

War vs pandemic—investigating the type of extreme context as a moderator of extreme-context perception effects on work alienation organisational outcomes

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Abstract

In environments marked by extreme conditions such as military conflicts and health crises, extensive research has examined how perceptions of extreme contexts affect job attitudes and outcomes within organisations. Although these studies have typically focused on specific extreme situations like warzones or pandemic conditions, there has yet to be a comprehensive comparison to determine if varying types of extreme contexts have distinct impacts on shaping job attitudes and organisational results. This gap in research highlights the need to investigate if the nature of the extreme context (whether it be war or pandemic) plays a role in moderating the effects of extreme-context perceptions on work alienation and how this, in turn, affects job attitudes and organisational outcomes. Our study analysed 668 valid responses from two distinct groups: the first group (N=449) was surveyed during the Syrian

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civil war from 2016 to 2019, while the second group (N=219) was gathered from the Middle East during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Employing PLS-SEM for our analysis, we discovered that the intensification of work alienation due to extreme work conditions, leading to a rise in job insecurity and a drop in job satisfaction and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) outcomes, varies depending on the type of extreme context. Specifically, respondents from the first group experienced a higher perception of extreme context but reported slightly better job satisfaction, along with lower levels of alienation and job insecurity compared to those in health crisis situations. Nonetheless, our findings indicate that alienation driven by extreme contexts tends to adversely affect job satisfaction and OCB in war zones more than in pandemic situations.

Keywords. Extreme-context perception; wars; pandemics; COVID-19 perception; alienation; job attitudes; Middle East.

Introduction

Extreme contexts such as wars, natural disasters, and pandemics create significant challenges for organisations and their employees. In particular, the decade-long civil war in Syria and the recent Israel-Hamas war have brought about a myriad of economic and organisational adversities. Sustaining positive emotions and attitudes among employees at the organisational level can be daunting, particularly when they are exposed to extreme circumstances such as those resulting from prolonged pandemics like COVID-19 or the aforementioned wars. This challenge is not limited to specific industries or job types but rather encompasses a broad range of sectors. While research has examined how specific extreme events like pandemics (Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2022) or wars (Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015) impact employee attitudes and behaviours, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have compared the effects of different types of extreme contexts. This study aims to address this gap by investigating whether the type of extreme context (war vs pandemic) moderates the relationships between extreme-context perception and work alienation alongside its outcomes.

The ongoing civil war in Syria has had profound economic ramifications on not just Syria but also neighbouring countries. The World Bank estimates that the conflict in Syria has been solely responsible for annual reductions in economic growth of 1.2 percentage points in Iraq, 1.6 pp in Jordan, and 1.7 pp in Lebanon over the last decade. Furthermore, the conflict drove up poverty rates by 6.0 pp in Iraq and 3.9 pp in other regions (The World Bank, 2020). Similarly, the recent escalation between Israel and Hamas caused considerable concern among individuals and businesses, leading to heightened caution in spending and investing, which could ultimately precipitate an economic recession (Bianchi, 2023).

Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we hypothesise that extreme contexts can lead to a depletion of psychological and material

resources, affecting job attitudes and behaviours. The COR theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valued resources and that the loss or potential loss of these resources can lead to psychological stress. We focus specifically on employees in the service sector in the Middle East. This region has faced recurrent political turmoil, conflict, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, making it uniquely suited to studying the impacts of layered extreme contexts. Given the interactive nature of service-sector roles, these jobs often require constant emotional labour and customer engagement (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hur & Shin, 2023; Mahmoud, Grigoriou, et al., 2022; Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, et al., 2021), potentially heightening vulnerabilities to extreme context stresses (Mahmoud, Reisel, Hack-Polay, et al., 2021). Moreover, we propose that the type of extreme context will moderate the harmful effects of extreme-context perception on work alienation, job insecurity, job satisfaction, and OCBs. Specifically, we expect that participants in war zones will experience less intense work alienation and job insecurity and less decline in job satisfaction and OCB compared to those facing a health crisis pandemic. This is because war may trigger a heightened sense of patriotism, loyalty, and duty (McPherson, 2008; Nathanson, 1989), thus reducing the loss of key job resources, as posited by the COR theory (Bakker et al., 2008; Hobfoll, 2001; Mahmoud, Hack-Polay, Reisel, et al., 2021; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015; Reisel & Mahmoud, 2014). However, we expect work alienation to be more detrimental in warzones than in pandemics due to the extreme conditions disrupting social structures and heightening trauma, as suggested by Durkheim's Division of Labour (Durkheim & Halls, 1997) and Mills' Sociological Imagination (Mills, 1959) theories. The Managed Heart theory (Hochschild, 2012) indicates the emotional toll in war zones can deepen the consequences of alienation, while Self-determination theory (Hochschild, 2012) supports that via the loss of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as exacerbating factors.

