

Stress-related aftermaths to workplace politics: the relationships among politics, job distress, and aggressive behavior in organizations

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Summary

In light of the growing theoretical and practical interest on organizational politics, especially its probable impact on work outcomes, two stress-related aftermaths of influence and politics in organizations were examined. On the basis of a model by Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989b) the idea was pursued that workplace politics may have a long-range impact on employees' job distress and aggressive behavior in and around organizations. Three samples ($n_1 = 155$, $n_2 = 184$, $n_3 = 201$) were used to examine direct and indirect/mediating relationships among the research variables. Participants were Israeli employees from the private, public, and third sectors. Findings showed that: (1) job distress was an immediate response to organizational politics across the three types of organization, and (2) job distress proved a possible mediator between organizational politics and aggressive behavior as enacted by the employees themselves. Several theoretical and practical implications of the findings that may extend our knowledge on various stress-related aftermaths of organizational politics are noted. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

Organizational politics has emerged in the last decade as a field of growing value and relevance for understanding managerial processes. Studies have examined various aspects of political behavior in the workplace but have not done enough to cover the full variety of aftermaths that such behavior may yield. Thus, our knowledge bank on the potential impacts of organizational politics has grown but is not yet large enough for either research or practical goals. A literature summary reveals a set of probable work outcomes that may be related with political manoeuvres of employees. Until now studies have frequently concentrated on work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) or behavior intentions (e.g., turnover intentions, intentions of negligent behavior). However, some other potential reactions to organizational politics are invariably overlooked. For example, slight attention has been paid to the possibility that politics in organizations may cause stress-related aftermaths that are beyond conventional work-related results (Bozeman, Perrewe, Kacmar, Hochwater, &

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Brymer, 1996—Paper presented at the 1996 Southern Management Association Meetings, New Orleans; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). Moreover, studies have not been able to attest to additional consequences related to job distress such as burnout or somatic tension. Except for the work of Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997), the only study to investigate a larger number of stress-related outcomes, theory and empirical evidence on this topic remain vague.

Hence, the present study suggests a deeper discussion and empirical assessment of stress-related reactions to organizational politics. Our goals were four-fold: (1) to conduct a theory-guided examination of the relationship between organizational politics and stress-related factors; (2) to examine empirically the relationship between organizational politics and employees' job distress; (3) to find a link connecting organizational politics, job distress, and more specific reactions such as aggressive behavior of individuals; and (4) to derive implications from the study for future developments and examinations in this field.

Literature Review

Politics and reactions to politics in organizations

Studies generally agree that organizational politics refers to the complex mixture of power, influence, and interest-seeking behaviors that dominate individuals' activity in the workplace. Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, and Pandy (1989a) suggested that organizational politics is a social-influence process in which behavior is strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest. As they pointed out, the self-interest may be consistent with or at the expense of others' interests. Stemming from these, organizational politics may result in positive or negative work outcomes. For example, Randolph (1985) argued that politics is not always bad; it is simply a tool which people can use for the good of the organization or for personal gain. Another study by Kumar and Ghadially (1989) concluded that organizational politics is both helpful and harmful for members of the organization. The positive outcomes of politics are career advancement, recognition and status, enhanced power and position, accomplishment of personal goals, getting the job done, feeling achievement, enhanced sense of control, and success. The harmful outcomes are loss of strategic power and position credibility, negative feeling toward others, internal feelings of guilt, and hampered job performance of various kinds.

In light of this, a seminal work by Ferris et al. (1989b) proposed a model for the examination of employees' perceptions of organizational politics (POPS: Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale) that inspired many scholars in subsequent years. A considerable number of studies conducted during the 1990s responded to the challenge to test empirically various outcomes of POPS, and most of them affirmed its negative impacts on employees and organizations.

As shown in Table 1, previous studies have so far accumulated a weighty bank of knowledge on the topic. However, most of these studies seem to have concentrated on a relatively limited set of outcome variables. Among these, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions were the frequently studied variables, while less studied ones were variants of job performance, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). These outcome variables can be classified into groups such as work attitudes, behavioral intentions, or actual behaviors (Vigoda, 2000a). Furthermore, only few studies have concentrated on *stress-related aftermaths* of organizational politics.

In fact, Ferris et al. (1989b) were those who originally mentioned the possibility that workplace politics may affect employees in other ways. These concern an individual's emotional state or

Table 1. A summary of studies on reactions to organizational politics (stress-related constructs highlighted)

