



## Destructive Workplace Deviance in the Farming Sector, South Africa

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### **Abstract**

In today's world of work, understanding destructive deviant workplace behaviours becomes more significant for organisations as they attempt to recover from the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Destructive deviant behaviour in organisations has received more focus in recent years due to its negative repercussions, which inhibit growth. However, it has rarely been studied in the farming sector, even though the sector is considered to be the main contributor towards bringing economic stability, especially in Africa. This paper explores the forms of farmworkers' destructive deviant behaviours that threaten the well-being of the farms in order for management to be in a better position to effectively manage them. A narrative approach to inquiry was adopted in order to understand the farmworkers' views and experiences in relation to their engagement in various forms of destructive deviant behaviours at their workplace. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 39 farmworkers. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and twelve themes were created in relations to the forms of destructive deviant actions that farmworkers engaged in. These themes include; putting little effort, incomplete work, sleeping on duty, extending break, using wrong working methods, ignorance of safety procedures, being under influence of alcohol, late coming, verbal fights, physical fights, theft and abscondment. The themes were further grouped into two categories, namely, interpersonal deviance and organisational deviance. An insight in relation to the various forms of destructive workplace deviance can enable management to develop appropriate managerial strategies that would minimise workers' tendencies to engage in destructive deviant behaviours and jeopardise the well-being of organisations.

**Keywords:** *Workplace Deviance; Destructive Workplace Deviance; Deviant Behaviour; Deviant Acts; Farmworkers*

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone unprepared, making it harder for organisations to recover from the negative effects of the pandemic (Nchanji & Lutomia, 2021). The external factors such as the war between Russia and Ukraine as well as internal factors such as rapid population growth make

the recovery process to be even worse for Africa (Visser & Ferrer, 2015; Wudil, Usman, Rosak-Szyrocka, Pila'r & Boye, 2022). The agriculture industry, especially farming sector, has been identified as one of the most important industries that could assist Africa to recover and bring the economic stability that the continent desperately needs in order to grow (Wudil et al., 2022). However, the industry is also in the recovery stage because it was also severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mthembu, Mkhize & Arthur, 2022), is still faced with climate change challenges (Keutgen, 2023) and has to also respond to the challenge of food shortages due to Russia-Ukraine war and rapid population growth (Visser & Ferrer, 2015; Wudil et al, 2022).

Workers' destructive deviant behaviours could impose threats to the industry's chances to rescue the continent. Xu, Zhang, Bu and He, (2022) emphasise the critical role of human resources (employees) in ensuring an organisation's success and sustainability, which heightens the importance of understanding and addressing workers' destructive deviant behaviours. Destructive workplace deviance is defined as a "voluntary behaviour that violates significant organisational norms in a manner that threatens the well-being of an organisation as well as its members, or both" (Yildiz, Alpkın, Sezen & Yildiz, 2015, p. 415). Researchers regard destructive workplace deviance as one of the most conspicuous negative behaviours in the workplace and a possible huge obstacle to economic growth due to its detrimental effects on the well-being of organisations and their members (O'Neill & Hastings, 2011; Kennedy, 2014; Braje, Aleksić & Jelavić, 2020; Agrawal & Pandey, 2021).

O'Neill and Hastings (2011) indicated that maximising the prediction of workplace deviance is an important priority for research and practice based on the enormous amounts of resources and productivity which could be lost each year as a result of negative deviant behaviours at the workplace. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of destructive deviance has intensified and earned popularity in the modern organisational behaviour literature and that it has suddenly become the most important research area (Yildiz, et al., 2015; Onuoha, 2022). However, it seems very little has been done in done in Africa (Fagbohunge, Akinbode & Ayodeji, 2012; Sunday, 2013). Furthermore, there seems to be limited research focusing on understanding farmworkers' behaviour in their farming workplace, especially in South Africa. Research conducted on farmworkers in the South African context tends to focus more on farmworkers' physical health and safety, alcohol consumption, living or dwelling conditions (London, 2000; Rother, 2008; Magcai, Du Plessis & Pienaar, 2013; Erwee, 2016; Afzal, Lieber, Dottino & Beddoe, 2017). Such an oversight is however shocking, especially after previous research estimated that 33 to 75 percent of all employees engaged in some form of deviant actions, such as theft, fraud, sabotage and intentional absenteeism (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Rogoan, 2009).

