# THE ROLE OF NEPOTISM ON ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM

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**Abstract**

Regardless of the type of organizations, unfortunately, nepotism practices can be encountered in every organization. Nepotism emerges as a phenomenon that leads to the emergence of negative attitudes and behaviors in employees and thus hits organizational productivity. In this study, based on the idea that the perception of nepotism in organizations may cause organizational cynicism, the relationship between nepotism and organizational cynicism was questioned and it was aimed to reveal the effect of nepotism on organizational cynicism. In order to achieve this goal, a survey study was conducted on 200 academicians in Erzurum Ataturk University. According to the results of the research, it was determined that the person-organization fit affects organizational cynicism negatively.

**Keywords:** Nepotism, Cynicism, Organizational Cynicism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is clearly seen that transparency could not be achieved and merit in appointments is not taken into account in economies that have difficulties in integrating into a competitive global economy. (Ören, 2007, 84-86). High unemployment rates, unsuccessful education systems, distorted political structures and strong family structures cause relatives to be favored in employment. This process, called nepotism, tends to increase. Therefore, employees and organizations are intensely faced with the problem of nepotism (Yazıcı & Seçer, 2018, 119).

Today, the phenomenon of nepotism is widely used as the recruitment of relatives in the same business (Abdalla et al., 1998, 555) and it is defined as the employment of a person only on the basis of kinship relations, regardless of factors such as skill, ability, success and education level (Özler et al., 2007, 438). Nepotism is expressed as being behaved in favored to the individual and being ensured his unfair progress in the business, regardless of his knowledge, skill, education level and experience, due to his close relations with the management (Linda & Brian, 1994, 10).

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Nepotism, which includes an unfair management approach, creates a negative perception on other non-kin employees. (Tunçbilek & Akkuş, 2017, 171). It is observed that people who do not have the necessary skills for their tasks which they've been appointed experience poor performance, correspondingly other employees working in the same institution with these people also lack motivation.  At the same time, nepotism will bring about a polarization between individuals working in the workplace. An employee profile will be divided into two as employees who are close to management and those who are far from management, and the feeling of distrust between these two poles will become the determining factor in time. Since there will not be interactions such as working in coordination and information sharing in such an environment, labor force performance will be negatively affected (Ören, 2007, 84-85-86). In such an organizational atmosphere, employees can constantly develop negative thoughts and feelings, and these negativities may pave the way for the emergence of organizational cynicism, which expresses employees' negative attitudes towards the organization.

Organizational cynicism, which emphasizes the negative attitudes of employees towards their own organizations (Dean et al., 1998), expresses that the employees develop negative feelings towards the organization they work with in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioral (Fettahlıoğlu, 2015, 181) and they reflect this feelings critically by their behaviors (Abraham, 2000, 269).

Organizational cynicism is the result of the employee's belief that there are no justice and honesty in the organization (Nafei & Kaifi, 2013, 131). In other words, employees who experience cynicism, believe that their organizations lack moral integrity and that values such as fairness, honesty and sincerity are sacrificed for organizational gain (Bernerth et al., 2007, 311).

Based on the above explanations, within the scope of this study, the relationship between nepotism and organizational cynicism was discussed, and the effect of nepotism on organizational cynicism was questioned.

## 2. RESEARCH THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Human resources are considered as the main factor for the success of organizations in modern management understanding. It is not possible for organizations that do not have the necessary human resources, to provide qualified and quality service, to survive in a competitive environment, to keep up with the pace of social change, and to see and implement the necessary innovations on time (Erigüç et al., 2014, 62).

Nepotism is a criticized phenomenon because it includes unprofessional practices. The intimacy relationships in nepotism can influence the managerial decisions in an organization. There is a typical perception among employees that it is impossible for managers to conduct reliable performance appraisal processes. The reason for this is that nepotism includes unfair treatment and subjective behaviors (Abubakar et al., 2017, 131).

Nepotism is known as a negative situation that includes a subjective character and leads to the emergence of victim employees when applied (Kurt & Doğramacı, 2014, 83). Due to employees who have close relationships with management, although they are unqualified, benefit from the opportunities of the organization privately, cause dissatisfaction on other employees (Arslaner et al., 2014, 65).