To test these hypotheses, we analysed two datasets: one collected in the Middle East during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, and the other gathered during the Syrian civil war from 2016 to 2018. We analyse the data from the two events using a between-subject design to assess the moderating effect of extreme context type. That said, this study makes three key contributions. First, it offers one of the first investigations into whether different extreme contexts have differential impacts on employee attitudes and behaviours. Second, focusing on the Middle East provides culturally specific insights into how extreme events shape organisational outcomes in a region prone to layered crises. Finally, findings can inform policies and interventions tailored to meet challenges posed by distinct extreme contexts aimed at addressing mental health and occupational well-being during crises.

Literature review and hypothetical framework

Extreme-context perception—war vs pandemic

Extreme contexts like wars, pandemics, cost of living, etc., are typically expected to exert drastic shifts in individual and collective perceptions and attitudes. Research suggests that war and pandemics can negatively impact job outcomes via heightened work alienation and feelings of threat and uncertainty, leading to greater job insecurity and reduced job satisfaction (Chiaburu et al., 2014; Fedi et al., 2016; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015; Mahmoud, Reisel, Hack-Polay, et al., 2021). Workers might become distracted by external threats and divided social identities (Stewart, 2022). Past research (e.g. Ras & Duyar, 2012) has associated such distressing conditions with reduced organisational citizenship behaviours like helping others or going beyond required duties (Organ, 1988). Such altered job attitudes and organisational outcomes can be a result of increased levels of work alienation (Chiaburu et al., 2014; Fedi et al., 2016) that filter into the workplace and possibly affect workplace dynamics. Uncertainty can make taking the initiative feel risky, potentially affecting how people perceive

their work environment and colleagues as sources of threat or solidarity (Berg, 2020; Ruppel et al., 2022). Thus, extreme contexts are expected to influence work alienation through multiple pathways.

During wartime, some evidence (McPherson, 2008; Nathanson, 1989) indicates that perceptions generally centre around themes of loyalty, sacrifice, and defence of the nation. This seems to create a sense of unity. However, wartime can also potentially deepen pre-existing social divisions, much like pandemics do (Ciuriak et al., 2023; Walker et al., 2020; World Economic Forum, 2022). The threat is usually externalised and can be attributed to an enemy outgroup, thereby possibly increasing ingroup solidarity, conformity, and identification with national symbols and leaders (Barclay & Benard, 2020; Hopman & Knijn, 2022; Marinthe et al., 2023). In contrast, pandemics can produce more variable perceptual effects. The threat is often seen as internal and less visible, thus reducing the ability to blame a specific outgroup (Demirtaş-Madran, 2020; Gallagher, 2020; Zhai, 2022). Some studies (e.g. Jungkunz, 2021; Sides et al., 2020; The Conversation, 2021) suggest that pandemics like COVID-19 are likely to exacerbate polarisation and political divides in some contexts due to divergent threat perceptions and policy disagreements. However, its effects can be inconsistent; documented instances also exist of elevated solidarity with frontline workers and emerging community support networks (Emily et al., 2022; Kinsella et al., 2023).

Extreme-context perception and alienation

Incorporating the theme of war alongside the context of COVID-19 provides a broader perspective on extreme-context perception and alienation. Like the COVID-19 pandemic, war is a form of extreme context that induces structural, social, and economic upheavals (Blankshain et al., 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2023; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015). The consequences

of war, similar to those of the pandemic, reverberate across various sectors, compelling organisations to adapt strategically and operationally.

In reflecting upon war as an extreme context, it is apparent that wars precipitate a profound and enduring loss of resources, both at the individual and organisational levels. According to Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, such threatening and traumatic events lead to resource depletion, thereby engendering fears and uncertainties among employees (Hobfoll, 1989). These fears, as potential stressors, significantly affect employees' emotional and behavioral outcomes (Helmy et al., 2020; Mahmoud, Reisel, Hack-Polay, et al., 2021). Just as the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a substantial stressor with objective environmental elements, war too, with its pronounced destructive capabilities, constitutes a formidable stressor that triggers a "shock" to individuals' cognitive processing, necessitating a careful assessment of the new, often perilous, information (Deng et al., 2022; Hobfoll, 1989).