Research estimates that approximately 77.8 percent of South Africans had experienced workplace bullying (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012), 10.8 percent of employees observed verbal and physical harassment at the workplace (Ramsaroop & Brijball Parumasur, 2007), about 25 percent of employees indicated awareness of co-workers working under influence of substances, while one in every fifteen employees steals from the employer (Rogoan, 2009). Research conducted in South Africa revealed that 44 percent of the reported work-related fatalities or injuries and 79 percent of the unreported work-related fatalities or injuries were from the agriculture sector (Schierhout, Midgley & Myers, 1997). The following were identified as some of the causes of work-related fatalities and injuries: falls, being struck by an object, machinery accident, vapours and gases, chemicals and pesticides as well as tractor accidents (Schierhout et al., 1997).

Although Schierhout et al. (1997) conducted their study approximately two decades ago, researchers in other countries found similar results, for example, Hagel, King, Dosman, Lawson, Trask and Pickett (2016) in Canada as well as Sharma, Prusty, Rathod, Arthi, Watterson and Cavalli (2023) in India. It can be argued that some of the causes of work-related fatalities and injuries stated above could be as a result of farmworkers' deviant behaviour, whether with good or bad intentions. It however appears

that very little has been done in trying to uncover the mystery behind employees' engagement in destructive deviant behaviours in the farming sector.

The purpose of this paper was to explore the various forms of destructive deviant behaviours that farmworkers are likely to engage in, from a social constructivist stance. Arshad and Malik (2021) view workplace deviance as a socially constructed phenomenon that should be investigated through less explored qualitative methods. A narrative approach to inquiry was adopted in this study, focusing on the farming sector, which is an unfamiliar context. This assisted to gain insight into workplace deviance from different perspectives, which could assist in discovering best ways of managing various forms of employees' destructive deviant behaviours at the workplace. Muafi (2011) asserted that it would be fruitless to address one form of destructive behaviour, only to be faced with another similar destructive behaviour in the future, which implies that various forms of destructive deviant behaviours should be understood before any attempts could be made to address destructive deviance.

The main research question addressed in this paper is: "What forms of destructive deviant behaviours are applicable to the farmworkers?" The paper is structured to include both theoretical and empirical literature review, the research methodology and findings as well as conclusion and recommendations. Farooq, Bhatti, Ishaq and Kashif (2023) assert that the success of organisations depends on employees' positive behaviours while their negative behaviours hinder growth. Therefore, understanding the forms of destructive deviance amongst farmworkers could assist the farming sector to devise mechanisms that would inhibit farmworkers destructive behaviours and assist the sector during its recovery journey.

## *Literature Review*

### **Theoretical Literature**

There seems to be no comprehensive theories that specifically explain workplace deviance but there are fundamental theories that could assist in understanding destructive workplace deviance. The theories considered relevant for this paper include Conservation of Resources Theory (CRT), Psychological Entitlement Theory (PET), and Four-cell Typology of Workplace Deviance (TWD).

#### *Conservation of Resources Theory*

The CRT proposed by Hobfoll (1988) is regarded as a model that is useful in understanding the phenomenon "stress" but the theory also assists to understand employees' tendencies to engage in deviant behaviours. The theory is based on the assumption that while people strive to preserve, safeguard and acquire resources, they also strive to prevent potential loss of the acquired valued resources. These resources could include objects, personal characteristics such as skills and relationships; conditions such as reputation at work and position in the organisational hierarchy, or energies that are valued by the employees (Hobfoll, 2011; Woods & West, 2019). The theory is based on two major principles: (1) resource loss is disproportionately more prominent than resource gain, and (2) people invest resources in order to protect against resource loss, recover from loss, and to gain resources (Hobfoll, 1988). This implies that employees would do anything possible to preserve their valued resources.