Study	Reactions to OP*
1. Kumar and Ghadially (1989)	Interpersonal trust (–) Alienation (+) Feelings about job performance (–)
2. Ferris and Kacmar (1992)	Job involvement (+) Job satisfaction (–)
3. Drory (1993)	Organizational commitment (–) Satisfaction with supervision and co-workers (–)
4. Ferris et al. (1994)	Job anxiety (+)
5. Parker et al. (1995)	Perceived innovation (–) Positive organizational values (~) Loyalty (~) Overall satisfaction (~) Senior management effectiveness (~)
6. Zhou and Ferris (1995)	Satisfaction with pay, promotion, supervision, and co-workers (–)
7. Ferris et al. (1996)	Job anxiety (+) Job satisfaction (–)
8. Gilmore et al. (1996)	Employees' attendance (~)
9. Bozeman et al. (1996) [†]	Organizational commitment (–) Turnover intentions (+) Job stress (+) Job satisfaction (–) Job involvement (–) Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Psychological withdrawal (+) Turnover intentions (+) Antagonistic work behavior (+) Job tension (+) Somatic tension (+) General fatigue (+) Burnout (+)
10. Cropanzano et al. (1997)	Organizational citizenship behavior–OCB (~) Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Turnover intentions (+) OCB (–) Job performance (~) Job satisfaction (–) Job anxiety (+) Turnover intentions (+) Organizational satisfaction (–) Supervisor effectiveness (–) Self-reported performance (–) OCB (–) In-role performance (–) Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Intentions of leaving (+) Negligent behavior (+)
11. Randall et al. (1999)	Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Turnover intentions (+) OCB (–) Job performance (~) Job satisfaction (–) Job anxiety (+) Turnover intentions (+) Organizational satisfaction (–) Supervisor effectiveness (–) Self-reported performance (–) OCB (–) In-role performance (–) Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Intentions of leaving (+) Negligent behavior (+)
12. Kacmar et al. (1999)	Job satisfaction (–) Job anxiety (+) Turnover intentions (+) Organizational satisfaction (–) Supervisor effectiveness (–) Self-reported performance (–) OCB (–) In-role performance (–) Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Intentions of leaving (+) Negligent behavior (+)
13. Vigoda (2000a,b)	Job satisfaction (–) Organizational commitment (–) Intentions of leaving (+) Negligent behavior (+)
14. Valle and Perrewé (2000)	Job satisfaction (–) Job stress (+) Turnover intentions (+)
15. Witt et al. (2000)	Job satisfaction (–)

*Direction of relationship in parentheses: + = positive relationship; – = negative relationship; ~ = very weak or no relationship; stress-related aftermaths in bold.

[†]Paper presented at the 1996 Southern Management Association Meetings, New Orleans.

psychological conditions that are stress-strain related and have a potential impact on the individual's behavior not limited to the immediate work sphere (i.e., in family life or other social contacts). Such reactions may reach beyond the work environment and include anxiety (Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar, & Howard, 1996; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999), stress (Valle & Perrewe, 2000; Bozeman et al., 1996—Paper presented at the 1996 Southern Management Association Meetings, New Orleans), general fatigue, job and somatic tension, and burnout (Cropanzano et al., 1997). The above studies, as well as the work by Jex and Beehr (1991), used many definitions for stress and stress-related variables. A comparison of the meaning of these definitions may show that they are actually confusing. For example, anxiety was defined as a psychological strain that involves feelings of tension, nervousness, worry, and apprehension. It may thus also include somatic tension and general fatigue; stress is defined in these studies either as an environmental event requiring some type of adaptive response or as an individual's response to environmental stressors; burnout is viewed as a unique consequence of long-lasting stress through a process of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or dehumanization, and a belittling of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Finally, Selye (1975) suggested that stress-related outcomes may result in exceptional behaviors such as verbal and physical aggression. However, most of the studies on reactions to organizational politics have not devoted adequate attention to stress-related outcomes of organizational politics that are psychological, physical, or behavioral.

The relationship between political behavior and stress in the workplace

Several studies to date have mentioned the possibility that employees' political behavior may lead to various stress-related impacts in the workplace (e.g., Gilmore, Ferris, Dulebohn, & Harrell-Cook, 1996; Ferris et al., 1996; Jex & Beehr, 1991; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). These studies treat stress in numerous ways, but all are basically rooted in the Selye's classic work (1975). Selye treated stress as the reaction of the organism to stressful events, which may be psychological, physiological, or behavioral. According to Beehr (1990), stress can be defined as any feature of the workplace that causes an employee to experience discomfort. Cropanzano et al. (1997) adopted another definition, namely that of Folkman and Lazarus (1991) and Edwards (1992), to argue that stress is the subjective feeling that work demands exceed the individual's belief in his or her capacity to cope. Jex, Beehr, and Roberts (1992) suggested that a response definition of stress is associated with what earlier was termed strain. Clearly, these definitions are sometimes contradictory; in this paper I have decided to define stress as an individual's response to work-related environmental stressors, one of which would be politics.

