

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Effects of Favoritism on Employees' Intention to Leave in Governmental Organizations with the Mediating Roles of Burnout and Alienation

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Abstract

Trying to retain the employees as the main capital of an organization seems highly substantial for the survival of any organizations. There are several influential factors to retain them and prevent them from leaving. One of these factors is favoritism in the organizations. The study examines the effects of favoritism on employee's intention to leave in government organization with the mediating roles of burnout and alienation. Having reviewed the literature and in light of "Adams' Equity Theory", the data was collected using a standard questionnaire from a total sample of 379 employees. The data was then analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique using AMOS software. The results of this study revealed that favoritism, which was investigated with two variables namely nepotism and cronyism, would have a positive and significant effect on the staff leave. Furthermore, the mediating role of burnout and alienation for the impact of nepotism and cronyism on employee leave was confirmed. This study serves as a reference for favoritism management in Iranian government organization. The study provides several theoretical as well as practical implications.

Keywords: *Favoritism, Nepotism, Cronyism, Burnout, Alienation, Intention to Leave*

Introduction

The employees are always considered as the main capital of the organizations and retaining those sounds a vital task to the survival of the organizations (Sharafizadeh, Abbasi, & Mehrabi, 2021). Any organization is required to do its best to create an environment that motivates the employees to stay in the organization (Mahdavi et al., 2022). Indeed, it is asserted that the leave would both impose many financial and non-financial ramifications to the organizations which could simultaneously be a serious obstacle to the

productivity, quality and, profitability of different organizations (Iqbal, 2010).

It has been projected that costs associated with staff leave would be equal to 150 to 250 percent of the annual staff salary (Mello, 2011). It is well agreed that once an employee leaves an organization, he/she would take all the information related to the company, clients and projects, and would often bestow them to the competitors (Haider et al., 2015). Therefore, in order to minimize such costs, managers are needed to seek ways to retain

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their employees (Kevin et al, 2004). Research has shown that various factors affect the employee's intention to leave, including favoritism, nepotism, and cronyism (Arasli & Tumer, 2008).

Favoritism changes the employees' perception and conduct, leading to work leave (Erdem & Karataş, 2015). Ahmadi et al. (2012) revealed that favoritism leads to work leave and negative word of mouth advertisements against the organization. Moreover, the results reported by Gholi Rowshan et al. (2015) suggest that nepotism is a factor influencing the employees' performance. Cronyism is defined by Safina (2015) as "intention to avoid uncertainties, care for the nearest and dearest, i.e. children and close relatives".

More than 120 thousand employees are working in governmental organizations in Fars province (statistics centers of Iran, 2020) and most of them believe that the favoritism is one of the main factors behind why they lack sufficient incentive for having more efficiency (Ghanbarpour Nosrati, Bay, & Haji Anzehaei, 2021); even favoritism has intensified their motivation to leave the organization and, if possible, to migrate from the country in order to seek a right position in the same situation (Azadbakht & Tabatabaee, 2015).

Bearing this in mind, the current research is an attempt to explore the impact of favoritism with the two variables of nepotism and cronyism on the employees' leave working in governmental organizations in Fars Province, Iran, with the mediating role of job alienation and burnout.

Literature Review

Adams' Equity Theory (Adams, 1976) emphasizes the importance of employees' sense of equity in terms of the justice practiced by the organization's behavior towards them. The theory claims that if the employees feel that they are treated inequitably, they feel inequality and would then try to reduce this

injustice. They would then choose one of the subsequent ways to reduce inequity: they change the amount of their inputs (for example, they spend less energy or reduce their efforts); they try more to change the outcomes; they continue to do so by justifying the status quo; they affect the others, comparing their inputs and outcomes with those of their coworkers and encouraging them not to try hard; they leave the organization; they either increase their absenteeism or eventually resign. The findings of Hatmaker and Hassan (2021) showed that, beyond the relevance of having high expected contributions, the crucial role played by the congruence of expected contributions of leaders and employees. Findings of Bourdage (2018) showed that equity sensitivity has a direct negative effect on workplace deviance.

Since staff leave imposes costs in terms of recruitment, training, and loss of organizational knowledge and negatively affects the organization's performance by losing social and human capitals (Jaafari, & Mehrara, 2021), the organizations can significantly reduce the extra human resources costs by improving their employee retention programs (Agus & Selvaraj, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2006). It is of note that considering nepotism and cronyism when recruiting, retaining, and promoting the human resources are one of the major factors affecting the sense of employees' inequity. This would eventually lead to lack of organizational commitment (Saleem et al., 2018) and leave (Abubakar et al., 2017; Wan, 2010).