The CRT suggests that employees have limited sources of resources at their disposal, and these resources assist them to cope with various stressors and demands in their workplace (Neves & Champion, 2015). Thus, employees acquire, preserve, and allocate necessary resources to perform their duties at the workplace and accumulate resources to avoid potential future depletion of resources. These resources also assist employees to cope with unfavourable work conditions and continue to positively contribute toward the realisation of organisational goals (Zhou, Ma & Dong, 2018). However, when employees feel that

their resources are threatened, becoming depleted or drained, they would seek ways to generate resources perceived necessary to cope with the work stressors and demands by detaching themselves from active participation in their expected daily duties. The outcome of such detachment may include poor performance and other withdrawal behaviour such as working slowly, taking longer breaks or leaving work early in order to avoid further depletion of resources (Ferguson, Carlson, Hunter & Whitten, 2012). Although the employees' engagement in such deviant actions may not be directly aimed at harming the organisation but to avoid depletion of resources, they do harm the organisation and therefore fall under the umbrella of destructive deviant behaviour.

### *Psychological Entitlement Theory*

Harvey and Harris (2010) suggest that it is acceptable for employees to have a certain level of entitlement in the workplace but emphasise that heightened psychological entitlement is problematic. The PET assumes that employees have a tendency to lean towards favourable self-perceptions and reward expectations, which may also occur in situations where there is little or no justification for such perceptions. This means that the employees' perceptions of rewards entitlement may be based on distorted perceptions and expectations. Employees may then become disappointed and frustrated if these expectations are unfulfilled. The disappointment and frustration may manifest in a form of negative attitudes, unethical behaviours, conflict with supervisors and high pay demands in the workplace (Harvey & Harris, 2010; Harvey, Harris, Gillis, & Martinko, 2014; Langerud & Jordan, 2020). High levels of psychological entitlement may also promote job-related frustrations amongst employees, resulting in negative behaviours towards co-workers and supervisors (Harvey & Harris (2010).

Harvey et al. (2014) argued that psychological entitlement may promote perceptions of abusive supervision even if such perceptions cannot be justified. Thus, a supervisor providing a constructive and objective feedback on a psychologically entitled employee's job performance, actual abilities and efforts may be perceived as being bias and abusive. A psychologically entitled employee may respond to such distorted perceptions by engaging in negative workplace attitudes and behaviours such as disrespecting the supervisor, disobeying the supervisor's instructions, refusing to take orders from the supervisor, putting little effort into one's work, taking unreasonable additional or longer break, intentionally working slower than expected and taking a property from work without permission (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline & Bushman, 2004; Stewart, Bing, Davison, Woehr & McIntyre, 2009; Harvey et al., 2014). All these negative behaviours fall under the umbrella of destructive deviant behaviour. Therefore, psychological entitlement is one of most concerns to managers in the workplace because a psychological entitled employee may unjustifiably feel unappreciated and demoralised, resulting in various forms of destructive deviant behaviour (Harvey & Harris, 2010).

### *Four-cell Typology of Workplace Deviance*

The TWD was proposed by Robinson and Bennett (1995), whereby two dimensions are used to explain workplace deviance. The first dimension called "minor versus serious deviance", focuses on the seriousness or harmfulness of the deviant acts, whereby one end of the dimension reflects deviant acts that are not serious or harmful to the organisation or its members, and the other end reflects deviant behaviour of serious nature and harmful to the organisation or its members. The second dimension called "interpersonal versus organisational deviance," focuses on the degree to which deviant acts are interpersonal and harmful to organisational members or non-interpersonal and harmful to the organisation, whereby one end of the dimension reflects deviant acts that are explicit and harmful to the organisational members but not harmful to the organisation, while the other end reflects deviant behaviour that are implicit and harmful to the organisation but not to the members of the organisation (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) went further and classified workplace deviance into four categories (cells), namely; production deviance, property deviance, political deviance and personal aggression (hence the name four-cell typology of workplace deviant behaviour). Production deviance refers to a minor, but harmful behaviour directed at the organisation, while property deviance includes a serious and harmful behaviour directed at the organisation. Political deviance involves a minor, but harmful behaviour aimed at organisational members, and personal aggression refers to a serious and harmful behaviour directed at organisational members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). The TWD assists in identifying various forms of workplace deviance and also provides examples of deviant actions that fall under each category or cell (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Thus, the TWD paved a way that makes it possible for researchers and practitioners to assess the seriousness or harmfulness of the various deviant acts that employees engage in.