Moreover, the extensive literature on war-induced trauma and its impact on workforce productivity and satisfaction elucidates how the dread and uncertainty engendered by war can lead to sleep disturbances, job insecurity, and reduced job satisfaction among employees (Lee et al., 2023). The repercussions of war extend beyond the immediate combat zones, affecting global markets, supply chains, and international partnerships, thereby necessitating significant adjustments in organisational strategies and operations akin to those triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Blankshain et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the enduring nature of war's impacts, much like the long-term effects of COVID-19, necessitates a recalibration of organisational policies and strategies to safeguard employees' well-being and sustain productivity amidst resource scarcities. As extreme contexts, both war and the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the imperative for resilient organisational structures, supportive work environments, and robust crisis management strategies to mitigate the detrimental effects on employees' mental health, job satisfaction, and

overall organisational performance (Blankshain et al., 2022; Sutcliffe, 2003; Wong et al., 2020).

As previously mentioned in this paper, we posit that various extreme contexts are likely to differ in their level of severity in terms of their negative impact those crises pose to the cognitive and attitudinal outcomes of service employees. Accordingly, we expect the association between extreme-context perception and alienation to be moderated by the type of extreme contexts. Therefore, we introduce our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *The positive relationship between extreme-context perception and alienation is moderated by extreme-context type (wars vs pandemics), such that it is less intense in wartime contexts.*

Alienation, job insecurity, and job satisfaction

Alienation stands for the feeling of being disconnected from oneself, others and the work one does (Lang, 1985, Banai and Reisel, 2007). There exists a significant correlation between alienation and various work-related consequences, including the attitudes of employees and attributes related to job performance (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2014). Research indicates a positive correlation between alienation and job insecurity (Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2022), while negatively associated with job satisfaction (Cheng and Chan, 2008). It is no surprise that cognitive and/or physical factors that isolate employees can lead to reduced perceptions of job security, confidence in employment, and overall job satisfaction. In fact, the detrimental impact of job insecurity on job satisfaction is one of the most commonly reported correlations in relevant literature (Reisel et al., 2010). Individuals' personal resources, including both cognitive and emotional aspects, are depleted by continuous threats outside of the workplace. This vicious cycle of resource loss may hinder employees' abilities to allocate significant energy towards other cognitive tasks and work assignments. As a result, this may

lead to a decrease in the perception of job security, confidence related to employment, and overall job satisfaction (Abhishek et al., 2021; Behl et al., 2022; Holmgreen et al., 2017).

The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee alienation, job insecurity, and job satisfaction have also been previously examined, with indications that the alienation caused by pandemic-related restrictions to mobility, lockdowns, and economic distress, has increased work-related insecurity and decreased satisfaction (Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2022).

The COR theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their valued resources. When faced with extreme contexts like wars and pandemics, these resources can be threatened, leading to heightened vulnerability (Egozi Farkash et al., 2022). However, the type of extreme context can moderate the relationship between work alienation and job insecurity. Based on the Event System Theory (Morgeson et al., 2015), we argue that the strength of wars, which is defined by novelty, disruption, and criticality, significantly increases the likelihood of alienation-induced job insecurity among employees. The inherent characteristics of wars, including heightened economic ramifications like work stoppages and layoffs, foster a pervasive sense of uncertainty and insecurity (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015). On the other hand, the economic impact of pandemics, while substantial, does not mirror the same level of job insecurity, possibly due to differing levels of event strength (Lin et al., 2021). Collectively, these theoretical underpinnings and empirical points of evidence underscore a more intense relationship between alienation and job insecurity in wartime contexts compared to pandemics, thereby substantiating the hypothesis. Therefore:

Hypothesis 2: *The positive relationship between alienation and job insecurity is moderated by extreme-context type (wars vs pandemics), such that it is more intense in wartime contexts.*