While the most imperative and arduous task of human resources management is to retain the employees (Bamberge, 2005), the existence of favoritism will compound this issue. Various factors affect the retain of manpower, such as job alienation (Santas, Isik, & Demir, 2016), job burnout (Parnell & Crandall, 2003), and favoritism (Arasli et al., 2006; Abalkhail, 2022).

Favoritism means the managers' unfair and discriminatory support of his or her favorite person in the organization. Favoritism has been defined as a great support of the person whom the manager likes more than the others and implies appointing him/her in a high position despite the lack of ability and experience necessary for such a task (Safina, 2015).

Arasli and Tumer (2008) define nepotism is the situation where a manager assigns a job to his nephews and other relatives not because of their qualifications but for their relations. Nepotism is defined by Sarpong & Maclean (2015), Jeong, Kim, & Kim, 2022; Nadeem et al, 2015 and Shabbir & Siddique, 2017 as the managers' tendency to hire and support their families, who do not have any qualification.

Nepotism has a direct impact on the level of job satisfaction and behavioral intentions, such as leave and negative word of mouth advertisements against the organization. If nepotism exists in an organization, the other employees will not be motivated. (Arasli et al., 2006; Hlaing, & Piriyaapada, 2021). Elbaz et al. (2018) found that nepotism had a negative impact on employees, management, and organization. Nepotism effects lead to such diverse issues as absenteeism, leave, disappointment, frustration, and stress.

Cronyism is defined as the selecting people regardless of their abilities and skills by their high-ranking friends (Avtac, 2010). Cronyism is a kind of favoritism in which friendship is taken into account more willingly than considering the principle of meritocracy for recruitment and promotion in an organization. Cronyism imposes a negative impact on the organization; in other words, it questions the equality and thus leads to the employees' negative perception towards the organization, losing their trust in the management (Erdem & Karataş, 2015).

It was concluded by Arasli and Tumer (2008) that cronyism contributes to job stress and negatively impacts job satisfaction, not

only in governmental organizations but also in the private sectors. Cronyism lessens the individuals' efficiency and productivity because they are treated on the basis of personal relationships, not based on their talents, knowledge, efficiency, and so forth (Nadeem et al, 2015).

The intention to leave the job has been defined as an employee's intention to leave the current job and seek another in the near future (Masroor & Fakir, 2010). There are studies indicating the relationship between job leave and burnout (Parnell & Crandall, 2003) and leave and favoritism (Erdem & Karatas, 2015). The results a research by Arasli et al. (2006) proved that nepotism exerted a negative effect on job satisfaction, intention to leave and negative word of mouth advertising.

Favoritism has been also reported to influence employee cynicism and work withdrawal (Abubakar et al., 2017). It reduces organizational commitment and increases the intention to leave (Colquitt et al., 2001). Favoritism can result in an imbalance in the organizations, which in turn is responsible for employee cynicism and may also give rise to the employees withdrawal from the organization (Wan, 2010). Furthermore, Santas, Isik and Demir (2016) found that cronyism escalates job stress which in turn has a significant impact on the employees' behavior. Masdek et al (2011) found that cronyism impacted positively on the employees intention to leave the work.

Job alienation refers to the fact that employees may not be able to fulfill their social needs and a gap would emerge between their perception of their work situation and their particular interests such as their values, aspirations, and ambitions (Santas, Isik, & Demir, 2016). From the cognitive point of view, job alienation separates the workers from their jobs and workplaces, emerging in the form of a reduction in job involvement and the lack of organizational identity (Chiaburu, Thundiylil, & Wang, 2014). Job alienation

diminishes the employee's motivation and psychologically separates him from work, resulting in a reduction in his involvement.

One of the three job alienation indicators is lack of commitment to organizational goals. In other words, the job alienation indicates the amount of distance a person has taken from his work (Hirschfeld & Field, 2000). According to Salu et al. (2010), job alienation implies the employees' inability to control work processes in the workplace. In other words, the person's opinion has no effect in decision making while not receiving any assistance or support from his colleagues and is not socially accepted in his work environment. Pelit, Diner, and Kılı (2015) found that favoritism had a positive relationship with job alienation. In line with this, Suharno et al. (2017) revealed that alienation has a significant effect on the employees' intention to leave.