### *Empirical Literature*

The work of Robinson and Bennett (1995) grouped different workplace destructive deviant behaviours into a comprehensive single work, which paved a way towards the development of a scale to measure destructive deviant behaviour (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). In their study, Robinson and Bennett (1995) identified two broader dimensions of deviance forms, namely; interpersonal and organisational destructive deviance. Interpersonal deviant behaviour refers to employees' voluntary actions that deviates from organisational norms and directed towards other organisational members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Political deviance and personal deviance contribute towards interpersonal dimension of destructive workplace deviance. A list of possible actions that constitutes interpersonal destructive deviant behaviour includes amongst others the following: verbally abusing another employee, sexually harassing an employee, gossiping about another employee, supervisor unjustifiably firing an employee, showing favouritism to certain employees, employees blaming other employees for their own mistakes, stealing co-worker's possessions as well as competing with co-workers in a non-beneficial manner (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 571-572).

Organisational deviant behaviour refers to employees' voluntary actions that deviates from organisational norms and directed towards other organisational members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Organisational dimension of workplace deviance encompasses both production deviance and property deviance. Some of actions constituting organisational destructive deviant behaviour as identified by Robinson and Bennett (1995, p. 571-572) include the following: "employee sabotaging equipment, coming to work late or leaving early, lying about hours worked, starting negative rumours about company, taking excessive breaks, intentionally making errors, covering up mistakes, intentionally working slowly, not following safety procedures, working unnecessary overtime as well lying about being sick." These forms of deviant behaviour formed the basis for most research conducted on destructive workplace deviance.

A study by DeShong, DeMond and Mullins-Sweatt, (2015) on the impact of the three traits of the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy) on destructive workplace deviance among part-time employees found significant correlation between the three traits and both interpersonal and organisational destructive deviant behaviour. In their study on the impact of personality traits on workplace deviance behaviour, Bolton, Becker and Barber (2010) discovered that full-time employees from various organisations with lower agreeableness tend to engage in interpersonal form of deviant behaviours while those with lower conscientiousness tend to engage in organisational form of deviant behaviours. The authors also found that employees with lower extraversion tend to engage in theft and those with higher neuroticism engaged in sabotage (examples of property deviance), while employees with higher openness tend to engage in production deviance (Bolton et al., 2010).

Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke (2002) found that sabotage, an example of property deviant behaviour, was the most common form of workplace deviant behaviour among employees from different organisations. Muafi (2011) discovered that operational employees engage in counterproductive behaviours such as poor quality work, destructive rumours, theft and sabotage of equipment, and absenteeism, which encompass production deviance, property deviance and political deviance. Jaakson, Vadia, Baumane-Vitolina and Sumilo (2017) found that retail employees engage in destructive deviant behaviours that relate to workplace dishonesty such as theft, deception, concealment and sabotage. Sunday (2013) discovered that employees in a logistics industry engaged more on production deviant behaviours. Ferguson et al. (2012) discovered that male employees are more likely to engage in production destructive deviance than female employees when confronted with personal challenges such as work-family conflict while in contrast, Fagbohunge et al. (2012) found that female employees are more likely to engage in higher production deviance, personal aggression and political deviance than male employees.

Hollinger and Clark (1982) found that young employees were more likely to engage in some forms of property destructive deviance and production destructive deviance. A study on cyberloafing, an example of production deviance, revealed that male employees are more likely to engage in cyberloafing behaviour as compared to female employees, and older employees are more likely to engage in cyberloafing as compared to younger employees (Restubog, Garcia, Toledano, Amarnani, Tolentino & Tang, 2011). The previous research findings presented above show that studies on workplace deviance tend to adopt a quantitative research approach, which supports the call made by Arshad and Malik (2021) to investigate workplace deviance by utilising less explored qualitative approach.

