

RELATIONSHIP OF PUNISHMENT ANXIETY WITH CORRUPT TENDENCIES IN POLICE PERSONNEL: WORKPLACE NEUTRALIZATION AND REWARD CRAV- ING AS MODERATORS

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Abstract

This study investigated the level at which workplace neutralization and reward craving moderate the connections between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies of police personnel. The 565 police personnel (494 males; 71 females) were selected across four Police Commands in southwestern Nigeria. They responded to measures of workplace neutralization, reward craving, punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that as punishment anxiety increased, police personnel showed a low tendency of engaging in corruption. However, when police personnel had the opportunity to justify corruption, the tendency to engage in corruption increased. Police personnel who

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craved for and were concerned about rewards showed more corrupt tendencies than those who had a low concern about rewards. Results of the moderation tests indicated that workplace neutralization moderated the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies such that when police personnel had the opportunity to justify corrupt behaviours, the likelihood of engaging in corruption increased. Reward craving moderated the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies in such a way that the motivation for reward balanced out the fear of punishment and increased corrupt tendencies. Workplace neutralization moderated the relationship between reward craving and corrupt tendencies such that when police personnel had the opportunity to neutralize the fear of punishment, reward craving further increased corrupt tendencies. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

Keywords: Corruption, Neutralization, Anxiety, Reward, Punishment, Police

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a condition in which an individual, including police personnel, abuses the authority entrusted in his/her care for personal gain at the expense of others or the organization (Ariyabuddhiphongs & Hongladarom, 2014; Suleiman & Othman, 2017). Based on the illegality of corruption, it may be difficult for studies, such as this, to focus on the amount of corruption or corrupt exchange (PricewaterHouse Coopers, 2016). Some studies have used questionnaires to measure the perceived prevalence of or attitude toward corruption (for instance, Tan, Liu, Huang, Zheng & Liang, 2016; Transparency International, 2018) and vignette to assess corrupt tendencies/ corrupt intentions, which is an indirect valuation of the propensity of an individual to engage in corruption (Bai, Liu &

Kou, 2014; Ogungbamila, 2017; Tan *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, this study focused on the corrupt tendencies rather than an attempt to measure the rate of corruption among police personnel in Nigeria. Corrupt tendencies, as used in this study, refer to the willingness, likelihood and propensity of police personnel to use the instrumentality of their office and authority for personal benefits at the expense of others, the organization or society (Rabl, 2011; Sardžoska & Tang, 2012; Tan *et al.*, 2016). Against this background, corruption and corrupt tendencies are used interchangeably in the study.

A recent survey has shown that the Nigeria Police is the most corrupt public-sector organization in Nigeria (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics – NBS, 2019). Apart from that, the extent to which the personnel of the Nigeria Police have performed their roles as one of the major agencies responsible for preventing, investigating and prosecuting crime and corruption, as well as promoting the safety of lives and property of the citizens, have been questioned in recent time (Akinlabi, 2017; Agbiboa, 2015; Hills, 2008). The negative perception of the public against the Nigeria Police has been associated with the reckless, ruthless, cynical, corrupt and predatory behaviour of the personnel (Agbiboa, 2015). The overt and, sometimes, unrestraint corrupt tendencies on display by the Nigeria Police might have prompted the public and researchers (such as Agbiboa, 2013; 2015; Hills, 2008; PricewaterHouse Coopers, 2016) to conclude that the Nigeria Police is one of most corrupt public-sector organizations in Nigeria. This may make the public look elsewhere for help and safety but from the Nigeria Police. When the public cannot trust the primary organization charged with the duties of security and safety, the psychological, economic and political well-being of persons living in that environment and the development of the country may be compromised. A corrupt police organization also has serious implications for the processes of reporting, investigating, and prosecuting corruption, especially in Nigeria.

Therefore, inappropriate management of corrupt tendencies among the police personnel in Nigeria has serious implications, not only for individuals living in Nigeria but also for the country. The recent anti-corruption efforts of the Nigerian government may be surface-scratching if psychological variables that may either enhance or discourage employees' ten-

dencies to engage in corruption are not adequately addressed, especially among the police personnel in Nigeria who have been reported as one of the most corrupt public-sector organizations in Nigeria (Agbibo, 2015; NBS, 2019). Previous studies (for example, Ogunbamila, 2017; Ogunbamila & Udegbe, 2014) that adopted employee-perspective reported strong links between psychological factors, such as perception of organizational injustice and corrupt tendencies. Though Ogunbamila (2017) reported a strong interplay between the perception of organizational injustice and workplace neutralization on corruption tendencies, the study recommended that future studies should investigate psychological variables that connect punishment anxiety with corrupt tendencies. The current study, therefore, investigated how the inclination to find justification for punishable behaviour (conceptualized as workplace neutralization) and the inclinations for reward (referred to as reward craving) direct the connections between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies among police personnel.

Literature review and hypotheses

The police personnel are usually not oblivious of the extant legal, organizational and socio-cultural frowns against corruption. According to the rational choice theory (Becker, 1968), police personnel's tendency to engage in corruption is predicated on systematic reasoning (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which involves an analysis of the cost, risk, benefit and rational choice at a point in time (Hu, Xu, Dinev & Ling, 2010). Such analysis countenances the legal, organizational, and socio-cultural expectations, as well as the consequences of not living up to the expectations.