The interrelation between alienation and job satisfaction can be further understood through the lens of Affective Events Theory, which highlights the role of work events in influencing workers' emotions and attitudes (Fedi et al., 2016). In the context of extreme environments, such as wars versus pandemics, the nature of these affective events changes, and so does their impact on job satisfaction (Abd-Ellatif et al., 2021). Moreover, the theoretical underpinnings provided by the Division of Labour in Society theory (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016) and the Managed Heart theory (Hochschild, 2012), alongside empirical evidence (Hirschfeld, 2002; Mahmoud, Hack-Polay, Reisel, et al., 2021; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015), suggest a plausible moderating role of extreme-context types on the dynamics of work alienation and its subsequent impact on job satisfaction. Particularly in war zones, the aggravated disruption of labour divisions and the demanding emotional labour can exacerbate the negative relationship between work alienation and job satisfaction, as compared to pandemic situations (Hochschild, 2012; Longhofer & Winchester, 2016). The harsher and more hostile conditions inherent in war zones are likely to underscore the harmful effects of work alienation on job satisfaction, presenting a more intense negative relationship between the two constructs. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: *The negative relationship between alienation and job satisfaction is moderated by extreme-context type (wars vs pandemics), such that it is more intense in wartime contexts.*

Alienation and OCB

Employees' voluntary actions that contribute to the effective functioning of organisations but are not acknowledged by formal reward systems are referred to as Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs) (Organ, 1988). OCBs encompass a variety of discretionary behaviours, such as promoting the organisation positively to outsiders or striving to excel in all professional functions consistently, regardless of reward-based circumstances

(Currall & Organ, 1988). On the other hand, when confronted with a hostile situation, stress models suggest that psychological distress may increase and lead to avoidance behaviour (Cannon, 1927; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Pandemics and wars are traumatic life events that may activate avoidance (Koenen et al., 2003; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015; Mahmoud, Reisel, Hack-Polay, et al., 2021; McFarlane, 1987; Reisel & Mahmoud, 2014; Reizer et al., 2021).

The circumstances that cause employees to feel alienated can reduce their perception of job security, confidence in employment, and overall job satisfaction. As a result, alienation can influence job insecurity and job satisfaction (Cheng & Chan, 2008). Conversely, job insecurity and job satisfaction are essential determinants of OCB (Sverke et al., 2019). Prior research has shown that alienation increases stress levels and reduces employees' voluntary contributions by preventing them from engaging in OCB-related behaviours, thereby conserving their physical and mental resources (Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2022).

The discourse on the Division of Labour in Society theory (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016) and the Managed Heart theory (Hirschfeld, 2002) illuminates the potential for war zones to intensify the negative relationship between work alienation and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). The extreme conditions in war zones disrupt normal labour divisions and impose high emotional labour (King et al., 1995; Singh & Randhawa, 2021), which can potentially deteriorate the pro-social behaviours encapsulated in OCB more so than in pandemic situations. We argue that work alienation might have a more detrimental impact on OCB in war zones due to the higher levels of stress, threat to personal safety, and the breakdown of normal social and organisational structures. In contrast, pandemic situations, while stressful, may offer more structured and safe environments, especially with remote working arrangements, thus potentially mitigating the negative effects of work alienation on OCB to an extent. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4: *The negative relationship between alienation and OCB is moderated by extreme-context type (wars vs pandemics), such that it is more intense in wartime contexts.*

Methods

Sample

This research aims to investigate whether the type of extreme context—war versus pandemic—moderates the effects of extreme-context perception on work alienation, job attitudes, and organisational outcomes. To achieve this, the study utilised two samples: Sample 1 comprises service sector professionals in wartime Syria, and Sample 2 consists of customer service professionals in Middle Eastern Arab nations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sample 1

The first phase of this study focuses on service-sector employees, a population significantly affected by the ongoing Syrian civil war, to recruit Sample 1. To fully comprehend the context in which these employees operate, it is crucial to understand the broader conflict and how it is positioned against other war zones in the world. In 2011, pro-democracy protests erupted in Syria against the authoritarian rule of President Bashar al-Assad, inspired by the Arab Spring. However, unlike the Ukrainian army defending against foreign invasion (UN, 2023), al-Assad's regime, aligned with invaders from other authoritarian regimes like Iran and Russia, waged war against its own people. Al-Assad violently cracked down on the initially peaceful demonstrations, leading to armed rebellion and eventually systematic destruction of social cohesion through civil war (Mahmoud et al., 2019). Applying Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil" (Arendt, 2013), al-Assad and his allies have bureaucratised violence by bombing civilian homes, markets, hospitals and schools while promoting his regime internationally as the saviour of minorities until 2023 anti-regime protests in the Druze-majority Sweida (aka As-Suwayda) province recently (BBC, 2023) demolished that image.