In order to ensure the development of the organization and to increase profitability and productivity, all employees from the lowest level to the highest level should ensure an integrity that does not break with the organization. Differences arising between groups due to nepotism practices and the negative perceptions of this situation by employees are considered as the most important obstacles to this integrity, which is necessary for success (Düz, 2012, 5).

Frequently used nepotism in organizations, unfair rewards and promotions often create a perception for employees that there is an effective politics in the organizations they work with (Wan, 2010), and this leads to the emergence of cynical employees who do not trust the activities of the management and approach them with suspicion. However, regardless of the field of activity, the awareness of the phenomenon of nepotism in any organization by employees brings along factors that will lead to negative attitudes such as cynicism towards the organization, managers and owners (Pelit et al., 2017, 47).

When the literature is reviewed, there are studies revealing that nepotism practices in organizations, increase the level of cynicism of employees. To mention a few of these studies; Abubakar et al. (2017), in a

study they conducted on frontline employees, concluded that nepotism positively affected organizational cynicism. Sunman (2017) also revealed that nepotism positively affected organizational cynicism as a result of a study conducted on the employees of three different family businesses operating in the manufacturing industry.

Based on the above explanations, the general and sub-hypotheses of the research were formed as follows:

*H1: Nepotism significantly and positively affects organizational cynicism.*

*H1a: Nepotism in promotion significantly and positively affects cognitive cynicism.*

*H1b: Nepotism in promotion significantly and positively affects affective cynicism*

*H1c: Nepotism in promotion significantly and positively affects behavioral cynicism.*

*H1d: Nepotism in the process significantly and positively affects cognitive cynicism.*

*H1e: Nepotism in the process significantly and positively affects affective cynicism.*

*H1f: Nepotism in the process significantly and positively affects behavioral cynicism.*

*H1g: Nepotism in hiring significantly and positively affects cognitive cynicism.*

*H1h: Nepotism in hiring significantly and positively affects affective cynicism.*

*H1i: Nepotism in hiring significantly and positively affects behavioral cynicism.*

After the theoretical framework, general and sub-hypotheses of the research have been formed, the research model is shown in figure 1:



**Figure 1.** Research Model

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Sample

The sample of this study consists of 200 academicians from different departments of Erzurum Ataturk University. In terms of gender, 84% (n = 168) of the respondents are male and 16% (n = 32) are female. In terms of age, 24% (n = 48) of the respondents are under 30 years old, 47.5% (n = 95) are between 30-40 years old, and 28.5% (n = 57) are over 40 years old. In terms of marital status, 69% (n = 138) of the respondents are married and 31% (n = 62) are single. In terms of title, 25.5% (n = 51) of the respondents are assisted professors, 29% (n = 58) are associated professors, and 45.5% (n = 91) are professors. Finally, in terms of tenure, 12% (n = 24) of the respondents are under 5 years, 42% (n = 84) are between 5-10 years, and 46% (n = 92) are over 10 years.

### 3.2. Measures

*Nepotism*: In this study, the nepotism scale that Asunakutlu and Avcı (2010) used in their studies and which includes 17 items within three dimensions (nepotism in promotion, nepotism in process, nepotism in hiring) was used in order to measure employees' perceptions of nepotism. The organizational cynicism scale is a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "(1) Completely disagree to" (5) Completely agree ".

The validity and reliability of the nepotism scale were examined. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis performed for the validity of the scale, it was determined that the scale with three dimensions has an acceptable fit (RMSEA = .06, CMIN / DF = 1.90, GFI = .91, CFI = .96). As a result of the reliability analysis performed for the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the whole scale was calculated as .85. In terms of the dimensions, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the dimensions are .91 for nepotism in promotion, .72 for nepotism in process and .65 for nepotism in hiring. Based on these results, it can be said that the nepotism scale is reliable.