Consequently, the police personnel may experience punishment anxiety. Such anxiety may emanate from the moral dissonance (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, Pastorelli, 1996), which may reflect the fact that the intended act of corruption negates the legal, organizational, socio-cultural, and moral dictates. In most cases, the legal, organizational, socio-cultural, and moral expectations also spell the appropriate punishments and sanctions for individuals that do not live up to the expectations. According to the deterrence theory, the anxiety brought about by the per-

ceived negative imbalance in the cost-benefit analysis of the intended corrupt act may discourage the police personnel from engaging in it (Cook, 1982; Gibbs, 1975).

Punishment anxiety refers to the feelings of apprehension, tension and fear that are associated with the perception that an act contradicts or may contradict the extant legal, moral, and socio-cultural norms of an organization or society. Based on the professionally, socio-culturally or organizationally internalized deterrence (Gibbs, 1975), police personnel would evaluate the discrepancies between the intended act of corruption and the acceptable behaviour. The higher the perceived discrepancies between the intended act of corruption and the acceptable behaviour as well the corruption-related punishments the higher may be the police personnel's level of punishment anxiety (Torrubia, Avila, Molto & Caseras, 2001). Studies (including D'Arcy & Hovav, 2009; Hu *et al.*, 2010) have proved that the perceived certainty, severity and promptness of corruption-related sanctions may instil enough punishment anxiety in employees, which may discourage them from engaging in corruption.

This condition may not hold for asymmetric punishment, where one of the parties involved in corruption (victim or partner turned whistleblower) receives less punishment than the other (Basu, Basu, & Cordella, 2014; Berlin, Qin & Spagnolo, 2018). This is because asymmetric punishment has the potential of increasing the size of corruption (Berlin *et al.*, 2018), especially if only one party has the opportunity to report or benefit from reporting corruption (Abbink & Wu, 2017). Therefore, the current study focuses on punishment anxiety rather than asymmetric punishment. In the 3-in-1 study conducted among undergraduates and employees in China, Bai *et al.* (2014) reported that the perceived likelihood of punishment, which might have generated punishment anxiety, consistently led to low corrupt intentions. Based on this, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Punishment anxiety will significantly predict corrupt tendencies in such a way that increasing the level of punishment anxiety will be related with decreasing level of corrupt tendencies among police personnel.

However, the police personnel may execute the intended corrupt act if they are able to neutralize the punishment anxiety by finding justification for the corrupt act (Iyer & Kvalnes, 2012; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Therefore, police personnel have the tendency or propensity to engage in corruption when they perceive that the benefits or rewards of the corrupt act to self and important others balance out its cost and risk (Park & Levine, 1999; Richardson, Wang & Hall, 2012). The perception of a favourable cost/ risks-benefits analysis is often determined and directed by an adequate and efficient neutralization of the punishment anxiety or rational analysis, predicated on subjective norms, reward craving and personal attitude toward corruption (Zhao, Zhang & Xu, 2016).

Workplace neutralization is a cognitive technique that enables an employee to find justification for unacceptable work behaviour and clear the perceived moral dissonance and discrepancies between the intended behaviour and the legal, organizational or socio-cultural dictates (Gannett & Rector, 2015; Ogungbamila, 2010; 2017; Sykes & Matza, 1957). This cognitive technique may help the police personnel neutralize the feelings of anxiety and apprehension that come with the intended corrupt act, indirectly motivating them to engage in corruption. Therefore, despite the perceived certainty, promptness and severity of the punishment associated with corruption, police personnel may be motivated to engage in corruption provided they are able to reduce or ward off the punishment anxiety using workplace neutralization. This is because Ogungbamila (2017), in a 2-in-1 study, showed that workplace neutralization increased corrupt tendencies in civil servants and security agents, including the police personnel in Nigeria.

Consequently, when the police personnel have the opportunity to engage in workplace neutralization, which attenuates and renders the potentially discouraging punishment anxiety ineffective, they may exhibit a higher tendency to engage in corruption. For example, Tan *et al.* (2016) reported that when employees found it difficult to trust or provide ideological support for their organization, which indirectly provided an opportunity for workplace neutralization, their level of corrupt tendencies increased. The perceived insensitivity and lack of trust in the ability of the Police organi-

zation to adequately and justly provide for the psychological and economic well-being of employees (Bai *et al.*, 2014) may be connected with the deficiencies in the structure, operations, and organization of the Nigeria Police (Agbibo, 2013; Akinlabi, 2016). The regimented and hierarchical nature of the operational, administrative and organizational structures of the Nigeria Police (Ogungbamila & Fajemirokun, 2016, Osuji, 2012, Owen, 2014) coupled with inadequate facilities negatively impact the well-being of the police personnel. Consequently, police personnel in Nigeria may feel justified to engage in corruption despite the punishment anxiety. This is because workplace neutralization would have helped the police personnel attenuate or remove the punishment anxiety by turning the intended corruption into a just-restoring retaliation against the organization, the society, or other individuals for compromising their occupational, psychological, and economic well-being (Ogungbamila, 2017). Against this background, it was expected that:

Hypothesis 2: Workplace neutralization will significantly moderate the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies in such a way that corrupt tendencies will increase with workplace neutralization, despite punishment anxiety.