The burnout concept was initially introduced in 1970 (Enache, 2013). It is usually defined as exhaustion, sluggishness, dementia, dissatisfaction, disability, aging, and mitigation of job-related motivation (Yener & Coskun, 2013). Job burnout is a form of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion,

and continuously diminishes productivity, satisfaction and commitment to the organization. On the other hand, burnout is proclaimed to give rise to occupational accidents, absenteeism and job stress (Farradina & Halim, 2016). It was demonstrated by Beaumont et al. (2016) that favoritism affects job burnout.

Given the research objectives, previous research, and the provided literature, the conceptual model of this research has been presented in Figure 1. In this model, the favoritism is investigated using its two dimensions, cronyism and nepotism, recommended by Arasli and Tumer (2008). Moreover, intention to leave is considered as the dependent variable while the two variables of burnout and alienation are considered to have a mediating role in this model. Adams' Equity Theory is considered as the structural support for this model. Based on this theory and the research objectives, it is hypothesized that favoritism results in a sense of inequity among the staff and this contributes to burnout and alienation and ultimately the intention to leave the organization.

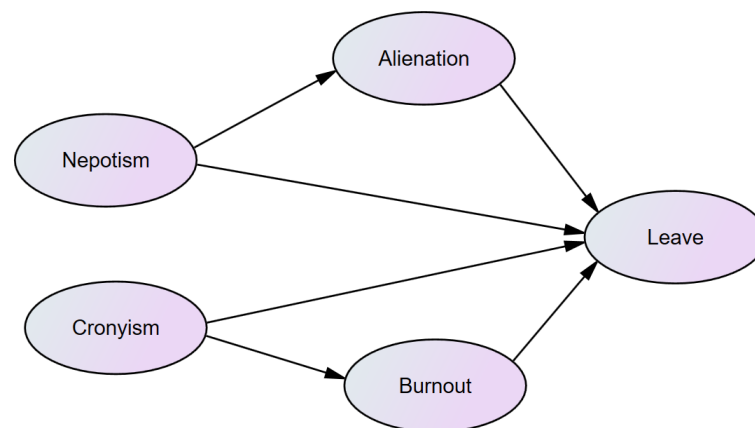


Figure 1. *The Research Conceptual Model*

Having in mind the literature and the objectives of this research, the following hypotheses could be established:

Hypothesis 1: Cronyism will positively affect the employee's intention to leave

Hypothesis 2: Nepotism will have a positive impact on employee's intention to leave

Hypothesis 3: Cronyism will have a positive impact on employee's job alienation

Hypothesis 4: Nepotism will have a positive impact on employee's job alienation.

Hypothesis 5: Cronyism will have a positive impact on employee's burnout.

Hypothesis 6: Nepotism will have a positive impact on employee's burnout.

Hypothesis 7: Job alienation will have a positive impact on employee's intention to leave

Hypothesis 8: Example: Job alienation mediates the relationship between cronyism and intention to leave

Hypothesis 9: Example: Job alienation mediates the relationship between nepotism and intention to leave

Hypothesis 10: Job burnout will have a positive impact on employee's intention to leave

Hypothesis 11: Job burnout mediates the relationship between cronyism and employees' intention to leave

Hypothesis 12: Job burnout mediates the relationship between nepotism and employees' intention to leave

Methodology

The six constructs (nepotism, cronyism, burnout, alienation and intention to leave) were measured by multiple-items scales adapted from previous studies. All items were operationalized using a five-point Likert-scale. A standard questionnaire was employed in this research, comprising 37 questions. While 16 questions dealt with assessing nepotism, 7 questions elaborated on measuring cronyism collected from Santas, Isik, and Demir, (2016). Moreover, 6 questions focused on job alienation whereas the burnout was evaluated

with 5 questions provided by Arasli and Tumer (2008). The intention to leave variable was also measured with 3 questions from the paper of Parnell and Crandall (2003). After extracting the questions related to each variable, and compiling the questionnaire, it was validated by a panel of experts including the university professors and researcher experts in governmental organizations; having received the comments from the mentioned experts. Afterwards, to adapt to this research, using a pilot study and recruiting 30 participants, the final modifications were undertaken.