*Organizational Cynicism*: In this study, the organizational cynicism scale developed Brandes et al., which consists of 13 items within three dimensions (cognitive cynicism, emotional cynicism, behavioral cynicism) was used to measure employees' perceptions of cynicism. The organizational cynicism scale is a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "(1) Completely disagree to" (5) Completely agree "

As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis performed for the validity of the scale, it was determined that the scale with three dimensions has an acceptable fit (RMSEA = .06, CMIN / DF = 1.84, GFI = .92, CFI = .98). As a result of the reliability analysis performed for the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was calculated as .94. Cronbach alpha coefficients of the dimensions are .93 for the cognitive cynicism, .86 for the affective cynicism and .87 for the behavioral cynicism. Looking at these results, it can be said that the organizational cynicism scale is reliable.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Correlations

Table 1 shows the correlation analysis findings between research variables. According to the analysis findings, significant and positive relationships were found between nepotism and nepotism in promotion (r = .811), nepotism in process (r = .906) and nepotism in hiring (r = .651). However, significant and positive relationships were found between organizational cynicism and cognitive cynicism (r = .894), affective cynicism (r = .871) and behavioral cynicism (r = .879). Based on these findings, it has been seen that the scales of nepotism and organizational cynicism are consistent within themselves.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1. Nepotism* | 2.80 | .88 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| *2. Nepotism in Promotion* | 2.90 | .99 | ,811** | 1 | | | | | | |
| *3. Nepotism in Process* | 2.56 | 1.24 | ,906** | ,537** | 1 | | | | | |
| *4. Nepotism in Hiring* | 3.10 | .85 | ,651** | ,440** | ,450** | 1 | | | | |
| *5. Organizational Cynicism* | 2.89 | .86 | ,598** | ,637** | ,465** | ,317** | 1 | | | |
| *6. Cognitive Cynicism* | 3.05 | .99 | ,683** | ,664** | ,564** | ,391** | ,894** | 1 | | |
| *7. Emotional Cynicism* | 2.63 | .96 | ,408** | ,483** | ,292** | ,194** | ,871** | ,644** | 1 | |
| *8. Behavioral Cynicism* | 2.96 | .97 | ,447** | ,509** | ,330** | ,223** | ,879** | ,660** | ,698** | 1 |
| *\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)* | | | | | | | | | | |

Considering the mutual relations between the main variables and their dimensions of the study, a significant and positive relationship was found between nepotism and organizational cynicism (r = .598). In terms of dimensions, significant and positive relationships between nepotism in promotion and cognitive cynicism (r = .664), emotional cynicism (r = .483) and behavioral cynicism (r = .509), significant and positive relationships between nepotism in process and cognitive cynicism (r = .564), emotional cynicism (r = .292) and behavioral cynicism (r = .330), and finally, significant and positive relationships between nepotism in hiring and cognitive cynicism (r = .391 ), emotional cynicism (r = .194) and behavioral cynicism (r = .223) were observed.

### 4.2. Hypotheses Testing

Table 2 shows the findings of the hierarchical regression analysis conducted to test the research hypotheses. Demographic variables of the research were included in the analysis as control variables. Looking at table 2, it is seen that there are four multiple regression models, each consisting of two stages. First of all, a hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to show the effect of nepotism on organizational cynicism in organizations. As a result of the analysis, it was found that control variables do not have a significant effect on organizational cynicism, whereas nepotism has a positive effect on organizational cynicism (β = .613; p = .000). Based on this finding, the H1 hypothesis was proved. In other words, it can be said that in organizations where nepotism is high, the organizational cynicism levels of employees will also be high.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Findings

| Variables | Organizational Cynicism | | Cognitive Cynicism | | Emotional Cynicism | | Behavioral Cynicism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| *Control Variables* | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Gender | .065 | .041 | .090 | .058 | .016 | -.008 | .055 | .029 |
| 2. Age | -.142 | -.209 | -.006 | -.036 | -.225 | -.212 | -.178 | -.170 |
| 3. Marital status | -.044 | .003 | -.046 | .005 | -.013 | .016 | -.055 | -.023 |
| 4. Title | -.012 | -.054 | -.017 | -.027 | -.038 | -.017 | .026 | .043 |
| 5. Organizational tenure | .100 | .071 | .045 | .007 | .143 | .114 | .089 | .059 |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Nepotism | | .613*** | | | | | | |
| 2. Nepotism in promotion | | | | .485*** | | .447*** | | .458*** |
| 3. Nepotism in process | | | | .286*** | | .095 | | .122 |
| 4. Nepotism in hiring | | | | .052 | | -.042 | | -.034 |
| $R^2$ | .019 | .386 | .011 | .508 | .032 | .265 | .030 | .295 |
| *Adj.* $R^2$ | -.006 | .367 | -.015 | .487 | .007 | .235 | .005 | .265 |
| *F* | .743 | 20.240 | .421 | 24.643 | 1.274 | 8.626 | 1.190 | 9.975 |
| *p* | .592 | .000 | .834 | .000 | .277 | .000 | .315 | .000 |