Reward craving is conceptualized as the overly excessive concern of an individual for compensation and the zeal to seek gratification for his or her contributions to the organization, society, and the well-being of significant others. Employees, including police personnel, usually feel unjustly treated and are motivated to engage in retaliatory behaviour, including corruption, when their perceived input outweighs the perceived reward (Ogungbamila, 2017; Ogungbamila & Udegbe, 2014). The zeal to engage in corruption may, therefore, be exacerbated by the belief in a just world toward self rather than others. This is because Bai *et al.* (2014) found that corrupt tendencies reduced significantly with the belief in a just world toward others. Therefore, when employees are more concerned about obtaining rewards for their input to the organization rather than the pursuit of rewards for everybody, there is a tendency for such employees to unjustly or over-

reward themselves at the expense of the organization and others. Stemming from this, the thirst for reward may dampen the anxiety associated with perceived reprimands for corruption and increase the level of corrupt tendencies in police personnel. It was, therefore, hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Reward craving will significantly moderate the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies such that corrupt tendencies will increase with reward craving, despite punishment anxiety.

Police personnel, who have excessive concern for reward, may also be motivated to dampen the concern about and consequently neutralize the punishment anxiety associated with corruption by using different neutralization techniques such as distorting the facts, negating the norm and blaming the circumstances (Kaptein & van Helvoort, 2019). This may play out, especially if the police personnel feel that the intended act of corruption is aimed at rewarding their under-rewarded contributions to the organization or society (Zyglidopoulos, Fleming & Rothenberg, 2009). At this stage, the police personnel have successfully rationalized corruption as a “normal” behaviour suited for rewarding their perceived under-rewarded contributions to the organization or society (Gault, 2017). In three experiments, Mulder and van Dijk (2020) reported that rationalization of previous immoral behaviour led to perpetuation and escalation of immoral behaviour. It is, therefore, expected that:

Hypothesis 4: Workplace neutralization will significantly moderate the relationship between reward craving and corrupt tendencies such that workplace neutralization will increase the level at which corrupt tendencies are related to reward craving in police personnel.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

This cross-sectional survey was conducted among police personnel in four Police Commands in southwestern Nigeria. The Police Officers in charge of each of the Police Commands, which covered two Local Government Areas, were informed about the purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and the guarantee of safety for participating in the study. After the consent of the Officers in charge of the Police Command, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the safe nature of the study (that is, the study would not expose them to psychological or physical harm), and that they were at liberty to participate in the study or not.

The questionnaire was administered to the police personnel who were available and willing to participate in the study. Before completing the questionnaire, the participants were asked to indicate their readiness to participate in the study. The rate of decline was generally low (only 2.1% of them declined participation). With an average of 145 copies of the questionnaire per Police Formation, 580 were distributed. Data collection spanned three weeks in January 2019. Out of the 580 copies of the questionnaire, 565 were duly completed.

The study involved 565 police personnel (494 males or 87.4%; 71 females or 12.6%) that were selected across four Police Commands in southwestern Nigeria. Their ages ranged between 21 and 53 years with a mean age of ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.03$; $SD = 8.10$). In terms of marital status, 198 (or 35%) of the participants were single, and 367 (or 65%) had been married at one time or the other (that is, still married at the time of the study = 204; widowed = 63; divorced = 75; separated = 25). Majority of the participants (348 or 61.6%) were junior officers in the rank of Sergeant, Major and below, while the remaining (217 or 38.4%) were between the ranks of Inspector of Police and Chief Superintendent of Police.

Out of the 348 junior officers, 330 (or 94.8%) were males and 18 (or 5.2%) were females. In the case of the senior officers, 204 (or 94%)

were males and 13 (or 6%) were females. The participants were asked to indicate their highest academic qualifications. Their responses showed that 340 (or 60.2%) of the participants had up to Ordinary Level Certificate, and 225 (or 39.8%) of them had above Ordinary Level Certificate (that is, Nigerian Certificate of Education/National Diploma = 102; Higher National Diploma/ First degree = 97; Master's degree = 26). In terms of job tenure, the participants had spent between two and 31 years on the job ($M_{\text{job tenure}} = 8.08$; $SD = 7.17$).

Measures

Corrupt tendencies

This was measured with a 9-item Corrupt Tendencies Scale (CTS) developed by Ogungbamila and Udegbe (2014). The instrument was designed to assess employees' tendency to engage in behaviours that aimed at benefitting self and others at the expense of the organization and the society. The CTS was rated on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Sample items include: "Diverting the organization's fund for personal use" and "Helping another person to take a property or an item that belongs to the organization". Ogungbamila and Udegbe reported a Cronbach's alpha of .92. In a study involving police personnel and private sector security personnel in Nigeria, Ogungbamila (2017) reported that CTS had a Cronbach's alpha of .96. With the present sample, CTS had a Cronbach's alpha of .97. The CTS was scored in such a way that scores that were up to or higher than the mean indicated that the police personnel had the tendency to engage in self-serving behaviours at the expense of the organization and the society, while scores that were below the mean showed that the police personnel had a low tendency of engaging in self-serving behaviours at the expense of the organization and the society.