It should be noted that at the time of the research there were 192 governmental organizations in Fars Province, Iran, with 120,615 employees and a total of 23,840 managers and supervisors. According to the above statistics, using Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) table and based on 1.1 ratio, 422 individuals were selected as the study samples. Of these, 321 employees and 63 managers were selected according to cluster sampling. The distribution of the questionnaire occurred during two months, i.e. January and February 2018. As a final point, 379 valid questionnaires were collected for the data analysis.

Results

The detailed demographic attributes of the respondents are tabulated in Table 1. Out of 379 respondents, 70.2% were male and 29.8% were female. Moreover, 84.2% of the respondents were employees, 13.7% supervisors, and 2.1% of them were managers in different departments. The majority of respondents held education degrees below bachelors, and had experiences less than 5 years.

Table 1.

Profile of Respondents

Variable	Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	266	70.2
	Female	113	29.8
Education	High school Diploma	98	25.9

Variable	Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	Associate Diploma	52	13.7
	Bachelor degree	100	26.4
	Master degree	75	19.8
	Ph.D.	42	11.1
	Others	12	3.2
Posts	Employees	319	84.2
	Supervisors	52	13.7
	Managers	8	2.1
Experiences	less than 5	136	35.9
	5-10	84	22.2
	10-15	55	14.5
	15-20	43	11.3
	20-25	21	5.5
	25-30	40	10.6

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) by means of AMOS 23.0 was undertaken in order to test the measurement model. Testing the measurement model is essential to see whether it attains acceptable validity and reliability prior to test if there is a significant correlation in the structural model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). After deleting eight indicators of

nepotism and one item of cronyism (due to loading below .50 or the highest Modification Index (MI) between the mentioned item and the rest), and recreating the model, the assessed measurements included the psychometric properties of the model in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Reliability and Item Loadings

Constructs	Items	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Nepotism			.92	.61
	NEP1	.81		
	NEP2 NEP3	.80		
	NEP4 NEP5	.79		
	NEP6 NEP7	.81		
	NEP8 NEP9	.79		
	NEP10 NEP11	.83		
	NEP12	.78		
		.72		
		.80		
		.79		
		.77		
	.66			
Cronyism			.86	.60
	CRO1	.73		
	CRO2	.68		
	CRO3	.84		
	CRO4	.80		
	CRO5	.78		
	CRO6	.80		

Constructs	Items	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Alienation			.70	.77
	Ali1	.73		
	Ali2	.89		
	Ali3	.92		
	Ali4	.91		
	Ali5	.92		
Burnout			.83	.69
	Bur1	.81		
	Bur2	.87		
	Bur3	.91		
	Bur4	.81		
	Bur5	.73		
Intention to Leave			.75	.79
	Leav1	.90		
	Leav2	.94		
	Leav3	.82		

As it is shown in table 2 values of composite reliability for the entire latent variables were more than 0.70, which larger than the benchmark provided by (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, factor loadings of the entire observed variables were satisfactory, corresponding to their constructs, which ranged from 0.66 to 0.92, were high above the threshold value of 0.50 to reach the convergent construct validity.

Table 2 demonstrates the whole AVE values fluctuated between 0.60 and 0.79, which is

beyond the suggested value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). The correlation matrix for the constructs has been represented in Table 3. The correlation estimates were below (0.38 – 0.80) the proposed threshold ($r = 0.85$) for the 5 sub-dimensions. The discriminant validity seems to be acceptable at the construct level in the case of all the constructs. The constructs in the proposed research model were found to be adequate; accordingly, discriminant validity is supported, i.e., there is no multicollinearity.

Table 3.

Correlation Analysis between Variables

	Nepotism	Cronyism	Alienation	Burnout	I. Leave
Nepotism	.781				
Cronyism	.739**	.774			
Alienation	.487**	.604**	.877		
Burnout	.380**	.529**	.805**	.830	
intention to Leave	.572**	.659**	.722**	.683**	.888

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The SEM was utilized to test the structural model with the aim of exploring the hypothesized conceptual framework by execution of a simultaneous test. The structural relationship among the research variables has been displayed in Figure 2.

Multiple fit indices were calculated in order to evaluate the model. Chi-squared/df = 2.886, CFI = .916, GFI = .821, NFI = .878, TLI = .908, and RMSEA = .071. The overall values reveal that there is evidence for a good model fit.