Only a few years ago did studies begin to show interest in the role of organizational politics as a possible work stressor. The relationship between organizational politics and various aspects of job distress was mentioned and empirically tested in several studies from the mid-1990s—for example, Ferris, Fink, Gilmore, and Kacmar (1994), Gilmore et al. (1996), Ferris et al. (1996), Bozeman et al. (1996—Paper presented at 1996 SMA Meetings), and Cropanzano et al. (1997). Gilmore et al. (1996) proposed organizational politics as one source of stress and conflict in the work environment with the potential for dysfunctional outcomes at both the individual and the organizational level. Ferris et al. (1996) surveyed 822 employees at a large university in southwestern USA. They empirically supported the relationship between organizational politics and job anxiety ($\beta = 0.56$; $p < 0.01$), and argued for much similarity between patterns of politics and likelihood of stress. First, politics and stress are both perceptual in nature. They do not refer to reality *per se* but to individuals' perceptions of reality, as originally posited by Lewin (1936). Second, politics and stress share the characteristic of ambiguity and uncertainty. Political behavior is usually an undercover/covert activity, which is also highly predominated by uncertainty. Likewise, stress, strain, and tension are frequently related to

uncertainty in an individual's environment and are stimulated by individuals' inability to forecast future situations (Ferris et al., 1989a,b^{Q1}). Third, both politics and stress 'create situations where people may gain or lose depending on how they respond to a situation' (Gilmore et al., 1996; p. 483). One's ability to handle successfully political and stress-related situations determines one's level of benefits or losses in the work environment. As further argued by Ferris et al. (1996), stress in organizations, like politics, seems to provide options and opportunities for individuals and 'thus can be construed in a comparable manner' (p. 236).

In their study, Cropanzano et al. (1997) tried more extensively to examine the relationship between organizational politics and individual-based stress factors such as job tension, somatic tension, and general fatigue. Their findings revealed a positive relationship between organizational politics and the outcome variables. In addition, these authors found that organizational politics was positively correlated with burnout, which may be viewed as a late outcome of job distress and work stressors. Still, despite the importance of these findings to the best of my knowledge they have never been examined in additional studies. Furthermore, studies on organizational politics have not examined stress and burnout separately, perhaps due to their considerable conceptual overlap.

Today, theory speaks almost univocally of the positive relationship among work stress, tension, anxiety, and burnout. In an extensive review of research on job burnout Cordes and Dougherty (1993) described the evolution of the concept and compiled a long list of studies that had examined it theoretically and empirically (e.g., Maslach, 1978, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1984; Pines & Maslach, 1980; Golembiewski & Mounzenrider, 1981, 1984; and many others). Most, if not all these studies, suggest that burnout is more likely to develop among service-oriented employees (e.g., nurses, teachers, policemen, social workers) where the work environment is stressful and pressing. Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991) supported the notion that burnout is a chronic affective response pattern to stressful work conditions that feature high levels of interpersonal contact. A more recent global process model for the understanding of burnout was suggested by Golembiewski, Boudreau, Mounzenrider, and Luo (1996). According to this study, advanced burnout implies that an individual experiences a collection of stressors. These job stressors cause so much strain that normal coping skills/attitudes do not suffice (p. 83) and in such an environment burnout is an inevitable result.

As shown in previous studies, organizational politics may function as a potential work stressor so it too may lead to job distress and burnout. Since workplace politics is usually not a passing event but a continuous activity that encompasses the organizational sphere, its impact on individuals accumulates over time. Cropanzano et al. (1997) suggested that stress and tension are manifested as nervousness and apprehension about work, so they may result in burnout, ill health, and other physical symptoms. One possible reason may be that workplace politics encourages and preserves a situation of inequity, unfairness, and disharmony among members of the organization (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; 193–194; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; 93). This rationale was partially supported by an experiment-based study by Dierendonck, Schaufeli, and Buunk (1998). Their longitudinal effort compared one experimental group with two control groups. Findings showed that reduced perceptions on inequity in the relationship with the organization and with other individuals caused burnout, absenteeism, and deprived feelings to diminish among the experimental group, with significant differences from the control groups. These findings support the central role of equity and fairness, as highly reflected by organizational politics, in relating with job distress and job burnout as well as other work outcomes.

According to other studies (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996; Folger, Konovsky, & Cropanzano, 1992) those who feel that they can't cope with a political, hence an unfair and unjust environment (and at the same time have other employment alternatives), usually adopt a 'flight' response and quit their job. Others who choose to stay must decide whether to 'fight' the system or adjust and comply with its norms (Selye, 1975). Either way, many of those who stay in the organization are exposed to a higher risk of stress and burnout due to their inability or unwillingness to play the political game as directed

by others and still be happy about it. Most employees find it hard to adjust to or comply with such a reality rife with problems. Their perception of the organization as an unfair or non-reciprocating environment where people do not receive honest returns and benefits for their admirable personal investments and efforts are translated into an emotional state of stress and burnout.

The relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior

Thus, a question arises: If organizational politics leads to job anxiety and job distress, can we assume even more extensive impacts such as a positive relationships with other behavioral consequences, as suggested by Selye (1975)? My interest in possible behavioral outcomes of organizational politics have led me to hypothesize that they are related to aggressive behavior in the workplace. I expected to find both direct and indirect relationships where organizational politics may lead to job distress and burnout, and also that job distress and burnout would be positively and directly related to aggressive behavior. Cordes and Dougherty (1993) suggested four major groups of consequences of job distress and burnout: physical and emotional, interpersonal, attitudinal, and behavioral. In Selye's (1975) typology, these groups may be refined to translate into two major constructs: (1) physiological results and (2) behavioral results. First, job distress and burnout may cause severe physical disorders. Maslach and Jackson (1981: 99–101) mentioned several physical symptoms such as high rates of headaches, lingering colds, backaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, etc. But in addition, and more important for this study, job distress and burnout may also influence individuals' actual behaviors. People who face a great deal of pressure on the job may become highly stressed, and therefore act nervously and impulsively, or evince far less tolerant behavior towards others. In fact, such symptoms may also be typical of aggressive behavior of various kinds.