Workplace neutralization

The level of workplace neutralization of the participants was assessed with the Workplace Neutralization Scale (WNS) developed by Ogungbamila (2017). This was a 14-item scale designed to measure the

extent to which employees find justification for punishable work behaviours. The instrument covered three areas of workplace neutralization: Organizational Neutralization (6 items), Imitational Neutralization (3 items), and General Neutralization (5 items). The instrument was rated on a 4-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= agree, 4 = strongly agree). Sample items include: “Since what I put into the organization (e.g. effort and time) is more than what I get, it is in order if I took what I deserve even without authorization” (Organizational Neutralization), “A negative behaviour exhibited by majority of the employees in an organization should not be punished by the organization” (Imitational Neutralization), and “The misbehaviours of the employees have no direct effect on a particular person” (General Neutralization).

The overall score on the measure of workplace neutralization was used in this study because the focus was on how workplace neutralization generally connects with other variables in the study and not on how the variables were related to the identified dimensions of workplace neutralization. The WNS had a Cronbach’s alpha of .90 among a sample that comprised police personnel and private sector security personnel in Nigeria (Ogungbamila, 2017). Based on the present sample, WNS had a Cronbach’s alpha of .95. Scores on the measure of workplace neutralization that were up to or higher than the mean showed that the police personnel engaged highly in workplace neutralization in order to find justification for punishable work-related behaviours, while scores that were lower than the mean indicated that the police personnel engaged less in workplace neutralization.

Punishment Anxiety and Reward Craving

The items on the Sensitivity to Punishment and Sensitivity to Reward Questionnaire (SPSRQ), Torrubia *et al.* (2001), were designed to measure an individual’s general reactions to punishment and reward. Therefore, the items on the SPSRQ may be less suitable for studies, such as the current one that focuses more on an individual’s concern about punishment and reward in relation to corrupt tendencies. Against this background, new scales were developed to measure punishment anxiety and reward craving. The Punishment Anxiety Scale (PAS) was designed to assess the

thought and apprehension associated with the perceived punishment connected with punishable behaviours. The Reward Craving Scale (RCS) was designed to measure the level of concerns and feelings individuals have about rewards and benefits.

In order to generate the initial items for the PAS and RCS, 10 public-sector employees (five males; five females) and 10 private-sector employees (5 males; 5 females), who had been in their current job for at least eight years, as well as 10 undergraduates (5 males; 5 females), were selected. These inclusion criteria were used in order to (a) ensure that the participants would have been exposed to situations that created or increased their concern about punishment and reward, and (b) design scales that would be relevant to public and private sector employees, as well as other individuals. Their ages averaged 29.02 years ($SD = 7.21$) with a range of 19 to 38 years.

They were asked to describe (in Part A) how they felt when they thought of the punishment associated with punishable behaviours, and (in Part B) their concerns and feelings about rewards and benefits. The feelings indicated in the description of at least 18 of the 30 respondents formed an initial pool of 26 items for the PAS. The same criterion was used for the RCS to get the initial pool of 23 items. In order to reduce the acquiescence response set, some of the items on the two scales were reverse-keyed (Abad, Olea & Ponsoda, 2011; Winkler, Kanouse & Ware, 1982). The major challenge associated with the use of this method is that it may lead to the low internal consistency of the scale (Salazar, 2015; Suárez-Alvarez, Pedrosa, Lozano, García-Cueto, Cuesta & Muñiz, 2018).

Pilot study: The initial items of the PAS and RCS were administered with CTS and WNS to 165 public sector employees, whose ages ranged between 25 and 42 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.09$; $SD = 6.22$). On the PAS, they were instructed to read each statement on the scale carefully and indicate the extent to which it describes their feelings when they plan to engage in wrongdoing on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all; 1 = a little bit so; 2 = moderately so; 3 = quite so; 4 = very much so; 5 = extremely so). For the RCS, they were asked to read each statement on the scale carefully and indicate the extent to which it captures their general concerns and feelings

toward reward and benefit on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all; 1 = a little bit so; 2 = moderately so; 3 = quite so; 4 = very much so; 5 = extremely so).

The results of the item analysis showed that five of the initial 26 items on the PAS were not valid. When they were deleted from the scale, the reliability of PAS increased from .53 to .79 Cronbach's alpha. Consequently, the five items were removed from the final scale. Therefore, the final PAS was a 21-item instrument predicated on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all; 5 = extremely so). In the case of RCS, three items were not valid. The removal of the 3 items increased the reliability of RCS from .62 to .84 Cronbach's alpha. The final RCS scale comprised 20 items scored on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all; 5 = extremely so). Pearson Product Moment Correlation test was conducted to determine the extent and direction of relationships among the measures. Results showed that the PAS and RCS were measures of related but opposite and distinct behavioural dispositions [$r(163) = -.54, p < .01$]. Results of the other correlation tests ranged between .18 (WNS and RCS) and -.72 (CTS and PAS)

Main study: Since the PAS and the RCS were newly constructed scales, an *Exploratory Principal Component Analysis*, which involved *Oblimin Rotation with Kaiser Normalization*, was performed on each scale. This was aimed at determining the underlying factors in each of the scales. In the case of PAS, the results of the *Pattern Matrix*, as shown in Table 1, indicate that the 21 items of the PAS loaded strongly on two distinct factors (Thought about Punishment = 10 items; Feelings about/ Fear of Punishment = 11 items).