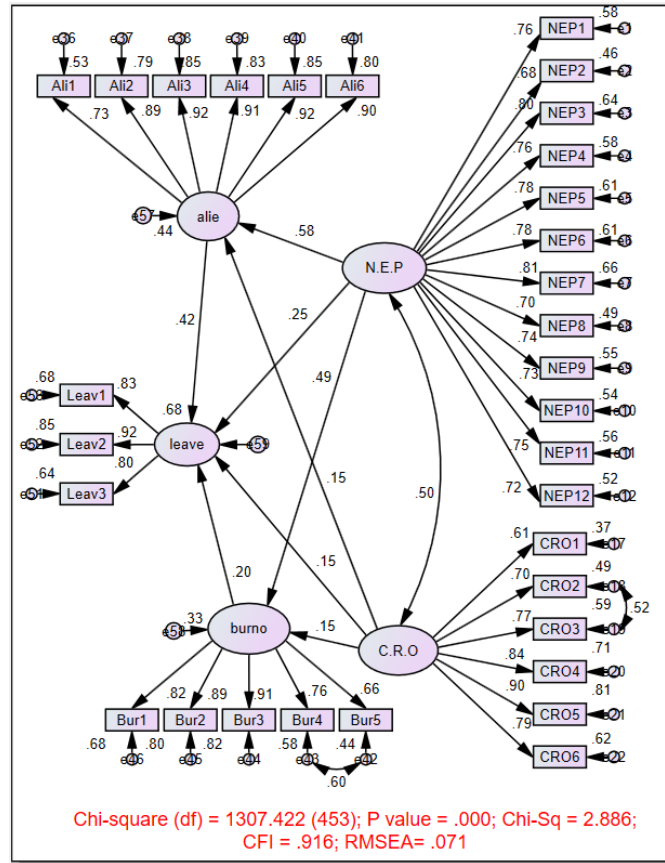


Figure 2. The Structural Model

The multi-group SEM within AMOS 23.0 was employed in order to examine the effects of independent variables of the study, namely nepotism and cronyism on the dependent variable, i.e. intention to leave by mediating roles of two variables namely burnout and alienation. Table 4 presents the standardized

regression coefficient (β), critical ratio (CR), P value, and standard error (SE), meant for interpreting the effects of two exogenous variables of nepotism and cronyism on the intention to leave through the mediating role of alienation and burnout.

Table 4.
Results of the Structural Model Test

Hypotheses	Construct	β	SE	CR	P value
1	Nepotism → Alienation	.579	.060	9.319	***
2	Nepotism → Burnout	.487	.063	7.447	***
3	Cronyism → Alienation	.146	.072	2.835	.005
4	Cronyism → Burnout	.147	.080	2.571	.010
5	Burnout → Intention to Leave	.198	.060	4.203	***
6	Alienation → Intention to Leave	.424	.070	7.700	***
7	Nepotism → Intention to Leave	.248	.072	4.246	***
8	Cronyism → Intention to Leave	.152	.080	3.370	***

***p value is significant at the .001

The results of the model test show that nepotism had a direct effect on alienation ($\beta = .579$, $CR = 9.319$ and $p < .001$), burnout ($\beta = .487$, $CR = 7.447$ and $p < .001$), and Intention to leave ($\beta = .284$, $CR = 4.246$ and $p < .001$). Moreover, cronyism had a direct effect on alienation ($\beta = .146$, $CR = 2.835$ and $p = .005$), burnout ($\beta = .147$, $CR = 2.571$ and $p < .010$), and Intention to leave ($\beta = .152$, $CR = 3.370$ and $p < .001$). Burnout and alienation had direct effects on Intention to leave ($\beta = .198$,

$CR = 4.203$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .424$, $CR = 7.700$, $p < .001$ respectively). Therefore, all 8 directed hypotheses (1-6, 7 and 10) were supported.

The multi model analysis was executed to test the mediating effects of burnout and alienation on the relationship between nepotism and cronyism with intention to leave. The results of the relationship between the variables in the full and the indirect model are provided in Table 5.

Table 5.

The regression weight in the full mediating and indirect models

DV		IV	Full model	Direct model
Nepotism	→	Intention to Leave	.233***	.542***
Cronyism	→	Intention to Leave	.150**	.237***

***p value is significant at the .001

**p value is significant at the .01

As shown in Table 5, in the full model in comparison with the direct model, the relationships between nepotism and cronyism with intention to leave were reduced (from 0.542 to 0.233 and from 0.237 to 0.150, respectively); however, when the mediating variables of alienation and burnout were included, the significance remained ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$); then based on Baron and Kenny's (1986), the partial mediation is supported. Therefore in this study, alienation and burnout mediated partially in the effect of nepotism and cronyism on intention to leave, meaning that hypotheses 8, 9, 11, and 12 were supported.

