian social workers employed by MoSD. As such, they represent a valuable national asset for serving vulnerable and marginalised families living in the West Bank.

In terms of multivariate analyses, results indicated that levels of job satisfaction were positively related to organisational commitment. As satisfaction increases amongst workers, they reported feeling more committed to their employing agency or organisation. This finding is consistent with a large body of workforce literature on this association (Mosadeghrad *et al.*, 2008; Mahantan, 2012; Top and Gider, 2013; Aamodt, 2016), including in the social service profession (McLean and Andrew, 1999, Sikorska-Simmons, 2005; Landsman, 2008). Most prior work has been conducted in Western or developed nations. This study extended these findings to fragile or emerging nations such as OPT.

Additionally, service orientation, or worker attitudes towards their profession, was positively related to the dependent variable. This finding is consistent with a pioneering study amongst human service professionals (Landsman, 2008) and indicates the relationship may be viable even in fragile or emerging nations. Palestinian social workers who expressed high levels of professional pride may believe that their work not only combats social problems, but also represents a form of collective self-efficacy within the multitude of constraints imposed by military occupation. Thus, these workers may feel more committed to their employer.

Interestingly, results supported our hypothesis that job stress would be significantly related to organisational commitment, but in an unexpected direction. In our model, higher levels of stress predicted higher levels of employee commitment to MoSD. This fascinating finding is counter to the existing workforce literature in which job stress is generally linked to unproductive employee behaviours and attitudes (Griffin *et al.*, 2017) and lower levels of organisational commitment (McLean and Andrew, 1999; Cicei, 2012).

One interpretation is that Palestinian social workers operate in extremely difficult social conditions (e.g. hyper-unemployment, deep levels of poverty, severe restrictions on movement, poor sanitation, political violence) (World Bank, 2001; UNDP, 2007; Easton *et al.*, 2017), many of which are caused or magnified by Israeli military occupation. Research has found that these workers often form bonds of solidarity through the lived experience of stressful conditions and collective trauma in OPT and cultivate advanced coping strategies (Lindsay, 2007; Blome and Safadi, 2016). As such, they may view their profession as more than provision of vital human services to Palestinians living in poverty, but also as a form of empowerment or national service within MoSD. Thus, job stressors may cultivate worker resilience and dedication to organisational goals.

The finding could also be interpreted in practical, realistic terms. Job stress may reinforce worker awareness of the severe job market

constraints and lack of career opportunities in OPT, thereby increasing appreciation for their position at MoSD. A third possible explanation is that an unspecified interaction between job stress and another variable (e.g. service orientation, job satisfaction) serves as the mechanism to explain the finding. More research is needed to explicate this unexpected finding in our study.

The results have important implications for MoSD and public sector human service organisations in other fragile or emerging nations striving to increase organisational commitment amongst employees. Based on our results, one mechanism to boost worker commitment appears to be through enhancing job satisfaction. Ministry leaders can consider an array of options to increase worker satisfaction with their employment, including reward programmes, worker recognition, promotion opportunities and additional training (Mottaz, 1985; Jones *et al.*, 2009). Despite budgetary and resource limitations, there are still low-cost, non-monetary options for rewarding employees (Fisher, 2015). Another path to organisational commitment appears to be through service orientation. Ministry leaders could include assessment of service orientation, either by including standardised assessments in written application materials or by discussion of the topic during oral interviews, in the recruitment and hiring of public sector workers.

This study, however, has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, data were collected at one point in time (i.e. summer, 2016) in the West Bank only; the cross-sectional design of the study prevents causal interpretations of relationships. Conflict between Israel and Palestine, including cyclical outbreaks of military incursions and war, may impact levels of organisational commitment and should be analysed through longitudinal research. Secondly, the five-item measure of organisational commitment used in this study assessed overall commitment. Thus, we were unable to assess different dimensions of commitment (i.e. affective, normative, continuance; Meyer and Allen, 1997), which may have unique sets of predictors. Finally, we were unable to fully test the conceptual framework of organisational commitment described by Griffin *et al.* (2017). Although several variables assessed worker perceptions of their employment (e.g. stress, satisfaction), exposure to violence was the only environmental factor in the analysis. Therefore, inclusion of more environmental and organisational structure variables would enhance our understanding of organisational commitment in future studies. Exploring factors such as span of control, formalisation and centralisation will add knowledge about the effectiveness of Palestinian organisations in enhancing commitment, motivation to work, job satisfaction amongst other work-related outcomes.

Future research should also replicate this study in other emerging or fragile nations to examine whether results are generalisable beyond

OPT. It would be interesting, for example, to investigate predictors of organisational effectiveness amongst social workers in countries such as Yemen, South Sudan, El Salvador or Afghanistan. Cross-national comparative research could help identify unique differences between such nations such as cultural factors. In OPT, qualitative research should investigate the primary sources of job stressors for Palestinian social workers and relevant support mechanisms in place at MoSD to reduce those stressors. Although job stress was positively related to organisational commitment in this study, it has been linked to negative outcomes, including worker health, in other studies. Investigation of possible moderating or mediating factors, such as autonomy, or supervisory support could enhance our understanding of the role of job stress in OPT. Finally, future research should explore factors that are related to job satisfaction amongst Palestinian social workers, a topic of interest to MoSD leaders. Organisational interventions and policy changes that boost job satisfaction could have the secondary benefit of promoting organisational commitment.

Continued conflict in OPT presents unique and urgent challenges to organisational commitment for social workers at Palestinian governmental organisations such as MoSD. A resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that is based on self-determination and human rights would greatly expand possibilities for strengthening Palestinian governmental institutions. Recognising the severe constraints of the status quo, there are still opportunities to promote institutional stability and service effectiveness through research and application of findings. Based on our literature review, this study was the first of its kind to assess levels and predictors of organisational commitment of social workers in OPT. Palestinian social workers reported noticeably high levels of organisational commitment; they represent a valuable national resource for promoting the health and well-being of Palestinian families in need. Certain malleable factors (e.g. job satisfaction, service orientation) could further boost worker commitment even further with support from targeted trainings or reward programmes. MoSD remains an organisation focused on enhancing civic society in Palestine by combating poverty and providing services and support for vulnerable and marginalised citizens.

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