Table 1:
Factor Loadings of the Punishment Anxiety Scale

Items	Components	
	TaP	FaP /FoP
1. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me jittery.	.79	.31
2. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me upset.	.77	.32
3. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me feel pleasant.	.76	.36
4. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me secure.	.75	.38
5. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me worried.	.73	.34
6. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me nervous.	.70	.38
7. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me tense.	.68	.40
8. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrong doing makes me comfortable.	.65	.42
9. I don't get frightened by the thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing.	.64	.43
10. The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me relax.	.62	.45
11. Despite the penalty or shame, I feel calm when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.30	.78
12. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel tense when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.31	.77
13. Due to the penalty or shame I feel upset when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.32	.75
14. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel frightened when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.40	.70
15. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel nervous when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.41	.69
16. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel worried when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.42	.68
17. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel unpleasant when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.43	.66
18. Due to the penalty or shame, I don't feel comfortable when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.45	.65
19. Despite the penalty or shame, I feel relaxed when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.46	.63
20. Due to the penalty or shame, I feel confused when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.49	.61
21. Despite the penalty or shame, I feel satisfied when I'm about to engage in a wrongdoing.	.49	.60
Percentage of variance explained	18.16%	13.47%

Note: TaP = Thought about Punishment. FaP/ FoP = Feelings about Punishment/ Fear of Punishment.

The Thought about Punishment subscale explained 18.16 per cent of the total score on PAS. The Feelings About or Fear of Punishment subscale explained 13.16 percent of the total score on PAS. Sample items of the PAS included: “The thought of the penalty or shame that comes with engaging in a wrongdoing makes me nervous”, “Despite the penalty or shame, I feel calm when I’m about to engage in a wrongdoing” (reverse-scored), and “Due to the penalty or shame, I feel frightened when I’m about to engage in a wrongdoing”. The analysis involved the summated score on

PAS because the study was concerned with how punishment anxiety was generally related to other variables investigated in this study. The focus of this study was not on how the dimensions of PAS were connected with corrupt tendencies, workplace neutralization, and reward craving. With the sample for the main study, PAS had a Cronbach’s alpha of .87. It was scored in such a way that scores that were up to or higher than the mean on the measure of punishment anxiety indicated that the participants were fearful of punishment for wrongdoing and vice versa.

As shown in Table 2, the results of the *Pattern Matrix* indicate that the 20 items of the RCS loaded strongly on a single factor with a *Variance Explained Value* of 20.83%.

Table 2:
Factor Loadings of the Reward Craving Scale

Items	Components	
	Factor I	Factor II
1. The thought of obtaining reward or benefit for doing things makes me happy.	.89	.20
2. I often get pre-occupied with the thought of obtaining rewards or benefits when helping others.	.88	.22
3. My concern is about my rewards or benefits; nothing else matter.	.86	.24
4. The thought of losing benefits makes me tense.	.84	.25
5. The thought of working without a reward or benefit makes me uncomfortable.	.82	.25
6. The thought of losing some benefits for helping others borders me.	.80	.27
7. I am more concerned about immediate gain or benefit than waiting for future benefits.	.79	.29
8. The thought of recognition motivates me to do things.	.77	.32
9. I get worried when I can’t obtain adequate reward or benefit for my efforts.	.76	.33
10. Despite the possibility of losing benefits, I feel calm.	.74	.35
11. I feel tense when I can’t get some gains for my efforts.	.73	.35
12. I get upset when my efforts are not recognized on time.	.70	.38
13. I feel nervous when my efforts are over-recognized.	.68	.35
14. I feel worried when I’m over-rewarded for my efforts.	.67	.36
15. I do things in order to be praised.	.66	.36
16. The availability of rewards or benefits motivates me to do things.	.64	.37
17. I don’t do things for immediate gains.	.63	.38
18. I can go to any length to get rewarded.	.62	.38
19. I am afraid of risks; no matter the reward or gain.	.60	.39
20. I don’t offer help for gains.	.60	.40
Percentage of variance explained	20.83	8.89%

Sample items of the RCS included: “I often get pre-occupied with the thought of obtaining rewards or benefits when helping others”, “I don’t offer help for gains” (reverse-scored), and “My concern is about my re-

wards or benefits; nothing else is important". Based on the present sample, RCS had a Cronbach's alpha of .89. The RCS was scored in such a way that scores that were up to or higher than the mean on the measure of reward craving indicated that the participants were concerned about getting benefits for their actions and vice versa.