Conclusion and Discussion

Each organization struggles to create the conditions encouraging their employees to stay in their organization as much as possible. Various factors are involved in retaining the staff in the organization. One of these factors is the relationship between the employees and the managers in the organization. Based on the Adams' Equity Theory (1976), employees who work through nepotism or cronyism, not only

do not have more incentive to work, but also demotivate the other employees to work. This is because the employees working under favoritism not only can be effortlessly promoted at the career ladder, but also receive organizational and job rewards easily. Therefore the idea of leaving a job and finding a new job among unmotivated employees will indeed cause loads of problems in the organizations.

Bearing this mind, the objective of this study was to investigate the effects of the favoritism in the organizations on the employees' tendency to leave. The results of this study indicated that nepotism and cronyism had a positive and significant effect on intention to leave, either directly or indirectly, via the mediator variables of burnout and alienation. Nevertheless, the results of this study revealed that the impact of nepotism on intention to leave, either direct or indirect, was more than cronyism.

As shown by the findings of research done by Hlaing, & Piriyaapada (2021) and Colquitt et al. (2001), favoritism reduces organizational commitment and increases the intention to

leave. Alongside with their finding, the result of this study indicated that different types of favoritism in the organization (nepotism and cronyism) would not only result in employees' burnout and alienation, but also it increases their motivation to find a job outside the organization.

The results of this study prove that although both nepotism and cronyism affect the intention to leave, the impact of nepotism having a standard beta of 0.248 is more than that of cronyism with a standard beta of 0.152. Nevertheless, the results of this research highlight that the effect of nepotism on intention to leave is greater with the mediating role of alienation because the standard coefficient of the impact of nepotism on alienation was 0.579 and the effect of alienation on the intention to leave was 0.424, implying that this path has the greatest quantity effect compared to the other paths. On the other hand, the direct impact of each variable of nepotism and cronyism on intention to leave is more than the indirect effect.

In general, the research findings support the research model and give support to all of the hypotheses. This research has theoretical (academic) and managerial (practical) implications. In term of academic implications, the research can be considered as a unique study in the field of employee management and in government sector in general. The results of this research are not only consistent with the results reported in the previous literature (such as Agus & Selvaraj, 2020; Arasli & Tumer, 2008; Erdem & Karataş, 2015; Gholi Rowshan et al., 2015; and Elbaz et al., 2018), but also they are in line with Adams' Equity Theory (1976). Based on this theory, employees recognizing the existence of organizational inequities due to nepotism and cronyism in an organization not only suffer from injustice but also seek a way to leave the organization.

With regard to business implication (in the context of the study is government sector), as

the study findings of this study confirm, the practical results. First and foremost, the results of this study could be considered as a guide for public sector managers; although nepotism and cronyism in the organizations would bring the managers some short-run or personal privileges, this will not benefit the organization's strategies in the long run. This is said to be the case due to the fact that skilled workers, being considered as the largest capital of any organization, will not be interested in staying in the organization, or if they even stay in the organization, they are more likely to think of a new job outside the organization, and they would avoid exerting their energy and capability for the organization. Passing laws to impede the recruitment of managers' acquaintances in the organizations, especially the public sector, can be an influential factor affecting the employees' loyalty to the organization.

In addition, favoritism in the organization leads to job alienation. As stated by Santas, Isik, and Demir (2016), an employee loses his control over the work process due to job alienation, finding himself in an unsupported organizational environment. Therefore, this factor declines the worker's motivation in the organization and psychologically separates him from his job and thus, even if he attends the organization, he will reduce his participation in organizational activities.

Moreover, consistent with Hamid et al. (2015), stress causes depression and job burnout, and injustice caused by nepotism and cronyism can be the factors responsible for the stress in the organization. This in turn will affect the employees' burnout, thus reducing organizational commitment (Ahmad & Roslan, 2016) and causing leaving (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

To culminate this, the present study provides a conspicuous contribution to the research literature and serves as an appropriate framework helping the researchers in the future studies by providing a new model that

examines the impact of nepotism and cronyism on intention to leave with the mediating role of burnout and alienation. Findings in this study could provide managers with the necessary information to reach new ways to retain the employees

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