With no air defences or shelters, civilians have been exposed to constant aerial assaults and chemical attacks, exemplifying what Stanley Cohen called “crimes of obedience” by soldiers following orders (Cohen, 1995). The regime is known for expelling journalists and suppressing narratives before commencing atrocities (Ahmed, 2018). With only basic mobile phones, civilians have struggled to inform the world (HRW, 2011; Yassin, 2022), unlike Ukraine, which hosts thousands of international correspondents (Eddy & Fletcher, 2022).

We estimated the population for Sample 1 to be around 1.76 million employees, accounting for nearly 65% of the total number of employees in Syria (Daher, 2023; O'Neill, 2023). From 2016 to 2019, we conducted a cross-sectional survey that participants could complete through either online or paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaires. We made it clear to participants that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their completion of the survey indicated their consent to participate. We also informed the participants that they were free to withdraw from the survey at any time for any reason and that they could choose not to answer any specific questions if they so desired. During the data collection process, we approached nearly 900 individuals, but many were hesitant to participate due to concerns about recrimination in a war-torn nation (Mahmoud et al., 2019). To address these concerns and increase response rates, we assured participants of anonymity and collected data in the privacy of their homes. Additionally, we utilised a snowball sampling approach to find additional participants through referrals from those already participating. Although there are limitations to this sampling method (Waters, 2015), it allowed us to conduct the study in a war-torn country (Horst, 2015; Mahmoud et al., 2019). Eventually, The majority of Sample 1 comprised of men (66%), with over half (54%) having attained a higher education degree and an average age of 26 years.

Sample 2

Ethics approval was obtained from Crandall University for this study, which was carried out between March and August 2021 in various Middle Eastern countries. The participants, 647 in total, were recruited from a randomly selected group of LinkedIn members who worked in customer service roles in Middle Eastern organisations. We used a personalised invitation message to reach out to these participants. We filtered the search results on LinkedIn based on the participant's country of residence and position title (customer service). Out of the 136,000 LinkedIn users in the sample population, we selected one participant for every three counts after filtering the search results. The recruitment message informed the participants that the survey would require their participation in two separate instances to be completed and that those who completed both phases would receive USD 10 cash or gift cards as compensation for their time and participation. We also obtained the participants' email addresses and/or WhatsApp numbers to send them the surveys. Additionally, we informed the participants that they would receive a five-digit identification number upon completing the first stage, which they would need to log into the survey in the second phase. At Time 1, the participants responded to measures of COVID-19 perception and alienation. The second wave of the survey was conducted four weeks after completing Stage 1. We chose a four-week time lag between the two stages to avoid falsely inflating the correlations between distinct variables (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2009). Previous research has taken a similar approach (e.g. Yam et al., 2016). The automatically generated IDs at Time 1 were used to match the participants' responses to the corresponding ones at Time 2, ensuring that the pairing was correctly done. The participants responded to measures of job insecurity, job satisfaction, OCB, and demographics at Time 2. We provided an explanation of the research's purpose and methodology to all participants during both survey waves. We also informed the participants that they could contact the researchers at any time to ask questions, voice concerns about the survey or withdraw from the

study. The survey distributed to participants included consent to participate in this study, and since the survey was conducted online in both phases, we did not obtain participants' signatures. The questionnaire was completed anonymously, and we assured all participants that their responses would remain confidential. A total of 647 surveys were circulated at Time 1, and 420 completed surveys were received. At Time 2, we only distributed the second wave questionnaires to those who completed the Time 1 surveys. As a result, we received 219 completed surveys that provided the data required for the pandemic-time sample. Sample 2 consisted mostly of males (53%) with a higher education degree (41%) and an average age of 35 years.

Measures

The measures that were used in this study and have been previously validated in previous research can be found in Appendix 2. Certainly, we used items validated by previous research (Mahmoud & Blinkhorn, 2018; Mahmoud et al., 2019; Mahmoud, Hack-Polay, Fuxman, et al., 2021; Mahmoud, Hack-Polay, Reisel, et al., 2021; Mahmoud & Reisel, 2015; Reisel & Mahmoud, 2014) to measure extreme-context perception adapted twice to measure wartime perception and pandemic perception respectively. Additionally, to measure alienation, we used Banai and Reisel (2007) and Lang (1985); we used Francis and Barling (2005) to measure job insecurity, and Judge et al. (2006) to measure job satisfaction. We also used Van Dyne et al. (1994) to measure OCB. All measures were graded on a five-point Likert scale. The validity and reliability of the measures used in this research were assessed using several indicators. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Lacker Criterion (Appendix 3) with square-rooted Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. Discriminant validity for all the measures employed was established because the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its correlations with the remaining variables. Additionally, all constructs had AVEs higher than 0.5, Composite Reliability (CR) values above .7, and Variance Inflation Factor