RESULTS

Descriptive and inter-variable correlations

The socio-demographic variables were coded. Gender was coded Male = 0; Female = 1. Marital status was coded Single = 0; Married at one time or the other = 1. Job cadre was coded Junior Cadre = 0; Senior Cadre = 1. Academic qualification was coded Up to Ordinary Level Certificate = 0; Above Ordinary Level Certificate = 1. Table 3 shows the results of the descriptive and inter-variable correlations.

Table 3:
Mean, Standard Deviation and Inter-variable Correlations

ables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Age	37.03	8.10	-									
Gender	-	-	.50**	-								
Marital status	-	-	.68**	.31**	-							
Job cadre	-	-	.23**	.20**	.05	-						
Academic qualification	-	-	.73**	.31**	.43**	.36**	-					
Job tenure	8.08	7.17	.82**	.39**	.62**	.20**	.74**	-				
Punishment anxiety	25.47	3.41	.18*	.30**	.21**	-.05	-.08	-.04	-			
Workplace neutralization	30.68	3.97	-.11*	-.17*	-.06	-.14*	-.07	.06	.51**	-		
Reward craving	50.95	2.97	-.20**	-.34**	.16*	-.12*	-.14*	-.05	-.64**	.38**	-	
Corrupt tendencies	25.11	3.82	-.28**	-.25**	.22**	-.23**	-.21**	-.24**	-.50**	.41**	.39**	-

As shown in Table 3, the level of corrupt tendencies in police personnel decreased as the level of punishment anxiety increased [$r(563) = -.50, p < .01$]. This implies that police personnel who were fearful of being punished for engaging in wrongful behaviour had a low tendency of engaging in corruption. However, their tendencies of engaging in corruption increased

as workplace neutralization [$r(563) = .41, p < .01$] and reward craving increased [$r(563) = .39, p < .01$]. The implication is that when police personnel had the opportunity to justify corrupt behaviour, they showed higher tendencies of engaging in corruption than when such punishable behaviours could not be justified. Similarly, the more police personnel were concerned about rewards and benefits, the more they were likely to be corrupt.

Test of hypotheses

A 3-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to test the independent and moderated effects of punishment anxiety, workplace neutralization, and reward craving on corrupt tendencies. The socio-demographic variables (age gender, marital status, job status and job tenure) were coded and added to the regression model in Step 1. As stated earlier, gender was coded Male = 0; Female = 1. Marital status was coded Single = 0; Married at one time or the other = 1. Job cadre was coded Junior Cadre = 0; Senior Cadre = 1. Academic qualification was coded Up to Ordinary Level Certificate = 0; Above Ordinary Level Certificate = 1. Punishment anxiety and the moderator variables (workplace neutralization and reward craving) were added to the regression model in the second step. In the third step, three moderated effects were added to the regression model. These included the moderated effects of workplace neutralization on the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies; the moderated effects of reward craving on the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies; the moderated effects of workplace neutralization on the relationship between reward craving and corrupt tendencies. The results are presented in Table 4.

Models	β	t	R	R^2	ΔR^2	F
<i>Model 1 (Socio-demographic variables)</i>	-	-	.35	.13	.13	3.76**
Age	-.12	-2.45*				
Gender	-.13	-2.75*				
Marital status	.10	1.86				
Job cadre	-.18	-3.19**				
Academic qualification	-.09	-1.35				
Job tenure	-.08	-1.25				
<i>Model 2 (Predictor variables)</i>	-	-	.60	.37	.24	9.76***
Age	-.09	-1.35				
Gender	-.10	-1.75				
Marital status	.06	.16				
Job cadre	-.15	-2.89*				
Academic qualification	-.08	-.99				
Job tenure	-.05	-.54				
<i>Predictor variables</i>						
Punishment anxiety	-.33	-4.55**				
Workplace neutralization	.21	3.75**				
Reward craving	.20	3.68**				
<i>Model 3 (Moderation variables)</i>	-	-	.73	.48	.11	12.70***
Age	-.07	-.18				
Gender	-.09	-1.37				
Marital status	.04	.12				
Job cadre	-.13	-2.11*				
Academic qualification	-.05	.54				
Job tenure	-.02	-.45				
Punishment anxiety	-.20	-3.67**				
Workplace neutralization	.18	3.19**				
Reward craving	.15	2.90*				
<i>Moderation effects</i>						
Punishment anxiety x workplace neutralization	.39	5.10**				
Punishment anxiety x reward craving	.36	4.95**				
Reward craving x workplace neutralization	.50	7.41**				

Table 4 shows that the socio-demographic variables accounted for 13% of police personnel's corrupt tendencies. Three of the socio-demographic variables exerted significant influence on corrupt tendencies. Results showed that corrupt tendencies reduced as police personnel grew older [$\beta = -.12$; $t(563) = -2.45$, $p < .05$]. Gender also predicted corrupt

tendencies, with male police personnel showing more corrupt tendencies than females [$\beta = -.13$; $t(563) = -2.75$, $p < .05$]. Corrupt tendencies reduced as police personnel advanced in their career [$\beta = -.18$; $t(563) = -3.19$, $p < .05$].