After revealing the general relationship between the research variables, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed for each dimension of organizational cynicism in order to show the relationships between dimensions. Nepotism in promotion had significant and positive effects on the dimensions of cognitive cynicism (β = .485; p = 000), affective cynicism (= .447; p = .000) and behavioral cynicism (= .458; p = .000). It was found that nepotism in process had a significant and positive effect on cognitive cynicism (= .286; p = .000). However, no significant effects were found between nepotism in hiring and the dimensions of organizational cynicism. Based on these findings, H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d hypotheses were proved; H1e, H1f, H1g, H1h and H1i hypotheses were rejected.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this study, the phenomena of nepotism and organizational cynicism were discussed and the relationship between these two phenomena was examined. The main claim of this study is the idea that nepotism practices in organizations will increase the organizational cynicism levels of employees. The necessary statistical analyses were performed by establishing the theoretical background to prove this claim, and the following results were obtained:

Correlation analysis was used to reveal the significance of the relationships between research variables. Nepotism and organizational cynicism variables and also their dimensions were added to this analysis. Findings have shown that there is a significant and positive relationship between nepotism and organizational cynicism. However, in terms of the dimensions, it was observed that there were mutually significant and positive relationships between the dimensions of nepotism in promotion, nepotism in process and nepotism in hiring and cognitive cynicism, emotional cynicism and behavioral cynicism.

Significant and positive relations determined as a result of correlation analysis cannot guarantee that there will be a cause-effect relationship between research variables. For this reason, hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the general and sub-hypotheses of the research. At each stage of this analysis, gender, age, marital status, title and tenure variables were included as control variables, and thus the effects of these variables on dependent variables were fixed. Analysis findings and comments are as follows: Nepotism generally affects organizational cynicism significantly and positively. Similar to other studies in the literature (Abubakar, 2017; Sunman, 2017), H1 hypothesis as the general hypothesis of the study was proved based on this finding. It can be said that as the perceptions of nepotism in organizations increase, the organizational cynicism levels of employees will also increase. In other words, increased perceptions of nepotism practices in organizations may increase the negative attitudes of employees towards their organizations. In such a negative atmosphere, employees cannot be expected to work efficiently. The perception of nepotism in the minds of the employees may lead to a day-by-day decrease in their efforts and performance, and accordingly, their productivity. In order to prevent this situation, organizational management will need to take measures to eliminate the perception of nepotism among employees.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in terms of the dimensions of nepotism and organizational cynicism, both to test the sub-hypotheses of the research and to conduct a more detailed review. The findings and comments made are as follows: Nepotism in promotion affects cognitive cynicism, affective cynicism and behavioral cynicism in a significant and positive way. Based on these findings, H1a, H1b and H1c sub-hypotheses were proved. In other words, it can be said that the increase in the perceptions of nepotism in promotion in the organizations will cause an increase in the cognitive, emotional and behavioral cynicisms levels of the employees. Employees who believe that there is nepotism in promotion in their organizations may exhibit more negative attitudes towards their organization both mentally and emotionally, and their tendencies to reflect these attitudes to their behaviors may increase.The management staff of the organizations that want to prevent this negative situation should build a merit and performance based promotion system within the organization.

It has been observed that nepotism in process affects only cognitive cynicism in a significant and positive way and does not have a significant effect on emotional and behavioral cynicisms. Based on these findings, H1d sub-hypothesis was proved, and the H1e and H1f sub-hypotheses were rejected. In other words, it can be said that the increase in nepotism in process in organizations may cause an increase in the cognitive cynicism levels of the employees. The increase in the number of employees with nepotism perceptions in processes related to organizational activities may cause these employees to think more negatively about their organizations.

Finally, there are no significant effects of nepotism in hiring on the dimensions of organizational cynicism. Based on these findings, H1g, H1h, and H1i sub-hypotheses were rejected. This means that the participants generally thought that nepotism in hiring did not cause them to have negative attitudes towards their organization. On the other hand, It is thought that the fact that the participants are already active employees may lead to this result.

This research has some limitations. The sample size was limited to 200, especially due to the fact that it is in the pandemic process. In future studies, it is thought that researches on different professions and larger samples will yield beneficial results.

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