(VIF) values less than five, establishing discriminant validity, construct reliability, and convergent validity for all measures used (refer to Appendix 4). Before conducting path and multigroup analyses with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2022), we ran Common-Method Bias (CMB) tests. CMB was not detected as the inner VIF values were all less than 3.3 (refer to Appendix 5) (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Results

Comparing means

The independent-sample t-test results indicated significant disparities in the perceptions and behaviours of employees in warzones compared to those in pandemic settings. Employees operating in warzones reported significantly higher levels of extreme-context perception ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.85$) than those in pandemic situations ($M=3.05$, $SD=0.88$), with a significant difference ($t(198)=-8.76$, $p<.001$). Job insecurity was experienced more acutely by employees in pandemic conditions ($M=3.00$, $SD=1.03$) as compared to those in warzones ($M=2.43$, $SD=0.97$), showing a significant difference ($t(198)=4.37$, $p<.001$). Additionally, feelings of alienation were marginally higher in the pandemic group ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.92$) versus the warzone group ($M=3.09$, $SD=0.99$), with a statistically significant difference ($t(198)=2.21$, $p<.05$). Conversely, job satisfaction was significantly higher among employees in warzones ($M=3.26$, $SD=0.75$) compared to those in pandemics ($M=2.96$, $SD=0.79$), with a difference ($t(198)=-3.09$, $p=.002$). However, no significant difference was found in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) between the two groups ($t(198)=0.63$, $p>.05$), despite a slightly higher mean in the warzone sample ($M=3.84$, $SD=0.88$) compared to the pandemic sample ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.91$).

Hypotheses testing

We employed structural equation modelling using the variance-based approach, known as partial least squares (PLS-SEM), as our primary statistical technique for evaluating research hypotheses. The choice to use PLS-SEM was made based on past studies that recommended it for predictive model analysis and its increasing popularity in public and occupational health studies (Jo & Baek, 2023; Mahmoud, Hack-Polay, Reisel, et al., 2021). Additionally, research (Mahmoud, Reisel, Fuxman, & Hack-Polay, 2022) suggests that most data do not meet the multivariate normality criterion, which is why an expanding body of literature (Hair et al., 2022) supports the use of PLS-SEM for empirical research studies that involve data sensitive to non-normality concerns.

Our hypotheses are tested through path analysis and multigroup analysis (MGA), utilising standardised betas (β) for direct effects, unstandardised betas (B) for indirect effects, and accompanying t-values in bootstrapping mode. To assess the model's fit to our data, we use the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). Furthermore, we use f^2 to evaluate effect sizes and PLSpredict to test out-of-sample prediction.

After conducting Bootstrapping on 5,000 sub-samples, it was found that extreme-context perception positively predicts alienation ($\beta = .213$, $P < .01$, $f^2 > .02$), as shown in Table 1. Additionally, alienation is found to positively predict job insecurity ($\beta = .622$, $P < .01$, $f^2 > .35$) while negatively predicting job satisfaction ($\beta = -.654$, $P < .01$, $f^2 > .35$) and OCB ($\beta = -.422$, $P < .01$, $f^2 > .15$).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 shows that all the unstandardised betas are significant at a probability value less than .01. Therefore, we can conclude that alienation acts as a transmitter, causing an increase in job insecurity ($B = .132$, $SD = .024$, $P < .01$), and a decrease in job satisfaction ($B = -.139$, $SD = .019$, $P < .01$) and OCB ($B = -.090$, $SD = .019$, $P < .01$).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The value of SRMR has been determined to be .043, indicating that our hypothetical model is a good fit for the data as it is less than .08. Furthermore, in comparison to the LM benchmark, which is a naive model (included in Appendix 6), most of the observed variables in the PLS-SEM evaluation have lower root mean square error (RMSE) scores. This suggests that the model has a strong level of predictive power (Hair et al., 2019).