Multi-collinearity test was performed on the data because three of the socio-demographic variables predicted corrupt tendencies. Results indicated that all the variables had *Tolerance* scores that were less than 1.00. Consequently, there was no multi-collinearity problem among the variables (Berk, 1977; Vatcheva, Lee, McCormick & Rahbar, 2016; Yoo, Mayberry, Bae, Singh, He & Lillard, 2014).

The addition of punishment anxiety, workplace neutralization and reward craving to the model increased the value of R from .35 to .60 ($R^2 = .37$; $\Delta R^2 = .24$; $F = 9.76$, $p < .01$). The addition of the variables brought 24% changes in the level of corrupt tendencies of police personnel. Punishment anxiety significantly predicted corrupt tendencies in such a way that the more police personnel were afraid of or uncomfortable with punishment, the less their tendency of engaging in corruption [$\beta = -.33$; $t(563) = -4.55$, $p < .01$]. These results provided support for hypothesis 1, which expected punishment anxiety to reduce corrupt tendencies. Workplace neutralization increased corrupt tendencies among the police personnel [$\beta = .21$; $t(563) = 3.75$, $p < .01$]. This implies that when the police personnel had the opportunity to justify corruption, their tendencies to engage in corruption increased. The results in Table 2 also show that police personnel who craved for and were concerned about rewards and benefits were more likely to be corrupt than those who were less concerned about rewards and benefits [$\beta = .20$; $t(563) = 3.68$, $p < .01$].

Results of the moderation tests indicated that workplace neutralization moderated the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies [$\beta = .39$; $t(563) = 5.10$, $p < .01$]. Before the moderation effects of workplace neutralization, punishment anxiety reduced corrupt tendencies of police personnel by 11%. But when the moderation effects were added to the relationship, corrupt tendencies of police personnel increased to 15%. This implies that when the police personnel had the opportunity

to justify corrupt behaviours, the likelihood of engaging in corruption would increase. These results confirmed the position of hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3, which proposed that reward craving would moderate the relationship between punishment anxiety and corrupt tendencies, was supported by the results in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the moderation effects of reward craving increased the level of corrupt tendencies in police personnel by 13% [$\beta = .36$; $t(563) = 4.95$, $p < .01$] compared with the effects of punishment anxiety alone, which reduced corrupt tendencies by 11%. This shows that the motivation for reward might have balanced out the concern about and fear of punishment, thereby increasing the corrupt tendencies in the police personnel.

Lastly, as expected in hypothesis 4, workplace neutralization moderated the relationship between reward craving and corrupt tendencies in police personnel [$\beta = .50$; $t(563) = 7.41$, $p < .01$]. When police personnel had the opportunities to neutralize and allay the fear of punishment, reward craving further increased their tendencies to engage in corrupt behaviour. For example, before the moderation effects of workplace neutralization were added to the model connecting reward craving and corrupt tendencies, reward craving increased the corrupt tendencies by 4%. With the addition of the moderation effects of workplace neutralization to the model, corrupt tendencies increased to 25%. These results supported hypothesis 4.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Police, one of the security agencies charged with the responsibilities of investigating and processing corruption-related cases, ranked consistently as one of the most corrupt organizations (NBS, 2019) despite the legal and socio-cultural sanctions against corruption. This may have serious implications for the processes of reporting, investigating and prosecuting corruption, especially in Nigeria. Literature implicated some psychological variables such as punishment anxiety, workplace neutralization and reward craving in corrupt acts. This study, therefore, investigated the level at which punishment anxiety predicts corrupt tendencies and whether workplace neutralization and reward craving moderate such relationships.

True to the predictions of the study, corrupt tendencies are reduced with punishment anxiety. The results of the present study confirmed the findings of Bai *et al.* (2014). They found that when individuals perceived the likelihood of punishment, their corrupt intentions reduced significantly. The rumination about the possibilities of punishment might have created fear and reduced the cognitive resources needed to prosecute the corrupt intentions (Bandura *et al.*, 1996). That might explain why police personnel who were less fearful of punishment showed higher tendencies of engaging in corruption than those who were more fearful of punishment. Based on systematic reasoning, those who were fearful of punishment might have shown less corrupt tendencies because of the perceived negative cost-benefit analysis of the corruption, which increased their level of punishment anxiety and discouraged them from the act of corruption (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Becker, 1968; Cook, 1982; Hu *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the results of the current study further strengthened the position of the deterrence theory on the possibility that punishment anxiety may discourage and prevent corruption, especially if the punishment is perceived as prompt and appropriate. For example, the organization should have a well spelt-out punishment for every corruption-related case, put in place ICT tools that would complement and aid human efforts in detecting corruption, provide accelerated investigation and open trial of all corruption-related cases, and promptly punish the culprit in strict accordance with the dictates of the regulations, promptly provide adequate information about the corruption-related case (nature of corruption, the employee or employees involved, and the punishment) to appropriate organs within and outside the organization, as well other employees in the organization.