Aggressive behavior was described by Baron (1977: 7) as 'any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.' Similarly, Berkowitz (1993: 3) refers to aggressive behavior as 'any form of behavior that is intended to injure someone physically or psychologically.' In a more recent study, Andersson and Pearson (1999) define aggression as deviant behavior with intent to harm (p. 456). They thus distinguish it from other close terms such as violence, deviant behavior, antisocial behavior, and incivility. Andersson and Pearson (1999) also provide further evidence that most of the aggression occurring in work settings is of a less intense form, namely verbal rather than physical, passive rather than active, indirect rather than direct, and subtle rather than overt (Baron & Neuman, 1996).

A closer look at the organizational politics literature provides some hints as to the possible emergence of aggressive behavior in highly political atmospheres. Gilmore et al. (1996) suggested that organizational politics has many negative consequences, including conflict and disharmony, which emerge when individuals and/or groups are pitted against each other or against the organization. In their analysis Gilmore et al. (1996: 482) use the term 'hostile environment' to refer to the possible atmosphere that organizational politics may create. So if politics enhances conflicts among individuals and groups as well as creating a hostile work sphere, employees' behavior will most likely be affected in some way at least, perhaps reaching extreme points such as aggressive behavior toward co-workers verbally or physically.

Model and hypotheses

In light of the above, Figure 1 presents a detailed framework for the examination of direct and indirect relationships between organizational politics and stress-related aftermaths. Accordingly, distress

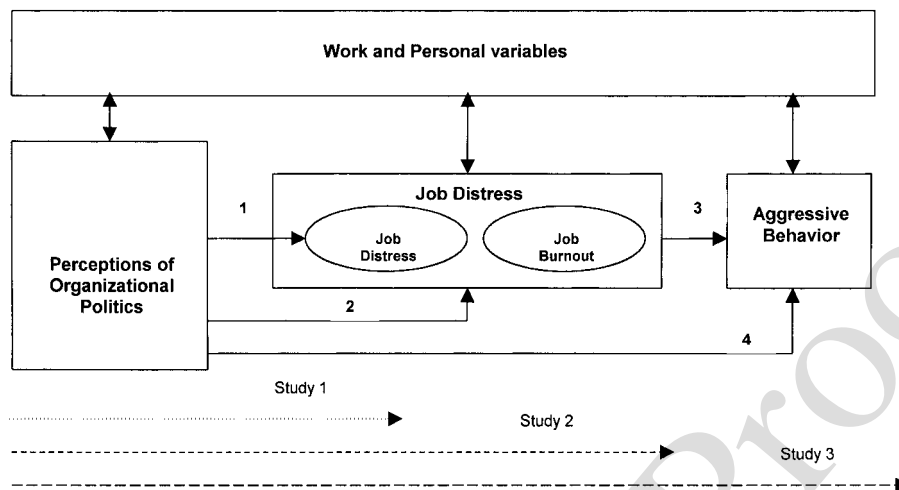


Figure 1. Perceptions of organizational politics, job distress, and aggressive behavior. (Main paths are numbered 1–4)

and burnout are the immediate responses to a high level of organizational politics. Individuals who perceive their work environment as more political, hence less fair and equal in terms of resource sharing, opportunities for influence on decision-making processes, and accessibility to organizational power centres, will show greater symptoms of distress, tension, tiredness, and a general feeling of exhaustion that are also typical of job burnout. Consequently, the model predicts the emergence of interpersonal hostility and aggressive behavior by the employee himself/herself or in his/her immediate surroundings.

Controlling for work and personal variables

Along with the core constructs of the research model I decided to control for two additional work attitudes that may prove relevant in this context. These are job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These variables were chosen for integration in the present research for several reasons. First, many studies have supported the relationship of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceptions of organizational politics (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Ferris et al., 1996; Randall, Cropanzano, Borman, & Birjulin, 1999; Vigoda, 2000a). These and other studies suggest that the social climate of an organization is related to employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This relationship may work in various directions but it implies that both satisfaction and commitment should be controlled wherever organizational politics, which is an important part of the organizational climate, is studied. Second, job satisfaction and organizational commitment were also examined in other works that investigated job distress and burnout (e.g., Wolpin, Burke, & Greenglass, 1991; Cropanzano et al., 1997; Tan & Akhtar, 1998). According to these studies, employees reporting high levels of job satisfaction are expected to feel less stressed at work. These studies further suggest equivocal relationships between organizational commitment and job burnout. For example, Cropanzano et al. (1997) reported a moderately negative relationship, which is in line with the findings on the relationship between job satisfaction and job burnout. However, Tan and Akhtar (1998) found a contradictory positive relationship. This finding may be explained by the more intensive care, attachment, and personal resource investment by highly committed employees who are consequently exposed to faster energy decline and increased job distress and burnout. Finally, job

satisfaction and organizational commitment are among the variables most used in many studies of organizational behavior and they have proved their substantial prediction power. I concluded that both these variables merited inclusion in the model. Despite disagreement as to their exact function in relation with the other stress-related variables I chose to integrate them as additional predictors of the dependent variables together with organizational politics, but I also decided not to provide specific hypotheses for these variables. Nonetheless, other studies are encouraged to do so in order to examine competitive relationships. Finally, I also controlled for several other personal variables. The choice was age, education, and job status, but here again no specific hypotheses were formulated for these variables, mainly in order to preserve a compact/parsimonious model.