### ***Methodology***

A qualitative research design was adopted to explore various forms of destructive deviant behaviours amongst farmworkers. Arshad (2021, p. 98) suggested that workplace deviance is a “socially constructed phenomenon” that requires a “social constructivist epistemology” to provide a “richer picture for its understanding”. A narrative research approach, requiring participants to narrate about the various destructive deviant actions occurring at the farms was used. A narrative inquiry required participants to rely on their memories to verbally express incidents related to destructive deviance like telling a story. This method was appropriate for the farmworkers as Tuwe (2016) emphasised that by nature, Africans are very good and vibrant when it comes to storytelling because they are deep-rooted in oral cultures and traditions.

Upon obtaining ethical approval from the University of Limpopo and permission from the management of the three farms, data was collected from a convenient sample of 39 full-time farmworkers from the three farms (13 from each farm) based on the research participants’ willingness and accessibility. Creswell (2007) suggested that in a narrative research, one or two individuals, or a larger pool of 20 to 30 participants can be used to develop a collective story. Semi-structured interviews, in a form of oral history were conducted to gather concrete descriptions of farmworkers’ lived experience with regards to workplace deviance by recalling and reflecting on workplace deviance incidents from their past through the use of prepared interview guide (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). As it is sometimes difficult for people to report on their own wrongdoings, the researcher considered making use of a second person (non-self-report system) when preparing the interview questions (Galperin, 2012).

The farmworkers were asked the following questions relating to destructive deviant behaviour: “Think of a time when someone did something that threatened the well-being of your farm” Secondary questions adapted from the Workplace Deviance Scale developed by Bennett and Robbins (2000), as well as other probing questions were also used to fill in missing information during the narration. A notebook

was used to take field notes and farmworkers' consent was obtained to use recording devices. The narrative as a mode of analysis," whereby the researcher "organises and interprets empirical data by describing events and actions" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 218) was adopted and the meaning and content of the narratives were analysed by employing thematic analysis to "identify, analyse and describe patterns or themes across the data set" (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Messenge, Van Aardt & Wagner, 2014, p. 350).

## **Results and Discussion**

A total number of twelve (12) themes were created in relations to the forms of destructive deviant actions that seemed to occur in the three farms, with pseudonyms. These include; putting little effort, incomplete work, sleeping on duty, extending break, using wrong working methods, ignorance of safety procedures, being under influence of alcohol, late coming, verbal fights, physical fights, theft and abscondment. These themes can be grouped under two categories according to previous research findings, namely; interpersonal (2 themes) and organisational deviant acts (10 themes), which were further condensed into three broad themes (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). The presentation of research findings below focusses on each form of destructive deviant behaviour separately and pseudonyms are used to narrate the selected extracts from farmworkers of the three farms, which are considered most vibrant and persuasive on incidents related to each of the twelve themes.

### **Interpersonal destructive deviant acts**

The interpersonal destructive deviant acts occurring in the three farms, threatening their well-being of others were grouped into two themes, verbal fights and physical fights. The TWD classifies the two themes under personal aggression, which is considered a serious deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

#### *Verbal fights*

Verbal fights include social interaction that involves personal assaults marked with spoken altercations (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Sixty percent of the workers from Farm 1 and Farm 2 respectively, indicated that verbal fight is a destructive deviant act that workers engage in and 40% from Farm 3. Ntokoto reported verbal fight incident and said; "*It once happened that one member of the team made fun of another member, thinking it was just a joke. It got so ugly that the other team members requested the two workers in conflict to be separated by assigning them to different teams*". By its nature, verbal fights can be regarded as another form of verbal workplace aggression and the consequences associated with the destructive acts include damaged physical or psychological reputation of the employee (Chirilă & Constantin, 2013). Therefore, it is important for management to have policies that address or minimise verbal fight incidents.