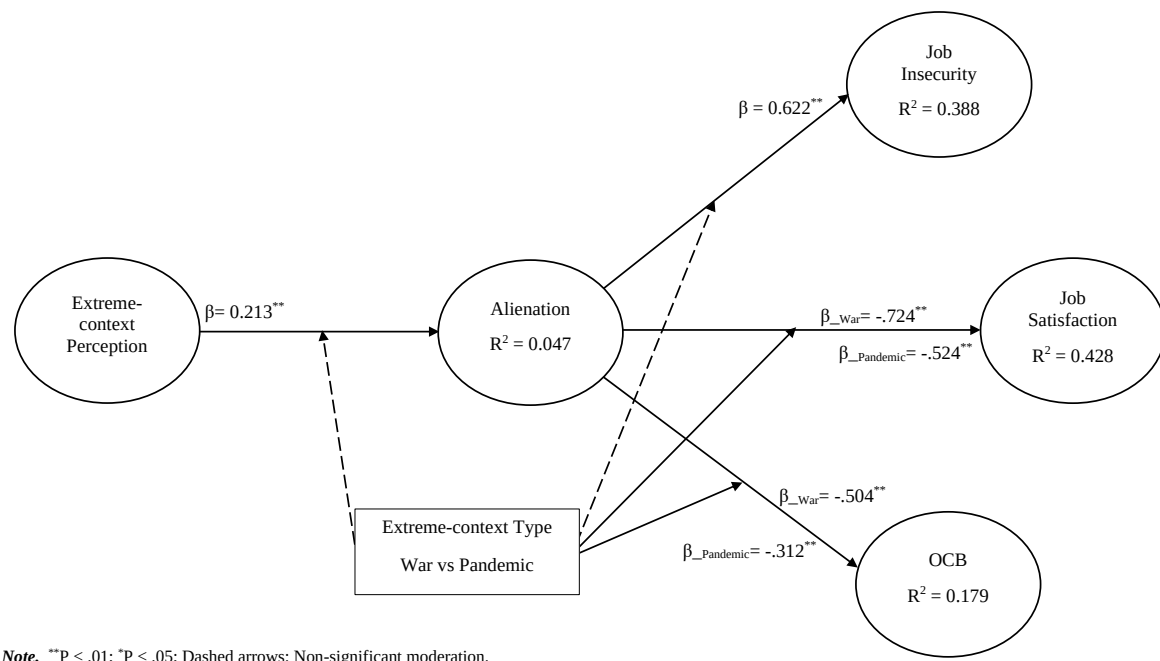
Before conducting any multigroup comparisons, both configural invariance and compositional invariance must be established and validated without data pooling (Hair et al., 2019). As we have adopted a PLS-SEM technique, the measurement configural invariance is achieved by default (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, we move on to establish whether the second condition, compositional invariance, is met. In this case, we perform a permutation check for all variables. All variables have Permutation P-values greater than 0.05 (see Appendix 7). Therefore, we consider the null hypothesis to be supported, proving compositional invariance, which means that the initial correlations of the constructs are not considerably different from 1.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

We conduct a multigroup analysis (MGA) to investigate whether extreme context type can moderate the hypothesised path. We use t-values associated with the comparisons indicated in the parametric analyses. According to the results (refer to Table 3), the paths representing the direct effects of alienation on job satisfaction and OCB are not equal between war and pandemics. Figure 1 shows that despite the non-invariance between employees in warzones and those in pandemic ones regarding the effects of extreme-context perception on alienation ($t_{(\text{Pandemic vs War})} = .518$) and alienation effects on job insecurity

($t_{(|\text{Pandemic vs War}|)} = .529$), employees in warzones are more likely to experience drops in the levels of job satisfaction ($\beta_{\text{War}} = -.724$, $P < .01$; $\beta_{\text{Pandemic}} = -.524$, $P < .01$; $t_{(|\text{Pandemic vs War}|)} = 3.767$) and OCB ($\beta_{\text{War}} = -.504$, $P < .01$; $\beta_{\text{Pandemic}} = -.312$, $P < .01$; $t_{(|\text{Pandemic vs War}|)} = 3.006$) as a result of extreme-context-triggered work alienation. Consequently, we conclude that H1 and H2 are unsupported, while H3 and H4 are supported. This means that the type of extreme context moderates the relationships between alienation and both job satisfaction and OCB in a way that becomes more devastating in wartime contexts as compared to pandemic ones.