Hence, I posited three hypotheses: first, that organizational politics is basically expected to increase job distress and burnout. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational politics is positively related to employees' job distress and burnout.

The second hypothesis of the model concerns the possible relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior. While earlier hypotheses treat workplace politics as a possible predictor of job distress and burnout, this hypothesis envisages a more ambitious relationship based on the assumption that Hypothesis 1 will gain some support. From the rationality that politics leads to job distress and burnout, I expect that aggressive behaviors are only natural consequence of such a distressed and uncomfortable work sphere. Thus Hypothesis 2 holds that:

Hypothesis 2: Organizational politics is positively related to aggressive behavior in the workplace.

The final hypothesis inclines to a more specific relationship, based on the model. It suggests that job distress and burnout function as a mediator between the independent variables and the only behavioral outcome in the model, which is aggressive behavior. The rationality for this hypothesis is quite similar to what has been described so far: politics may lead to higher levels of job distress and burnout due to its competitive and conflictual nature, which enhances aggressive workplace behaviors. Hypothesis 3 thus implies an indirect/mediating relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior via job distress and burnout.

Hypothesis 3: Job distress and burnout mediate the relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior in the workplace.

Organizational Context

The Sectors

The study was designed to collect data from employees who work in three separate sectors: the private sector, the public sector and the voluntary/third sector. All these sectors play a significant role in Israel's economy. In recent years we have witnessed a particularly rapid growth in the share of the third sector at the expense of the public sector. According to the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research (ICTSR), the Israeli third sector is among the biggest in comparison with other Western states. In 1995 organizations of the third sector provided about 147 000 jobs (with salaries) and an additional 25 000 positions for volunteers, bringing the total number of positions to 172 000 or 10.7 per cent of all the positions in the Israeli economy. The Israeli private sector is characterized by a rapid increase in high-tech industries and is highly developed in Western terms. It is also the largest

employer with 1 616 800 jobs in various fields. The public sector is the second largest employer with 599 500 positions. (All figures are based on assessments by the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, 1997.)

The Organizations

Employees from four organizations provided the data used here. The third sector organization, as well as the two public sector organizations, were located in the north of Israel. The private organization was located near Jerusalem.

The third sector organization functioned primarily in the fields of education and welfare services. This organization was established in 1921, but was restructured in 1976. It is formally defined as a VNPO (voluntary non-profit organization), and its internal institutions are constituted by relative representation of the political parties in Israel. Its managerial leadership is elected every four years, and it has about 80 branches across the state. This organization is the employer of approximately 5000 workers. No exact figures exist on the total number of volunteers, and best estimations are of between 2000–3000 people. The private sector organization was an Israeli branch of a large international high-tech company that develops and manufactures sophisticated electronic chips for the computer and telecommunication industry. This company employs approximately 5000 people in factories and laboratories across Israel, and the data collection was conducted in one branch near Jerusalem. Of the two public sector organizations, the larger was a governmental authority supplying energy, and the other was a local municipality. The energy authority employs approximately 10 000 workers and has several branches across Israel. Our data collection was conducted mainly among technical and administrative staff in several branches around the northern parts of Israel. The local municipality employs approximately 400 people and is located in the suburbs of the metropolitan city of Haifa.

The Workers

The samples were comprised of three groups of employees, each from a separate sector and organization. Note that we have combined the two separate groups of the public sector into one coherent unit. In each group there was a broad distribution of skills, education, age, and other demographic variables. Each sample was representative of the general population in the organization. The first sample consisted of 155 employees who provided child-care services. The second sample was based on the reports of 185 employees who worked for the private organization in various positions such as manufacturing, administrative positions, development and other internal services. The third sample was based on information provided by 201 employees. Here again there was a large distribution of functions ranging from mechanical operation to customer services, financial services and other administrative duties.

Time Frame

All studies were conducted in the years 1998–99.

Method

Samples and procedure

Three separate studies and samples were applied to examine the research model and hypotheses. All three studies were based on a survey of Israeli employees. Participation was voluntary and employees

were assured full confidentiality during the entire process. Data of all samples were collected between 1998 and 1999, and together created one record. Note also that the samples were representative of the local populations in the organizations. The various demographic characteristics of each sample (i.e., gender, age, job status, education, and marital status) were compared with the general population statistics as provided by the human resource departments in the organizations. The results confirmed that our three samples were well representative of the target populations.