#### *Physical fights*

Physical fights involve dispute between two people marked with violence, physical intimidation, force or contact (Nielsen, Glasø & Einarsen, 2017; Yang, Zhang, Xi, & Bovet, 2017). Twenty percent of the farmworkers from Farm 1, 10% from Farm 2 and 20% from Farm 3 reported physical fight as a destructive deviant incident that happened at the farms. Musa reported the incident and said; "*During picking season, a temporary female worker found it difficult to stand the "heat of working at a very fast pace" and physically fought with a temporary male worker over bins used to place in harvests. The female worker "attacked and bit the male worker but the male worker did not fight back". The incident forced other workers to desert their work and tried to stop the fight. The two workers were summoned to the office*".

Physical fights at the workplace form part of physical workplace aggression which can either be direct or indirect (Hills, 2018). The indirect form of physical workplace aggression includes an employee raising a hand or object in a way that threatens or intimidates a co-worker, while direct form of physical workplace aggression includes acts relating to the actual physical attack and sexual harassment (Steffgen, 2008; Hills, 2018). Research showed that failure to manage physical fights in the workplace may have detrimental effects on both individual and organisational level. At the individual level, a victim of physical fights may suffer from physical injuries or psychological challenges such as depression and psychosomatic disorders, while at the organisational level, the organisation's productivity and employees' performance may be negatively impacted (Steffgen, 2008; Ikyanyon & Ucho, 2013).

### Organisational destructive deviant acts

The organisational destructive deviant acts occurring in the three farms, threatening their well-being were grouped into ten themes, which were further condensed into three broader themes. Firstly, putting little effort, incomplete work, sleeping on duty, chatting over the phone for long time during working hours and listening to radio news on duty were grouped under poor performance. Secondly, wrong working methods and ignorance of safety procedures were grouped under wrong working procedures. Lastly, reporting under influence of alcohol, late coming, extending break, theft and abscondment were grouped under violation of rules and procedures.

#### *Poor performance*

Robinson and Bennett (1995) as well as Bennett and Robinson (2000) identified putting little effort, incomplete work and sleeping on duty as some of destructive deviant behaviours that employees are likely to engage in, which can be associated to poor performance. The TWD groups these behaviours under production deviance, which is regarded as a minor deviance.

Putting little effort involves intentionally withholding work effort by working in a less effective manner, with no attempt to exert physical and mental energy in one's work in order to achieve organisational objectives (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). This deviant act was identified by 60% of the workers who participated in this study at Farm 2, 50% from Farm 1 and 40% from Farm 3. When reporting this kind of destructive deviant behaviour, Tshepang said; *"It once happened when we came back from our first summer festive after the introduction of performance based bonus system. We all did not understand how the bonuses we received were calculated and we were so unhappy about it. Some of the workers showed their discontent by working slower than expected"*.

Sleeping on duty refers to an act involving intentionally falling asleep while responsible for performing job duties during working hours (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Sleeping on duty was reported as another deviant action in which workers engage by 20% of the workers from Farm 1 and 10% from Farm 2. Modise narrated the incident related to this form of destructive act and said; *"There was a worker who liked to sleep on duty and got caught on several occasions by the supervisor. One day, the supervisor decided to take few workers with him to his work station and showed them where he always sleeps. The supervisor told the worker that he wanted the few workers to be his witnesses when he takes disciplinary actions against him. When we got to the area, we could not believe what we saw. The grass in the area where the worker slept easily attested to the supervisor's claims that the worker always sleeps on duty instead of performing his duties. His blocks were untidy and his plants did not receive the care they deserved"*.

Incomplete work refers to a form of poor performance relating to employee's intentional failure to finish the assigned tasks (Streblor, 2004). Incomplete work was reported as another destructive deviant behaviour prevalent by 10% of the participants from Farm 1 only. Jabu confirmed this deviant act by saying; *"There was a worker who failed to perform his duties as it was expected of him. The supervisor*



*tried to set daily targets for the worker in an attempt to force the worker to complete the assigned duties, but the intended results were not achieved. The worker failed to reach the daily targets assigned to him”.*

Strebler (2004) emphasised that it is important for management to identify the possible causes of poor performance and to tackle poor performance as early as possible. Thus, actions aimed at diagnosing and alleviating causes of poor performance may assist to minimise cost associated to this behaviour. This is important as the CRT shows that poor performance could also be as a result of employees’ fear of further depletion of their resources (Hobfoll, 2012; Zhou, Ma & Dong, 2018).