When police personnel had the opportunity to justify corruption, their level of corrupt tendencies increased despite the concern about punishment. The findings of Ogunbamila (2017) and Tan *et al.* (2016) were corroborated by the results of the current study. They reported that employees' level of corrupt tendencies increased when they had the opportunity to justify corruption. Despite the perceived punishment for corruption, workplace neutralization might have given the police personnel the opportunity to perceive the intended acts of corruption as a justice-restoring act against the organization, others and society. In that case, work-

place neutralization might have helped attenuate the punishment anxiety by turning the intended corruption into a just-restoring retaliation against the organization, society or individuals whom they perceived as directly or indirectly allowing their occupational, psychological and economic well-being to be compromised (Ogungbamila, 2017).

This study also supported the neutralization theory. According to neutralization theory, the appropriateness, promptness and severity of the perceived punishment may not deter police personnel from corruption if they are able to clear the perceived moral dissonance and discrepancies between the intended behaviour and what the legal, organizational or socio-cultural norms permit (Ogungbamila, 2010; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Consequently, police personnel who reported a high level of corrupt tendencies despite the perceived punishment associated with corruption might have successfully neutralized the feelings of anxiety and apprehension that came with the thought of corruption, which indirectly gave the impetus to engage in corruption. Therefore, despite the perceived certainty, promptness and severity of the punishment associated with corruption, police personnel might still be motivated to engage in corruption provided they are able to adequately reduce the punishment anxiety using workplace neutralization techniques.

In line with the expectations of hypothesis 3, police personnel who were motivated for and were highly concerned about reward also tended to be corrupt in the face of the possibilities of punishment. This may be because their concern about reward might have overshadowed the fear of the punishment associated with the intended corrupt act. The fear of punishment may be very weak for this group of police personnel, especially if the intended act of corruption is perceived as commonplace in the organization or society. This may be particularly true in Nigeria Police where the corruption norm seems strong and more acceptable. Therefore, the police personnel might perceive the intended acts of corruption as legitimate rewards for inadequately rewarded efforts and or loss of benefits accruing to self and significant others. At that level, police personnel who craved rewards might become oblivious of the punishment associated with intended corrupt acts than those who craved less about rewards.

Lastly, the present study showed that when workplace neutralization interacted with reward craving, police personnel showed higher possibilities of engaging in corruption. This is in consonance with the findings of previous studies (for example, Gault, 2017; Mulder & van Dijk, 2020). The excessive concern about rewards and benefits might have prepared a good ground for the police personnel to attenuate the punishment anxiety associated with the intended acts of corruption. That may explain why workplace neutralization increased the level at which reward craving led to corrupt tendencies in police personnel. This may be particularly true if such reward-craved police personnel hold that the effort-reward ratio in the organization or society is negatively skewed. He or she might even feel justified to over-reward himself or herself and significant others, especially if the imbalance in the effort-rewards ratio is generally seen as unjust. The corrupt acts might, therefore, appear as a “legitimate” way of restoring the balance of justice in the effort-reward imbalance. In that wise, punishment anxiety is seen as an abnormal situation that must be easily and promptly dampened using the technique of workplace neutralization.

Theoretically, this study has been able to effectively marry the tenets of neutralization (Iyer & Kvalnes, 2012; Ogungbamila, 2017; Sykes & Matza, 1957) and the craving for rewards as police personnel make a rational choice (Becker, 1968) when confronted with deliberate actions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Hu *et al.*, 2010) that may run contrary to the extant legal, organizational and socio-cultural dictates (Cook, 1982; Gibbs, 1975) against corruption. Results of the current study indicated that punishment anxiety, though potent against corruption, may not be enough if employees are able to justify the corrupt acts, especially if the justification would help satisfy their craving for rewards and benefits.

Apart from its theoretical implications, this study also has implications for practice. As indicated in the results, psychological interventions may provide an excellent alternative to or complement the legal framework for fighting corruption. This is because the acts of reporting, investigating and prosecuting corruption are predicated more on the human element than other resources. The results of this study have shown that increasing the

fear of punishment, reducing the opportunities for finding justification for corruption, and managing the concern for rewards are important factors in handling the human aspects of the anti-corruption crusade.

For example, the perceived promptness and appropriateness of the corruption-related punishment would help increase punishment anxiety and discourage corrupt tendencies. Similarly, when employees perceive that the efforts/inputs-rewards balance in the organization and society is predicated on justice, they may not find solace in workplace neutralization and reward craving, and their level of corrupt tendencies may likely come down.

In terms of research implications, this study has shown some directions for future research. For example, there is a need to ascertain whether corruption and corrupt tendencies are a one-off or cyclical behaviour. This is because the current study did not cover the contributions of some psychological variables that may enhance the fine-grain knowledge of the content and process analyses of corruption. Such knowledge may help in fighting and managing corruption. For example, Zhao *et al.* (2016) found that personal attitudes towards corruption spelt the level at which employees engaged in corruption.

This implies that *corruption tolerance* and *moral intelligence* may also be important variables that may spell and direct the connections among punishment anxiety, workplace neutralization, reward craving and corrupt tendencies. Other health-related work behaviours, such as occupational burnout and psychological well-being may also be connected with *corruption tolerance*, especially among employees with high *moral intelligence*. There is a need to explore these connections in order to further appreciate the psychology of corruption.

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