Figure 1: Hypotheses testing



Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the type of extreme context (war vs pandemic) moderates the effects of extreme-context perception on work alienation and subsequent job attitudes and organisational outcomes. The results showed that extreme-context perception positively predicted alienation. Furthermore, alienation positively predicted job insecurity and negatively predicted job satisfaction and OCB. Importantly, the type of extreme context moderated some of these relationships. Specifically, the negative relationships between

alienation and job satisfaction and OCB were stronger in the war context compared to the pandemic context. This aligns with our hypotheses and theoretical rationale based on the Division of Labour and Managed Heart theories, which suggested that the disruption of normal social structures and emotional labour demands exacerbated by warzones can deteriorate job satisfaction and OCBs to a greater extent than pandemics. However, contrary to Hypotheses 1 and 2, the positive relationships between extreme-context perception and alienation, and between alienation and job insecurity, were not moderated by context type. This contrasts with our application of theories like COR and Event System, which proposed that wartime contexts would intensify these relationships due to higher novelty, disruption, and threat appraisals. A potential explanation is that the economic uncertainties and job instability provoked by the pandemic may have equalised these effects across contexts. Overall, the findings reveal that while extreme contexts like wars and pandemics can worsen work alienation and attitudes, their moderating effects depend on the specific outcome variable. The results highlight the need for tailored organisational policies to address the complex challenges posed by different extreme contexts. For instance, boosting social support and solidarity may be particularly beneficial in warzones, whereas financial security policies could be more impactful in pandemics. The study makes key contributions to extreme contexts and occupational health literature. First, it offers one of the first investigations into whether different extreme event types have differential impacts on employee attitudes and behaviours. Second, focusing on the Middle East provides culturally specific insights into how layered crises shape organisational outcomes in a turbulence-prone region. Finally, findings can inform policies tailored to meet challenges posed by distinct extreme contexts.

Practical implications

The results of the paper indicate that extreme contexts like wars and pandemics can worsen feelings of work alienation, which then negatively impacts important job outcomes like job

satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). However, the type of extreme context moderates some of these relationships. Specifically, the declines in job satisfaction and OCBs due to work alienation were more severe in wartime contexts compared to pandemic contexts. These findings suggest several practical implications for organisations: First, organisations should aim to reduce work alienation and isolation for employees facing extreme contexts, as this can prevent declines in job satisfaction and extra-role behaviours that benefit the organisation. Strategies could include increasing communication, providing social support systems, and facilitating remote collaboration. Second, the moderating effect of context type indicates that tailored interventions may be needed for employees in different extreme situations. For example, boosting social cohesion and solidarity could be especially impactful in wartime contexts where alienation had a stronger negative relationship with outcomes. Third, ensuring job security and stability is crucial, particularly in pandemic contexts where alienation more intensely predicts job insecurity. Organisations should communicate transparently about job stability and provide financial safety nets.

Overall, the results demonstrate that work alienation triggered by external crises can damage employee attitudes and behaviours. Organisations should proactively implement targeted policies and interventions based on context to reduce alienation and safeguard job satisfaction and organisational citizenship.

Research implications

Although our study provides valuable insights, it has some limitations that require further investigation. A significant limitation is that our sample was restricted to the service sector in the Middle East, which raises concerns about the generalisability of our results to other regions and industries. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse set of industries, occupations, and geographical areas to determine if the moderating effects we observed hold true across different settings.

Another limitation is that we used cross-sectional data for the war sample, whereas we used longitudinal data for the pandemic sample. This may limit the comparability and strength of causal inferences. Therefore, future research should collect longitudinal data for both types of extreme contexts to enable a more consistent and compelling analysis of causal relationships.

Moreover, the use of self-reported measures may introduce the potential for various biases, such as social desirability or self-assessment inaccuracies. Therefore, future research should incorporate more objective measures that are less prone to these biases, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings.

Additionally, our study only compared war and pandemic contexts, but there are other extreme situations, such as economic crises or natural disasters. Future research could expand on our work by exploring these additional contexts to see if the moderating effects we identified vary across different extreme situations.

Furthermore, while our study drew upon established theories, there remains a need for a deeper exploration of the theoretical mechanisms at play. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches could yield more insights into how and why different extreme events shape attitudes and behaviours. This could also involve a more extensive testing of theories to explain the variances in responses to different types of extreme events.

Lastly, examining additional attitudinal and behavioural variables sensitive to extreme contexts would provide a broader perspective on the full spectrum of impacts that such events can have on the workforce. By exploring these variables, future research can enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics within extreme contexts and contribute to developing more effective organisational strategies and policies to mitigate the adverse effects of such events.

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