The first sample (Sample 1, Study 1) was designed to examine the basic relationship between organizational politics and job distress as originally proposed in the literature. Participants in this study were 155 third-sector employees who provided child-care services in a northern Israeli city. By a direct return method a response rate of 77.5 per cent was achieved in this study. All participants were women of average age 46 years ($SD = 9.8$) and average tenure 9.4 years in the organization ($SD = 6.7$). Of the employees, 76 per cent had high school education and 24 per cent held an academic degree; 79.7 per cent were married, 82.1 per cent worked part-time, and 83 per cent had tenure.

The second study (Sample 2, Study 2) extended the theoretical boundaries of the first by adding job burnout into the extended measure of job distress. This study was based on the reports of 185 private-sector employees who worked for the Israeli branch of a large international high-tech company that developed and manufactured sophisticated electronic chips for the computer and telecommunication industry and was located near Jerusalem. Here again, a direct return method was used, resulting in a response rate of 88.3 per cent. In this study 83.2 per cent of the respondents were men and 16.8 per cent women, average age was 27.8 years ($SD = 5.3$), and average tenure in the organization was 2.9 years ($SD = 2.4$). Of the employees, 31.4 per cent had high school education, 52.4 per cent had partial academic education, and 16.2 per cent held an academic degree; 50.3 per cent were married and 89.7 per cent worked part-time.

The third study (Sample 3, Study 3) was designed to be the most inclusive and detailed. It gathered information from public-sector employees who worked for two major organizations; one was a governmental authority supplying energy and the other a local municipality. As in the previous studies, here too a direct return method was employed to maximize the return rate. This resulted in 201 usable questionnaires and a response rate of 57.4 per cent, somewhat lower than the other two samples. In this study 58.2 per cent of the respondents were men and 41.8 per cent women, average age was 39.9 years ($SD = 10.4$), and average tenure in the organization was 15 years ($SD = 10.9$). Of the employees, 49.8 per cent had high school education, 28.8 per cent had partial academic education, and 21.4 per cent held an academic degree. All the employees worked full-time; 74.1 per cent were married and 23.9 per cent worked on a temporary basis.

Measures

Organizational politics

Organizational politics was defined in this study as individuals' perceptions of politics in the work environment. In its most acceptable definition this construct was defined by Ferris et al. (1989a,b)^{Q1} as the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political, and therefore unjust and unfair. I used a 6-item version of POPS, first suggested by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). The original scale was re-examined by Kacmar and Carlson (1994—Paper presented at the annual meeting of Academy of Management, Dallas, Texas) who proposed a more parsimonious 12-item scale, which has become the most accepted measure of POPS in the literature. Our 6-item scale was carefully chosen on the basis of findings of a pre-test conducted among 100 students. Only those items with the highest loading values as resulting from a factor analysis and a subsequent reliability analysis were included. The items used in all three samples were the following: (1) 'Favoritism rather than merit

determines who gets ahead around here'; (2) 'Rewards come only to those who work hard in this organization' (reverse item); (3) 'There is a group of people in my department who always get things their way because no one wants to challenge them'; (4) 'People in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down'; (5) 'I have seen changes made in policies here that only serve the purposes of a few individuals, not the work unit or the organization'; and (6) 'There is a no place for yes-men around here: good ideas are desired even when it means disagreeing with superiors' (reverse item). Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score meant higher perception of organizational politics. Reliability of the scale was 0.77 in Study 1, 0.78 in Study 2, and 0.68 in Study 3. These values were close to those found in other studies (e.g., 0.74 in Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; 0.76 in Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995).

Job distress

Job distress was measured differently in Study 1 and in Studies 2 and 3. In Study 1 we based our definition on House and Rizzo (1972), who described a scale to measure 'the existence of tensions and pressures growing out of job requirements, including the possible outcomes in terms of feelings or physical symptoms' (p. 481). The original scale was 17 items and it referred to three types of tension-stress factors: job-induced tension (JIT), somatic tension (ST), and general fatigue and uneasiness (GFU). For reasons of parsimony only four items were used, which, however, were representative of the three factors: (1) 'I work under a great deal of tension' (JIT); (2) 'If I had a different job, my health would probably improve' (JIT); (3) 'I get irritated or annoyed over the way things are going here' (ST); and (4) 'I seem to tire quickly' (GFU). Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score meant a higher level of job distress. This variable was applied in Study 1 and its reliability was 0.75.

In studies 2 and 3 I have extended the conceptual ground for this variable. I felt that a study on stress-related aftermaths to organizational politics would benefit from adding more substance to the simple job distress variable as measured in Study 1. Thus, the new version of job distress was based on a combination of the previous job distress variable and a measure of job burnout. As will be explained below, our original idea was to examine these concepts separately. However, the considerable conceptual overlap between job distress and job burnout as was both suggested in the literature and supported here, have led us to combine these facets into one extensive measure of job distress.

Accordingly, to improve the original scale I applied the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) and added the following six items: (1) 'I feel emotionally drained by my work'; (2) 'I feel used up at the end of the workday'; (3) 'Working with people all day is really a strain for me'; (4) 'I feel burned out by my work'; (5) 'I feel I'm working too hard on my job'; and (6) 'I feel like I'm at the end of my rope'. These items were added to the previous four items of job distress as measured in Study 1 and created a final scale of 10 items. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and a higher score reflected a higher level of burnout.