#### *Wrong working procedures*

Wrong working procedures include wrong working methods and ignorance of safety procedures. Robinson and Bennett (1995) as well as Bennett and Robinson (2000) associated the application of wrong working methods and ignorance of safety procedures as some of destructive deviant behaviours that employees tend to engage in, and these behaviours are grouped under production deviance according to the TWD, which is considered a minor deviance.

Using wrong working methods involves performing duties in a manner that is inconsistent with the prescribed methods, resulting in poor performance (Strebler, 2004). Ten percent of workers from Farm 1 and Farm 2 separately reported incidents relating to workers applying wrong working procedures as another form of destructive deviant behaviour occurring at the farms. Khutso stated; *“Workers who pick the produces are given scissors specifically designed to pick the fruit but when they realise that the supervisor is not around, they use their hands to pick the produces because they perceive it as being easier and faster for them. What they do not realise is that they compromise the quality of the harvests to be exported”.*

Ignorance of safety procedures includes acts of intentionally disregarding stipulated safety procedures by engaging in risky behaviours when performing duties (Stackhouse & Turner, 2019). Thirty percent of the participants from Farm 1 and 10% from Farm 2 indicated that ignorance of safety procedures is a destructive action evident at their workplace. Bongani stated; *“There was an incident involving a worker who was working with a pruning machine, and he got injured just under the eye because he did not put on the face shield. The worker was just lucky enough for not losing his eye. Although if he lost his eye, it would have become the problem of the farm as it would be regarded as an injury on duty case, he would have been forced to live the rest of his life with one eye – something that workers do not think of when they take short cuts”.*

The PET supports that psychological entitled workers who fail to get what is perceived as being due to them can engage in this destructive behaviour (Campbell et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 2009; Harvey et al., 2014). However, Israilidis, Lock and Cooke (2013) found that there is a difference between ignorance because of lack of information or knowledge as well as ignorance because of disobedience, and therefore emphasised that it is important for organisations to investigate factors that lead to unhealthy behaviours of ignorance. This means that workers could ignore working procedures or safety procedures because they are ill-informed in terms of the repercussions of their actions, which requires ignorance management. Israilidis et al. (2013) regards ignorance management as:

*“a process of discovering, exploring, realising, recognising and managing ignorance outside and inside the organisation through an appropriate management process to meet current and future demands, design better policy and modify actions in order to achieve organisational objectives and sustain competitive advantage” (p. 76).*

### *Violation of rules and procedures*

The violation of rules and procedures reported as destructive deviant behaviours occurring at the farms include extending break, theft, abscondment, reporting under influence of alcohol and late coming. These behaviours fall under the term “misconduct”, which involves the negative behaviour or conduct of the employee in the workplace (Mogotsi, 2013; The South African Labour Guide, 2019; Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). The TWD classifies most of these behaviours as production deviance, which is considered a minor deviance with the exception of theft. Theft falls under property deviance and is regarded as a serious form of deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Extension of lunch break refers to intentionally taking of longer rest breaks than allowed (The South African Labour Guide, 2019). This behaviour was reported as a destructive act that most workers engage in by 70% of Farm 2 workers, 50% of the Farm 1 workers, and 40% of Farm 3 workers who participated in the study. Akani attested; *“During picking season, workers are expected to work as fast as they could, and by the time they go for their lunch break, they are extremely exhausted to such an extent that thirty (30) minutes becomes very short for them to eat their lunch and “recharge” at the same time. After extending their lunch break, they seemed to have rested a bit and continue to put more effort into their work”*.