To certify the solidity of this new variable the reliability of the new scale was compared with the reliability of the original job distress measure and the independent job burnout scale. Reliability of the new extended scale was 0.84 in Study 2 and 0.90 in Study 3, which is significantly higher than the reliabilities of the separate measures (for job distress: 0.75, 0.75, 0.83 in studies 1, 2, and 3 respectively, and for job burnout 0.81 and 0.87 in Studies 2 and 3 respectively). Further support for the decision to combine these scales and create a revised measure of job distress was afforded by the intercorrelation analysis. The correlation between the original measures of job distress and the independent scale of job burnout was very high ($r=0.57$; $p<0.001$ and $r=0.64$; $p<0.001$ in Studies 2 and 3 respectively), which again caused me to combine these scales into one measure of job distress.

Aggressive behavior

Aggressive behavior was defined following Berkowitz (1993: 3) as any form of behavior at work intended to injure someone physically or psychologically. To measure employees' aggressive behavior I used a 4-item scale which asked individuals to report whether they were personally involved in any kind of verbal or physical aggressive behavior in their work environment. Items were: (1) 'Lately I have been personally involved in verbal confrontations with other workers'; (2) 'Lately I have been involved in verbal confrontations with clients'; (3) 'Lately I have found myself involved in physical confrontations with others in my organization'; and (4) 'I think that sometimes my behavior toward others at work can be defined as aggressive'. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and a higher score indicated greater orientation towards aggressive behavior. Reliability of the scale was 0.76.

Control variables

Job satisfaction

This variable was measured by a 6-item scale taken from Schriesheim and Tsui (1980—Paper presented at the Western Academy of Management Meeting). Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their current job, co-workers, supervisors, current salary, opportunities for promotion, and work in general. The scale for these questions ranged from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Reliabilities in studies 1 and 2 were both 0.70, while in Study 3 reliability reached 0.78.

Organizational commitment

To measure this variable I used a shorter version of the attitudinal Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) by Porter and Smith (1970—unpublished manuscript). The scale includes eight items and reflects the three core dimensions of the definition of commitment as suggested by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974): (1) desire to retain membership in the organization; (2) belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization; and (3) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization. Additional studies such as Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) and Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) showed the long-lasting stability and psychometric power of this measure. Sample items for this measure include: (1) 'I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization'; (2) 'I really care about the fate of this organization'; (3) 'I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for the organization'; and (4) 'For me, this is the best of all possible organizations to work for'. The scale for this measure ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); reliability was 0.90 in Study 1, 0.78 in Study 2, and 0.79 in Study 3.

Demographic variables

Three variables were included in this category: age, measured as a continuous variable, education, measured as an ordinal variable (0 = elementary education to 5 = higher academic education), and job status, measured as a categorical variable (0 = tenured employee, 1 = temporary employee).

Data analysis

To support the research hypotheses three strategies were employed. First, all three samples underwent a correlation analysis for internal relationships that might prove useful for further evaluation. Second, standard multiple regression analysis was used to test for direct relationships. Third, the mediating relationships were analysed by hierarchical regressions. To support the hypotheses regarding indirect-mediating relationships I followed Baron and Kenny (1986), Kenny, Kashy, and Bolder (1998), and also Kenny's web page on mediation (<http://nw3.nai.net/~dakenny/mediate.htm>).

According to these sources, to test for mediation one should estimate the following three regression equations. First, the dependent variable is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must be related to the dependent variable to establish that there is a relationship that may be mediated. Second, the mediator is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must be related to the mediator. Third, the dependent variable is regressed on both the independent variable and on the mediator, whereby the mediator must be related to the dependent variable while controlling for the independent variable. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, a certain level of mediation exists. An additional fourth condition concerns a case of full mediation. Here the relationship between the independent variable and the outcome variable controlling for the mediator should be zero. If this relationship is anything other than zero (i.e., only the first three equations hold), a partial mediation is indicated.

Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for each of the three samples. All psychometric properties of the variables appear reasonable. Absolute level of job distress was lowest among participants of Sample 1 ($M = 1.88$; $SD = 0.94$) and highest among participants of Sample 2 ($M = 3.03$; $SD = 0.90$). As expected, level of aggressive behavior (measured only in Sample 3) was not very high but still high enough to justify further investigation ($M = 1.94$; $SD = 0.79$).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and inter-correlations (Pearson's r) for studies 1, 2, and 3