Theft refers to an intentional act of taking something from the organisation without permission (Moorthy, Somasundaram, Arokiasamy, Nadarajah & Marimuthu, 2011). All employees who participated in this study at Farm 1 and 90% from Farm 2 and Farm 3 respectively, reported theft as a destructive deviant action that is prevalent in the farms. Thato narrated; *“When harvesting time comes, workers are caught stealing the harvests by the security officers. Workers take advantage that during harvesting season, there are many temporary workers in the farm, which makes it difficult for security officers to search everyone. The workers did not even consider that it was the beginning of the harvest season, which means that the farm has not yet gained any kind of returns on the investment made”*.

Abscondment involves an employee intentionally deserting work without notifying the employer for a time that it may be inferred that the employee does not intend to return to work (Kalawe, 2018). Only 10% of Farm 1 workers and Farm 2 separately reported abscondment as another destructive deviant act occurring in the farms. Vukosi narrated the incident; *“There was an incident involving a worker who decided to continuously abscond from work for a day or two and failed to notify the supervisors or the operational manager. The worker continued to do it even after getting series of warnings until got dismissed”*.

Being under influence of alcohol involves reporting for work while the ingested alcohol is still in one’s nervous system in such a way that may render one incapable of discretion and making sound judgement (The South African Labour Guide, 2019). Eighty percent of the workers who participated in this study at Farm 3, 60% from Farm 2 and 30% from Farm 1 reported that incidents of workers reporting for duty being under influence of alcohol. Kheto confirmed this by saying; *“There is one worker who always comes under influence on Mondays, especially after month-end. The worker is one of the hardest working workers, but his main problem is alcohol”*. The PET may partially explain this kind of behaviour whereby the culprit (psychological entitled worker) unreasonably expects to receive favours from supervisors to cover up for his destructive behaviour based on being a hard worker.

Late coming is a tendency of arriving at work later than the prescribed time (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Workplace destructive deviant incidents relating to late coming was reported by 20% of Farm 1 workers, 40% of workers from Farm 2 and Farm 3 respectively. With regards to late coming, Vonani said; *“Majority of workers who come to work late are those who are using buses to commute from home to work. As workers are expected to report early in the morning, they are expected to leave their homes very early in order to catch their buses. In the afternoon, they wait for the buses and*

*sometimes get home very late in the evening and miss their buses in the morning.*” The CRT may assist to partly explain this behaviour based on the fact that depletion of resources in the form of energy, which is caused by exhaustion may contribute to late coming.

For misconduct to be regarded as entirely the employee’s fault, the management should make sure that the rules, procedures or standards are reasonable, employees are aware of them, and these rules, procedures or standards should be applied fairly and consistently among all employees (Mogotsi, 2013; Knight & Ukpere, 2014; Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

It is apparent that destructive deviant behaviours may have detrimental effects not only on the well-being of organisations (farming sector), but the economic growth of the country. This paper managed to identify possible forms of destructive workplace deviance that need to be effectively managed in order to minimise their negative outcomes in the farming sector. The shared themes in relation to farmworkers’ experiences of destructive deviant behaviours include behaviours directed towards both the organisation (organisational) and organisational members (interpersonal). Interpersonal deviance included verbal and physical fights while and organisational deviance include poor performance, wrong working procedures and violation of rules and procedures. These findings show the perilous nature of destructive deviant behaviours that employees can engage in.

Employees are the most crucial resources that organisations need in order to realise their objectives, hence, it is important for managers to understand any forms of negative behaviours which could jeopardise processes related to realisation of their objectives. The first step involves recognising the various forms of destructive deviant behaviours which employees could engage in, and then devise mechanisms to address or prevent them. Agriculture industry’s cognisance of destructive deviant behaviours that could make it difficult for it to assist the African continent to recover from its economic challenges could assist in devising effective management strategies.

This study recommends that management should invest in training programmes aimed at equipping workers with skills inherent to their jobs as well as general business knowledge and its operations. Communication channels should always be kept wide open and workers should be involved in the process of making decisions that may affect them. It is also important for workers to understand what is expected of them as well as the repercussions of deviating from their contractual obligations. The application of disciplinary proceedings at the workplace should be done in a fair and consistent manner, guided by the relevant labour legislation.

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