	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Study 1 (third sector, n = 155)</i>										
1. Organizational politics	2.69	0.78	0.77	—						
2. Distress	1.88	0.94	0.75	0.33 [‡]	—					
3. Job satisfaction	3.74	0.66	0.70	-0.49 [‡]	-0.31 [‡]	—				
4. Organizational commitment	4.05	0.87	0.90	-0.45 [‡]	-0.19*	0.58 [‡]	—			
5. Age	46.05	9.81	—	0.03	0.14	0.09	0.24 [†]	—		
6. Education	1.65	1.12	—	0.04	0.07	-0.07	-0.20 [†]	-0.29 [‡]	—	
7. Job status (temporary)	—	—	—	0.11	-0.07	-0.04	-0.10	-0.34 [‡]	0.27 [†]	—
<i>Study 2 (private sector, n = 185)</i>										
1. Organizational politics	2.90	0.65	0.78	—						
2. Distress	2.94	0.72	0.84	0.48 [‡]	—					
3. Job satisfaction	3.70	0.56	0.70	-0.36 [‡]	-0.48 [‡]	—				
4. Organizational commitment	4.03	0.60	0.78	-0.31 [‡]	-0.30 [‡]	0.48 [‡]	—			
5. Age	27.85	5.28	—	0.01	0.11	-0.03	0.16*	—		
6. Education	2.61	0.83	—	0.08	0.14	-0.13	-0.04	0.34 [‡]	—	
7. Job status (temporary)	—	—	—	-0.03	-0.21 [†]	-0.03	-0.16*	-0.31 [‡]	-0.07	—
<i>Study 3 (public sector, n = 201)</i>										
1. Organizational politics	3.29	0.64	0.68	—						
2. Distress	2.60	0.93	0.90	0.35 [‡]	—					
3. Aggressive behavior	1.94	0.79	0.76	0.37 [‡]	0.52 [‡]	—				
4. Job satisfaction	3.65	0.70	0.78	-0.43 [‡]	-0.39 [‡]	-0.20*	—			
5. Organizational commitment	4.06	0.70	0.79	-0.38 [‡]	-0.04	-0.11	0.60 [‡]	—		
6. Age	39.88	10.41	—	0.17	0.19*	0.17	-0.08	0.07	—	
7. Education	2.56	1.22	—	-0.01	-0.10	-0.15	-0.16	-0.11	0.11	—
8. Job status (temporary)	—	—	—	-0.24 [†]	-0.28 [‡]	-0.28 [‡]	0.09	0.06	-0.51 [‡]	0.14

* $p \leq 0.05$; [†] $p \leq 0.01$; [‡] $p \leq 0.001$.

According to Table 2 organizational politics was positively related to job distress in Study 1 ($r=0.33$; $p<0.001$) and to job distress in studies 2 and 3 ($r=0.48$; $p<0.001$ and $r=0.35$; $p<0.001$ respectively). It was also negatively related to job satisfaction ($r=-0.49$; $p<0.001$, $r=-0.36$; $p<0.001$, and $r=-0.43$; $p<0.001$, respectively) and to organizational commitment ($r=-0.45$; $p<0.001$, $r=-0.31$; $p<0.001$, $r=-0.38$; $p<0.001$, respectively). In Study 1 job distress was negatively related to job satisfaction ($r=-0.31$; $p<0.001$) and to organizational commitment ($r=-0.19$; $p<0.05$). Job distress was negatively related to job satisfaction in studies 2 and 3 ($r=-0.48$; $p<0.001$ and $r=-0.39$; $p<0.001$, respectively) and also to organizational commitment in Study 2 ($r=-0.30$; $p<0.001$). In Study 3 job distress was positively correlated with aggressive behavior ($r=0.52$; $p<0.001$). All in all, the zero-order correlations were consistent with the research hypotheses, and specifically with Hypotheses 1 and 2, which expected a positive relationship between organizational politics, job distress, and aggressive behavior.

Table 3 summarizes the results of five regression equations. The first three Equations (1–3) were conducted to examine the direct relationship between the independent variables and job distress. The last two Equations (4a and b) regressed aggressive behavior on the independent variables (4a), as well as on job distress (4b). These equations refer only to Study 3.

Analysis of the first three equations revealed that job distress was positively related to organizational politics in Study 1 ($\beta=0.27$; $p<0.05$) and that job distress was also related to organizational politics in studies 2 and 3 ($\beta=0.33$; $p<0.001$, and $\beta=0.22$; $p<0.05$, respectively). These findings were thus consistent with H1. Moreover, they were also consistent with the second condition for mediation, which requires that the independent variable (organizational politics) in a model be correlated with the plausible mediator, which according to H3 is job distress. Finally, according to the first three equations job distress was also negatively related to job satisfaction in all three studies ($\beta=-0.23$;

Table 3. Regression analysis for studies 1, 2, and 3 (standardized coefficients): the relationship between organizational politics and job distress (studies 1–3) and the relationship between organizational politics and job distress, and aggressive behavior (study 3) (t test in parentheses)

Equation no.	1	2	3	4	
	Job distress (Study 1)	Job distress (Study 2)	Job distress (Study 3)	Aggressive behavior (Study 3)	
Independent variables				Job distress not controlled	Job distress controlled
1. Distress	—	—	—	—	0.45 (4.85 [‡])
2. Organizational politics	0.27 (2.30*)	0.33 (4.97 [‡])	0.22 (2.62 [†])	0.29 (3.04 [†])	0.19 (2.13*)
3. Job satisfaction	-0.23 (-2.18*)	-0.33 (-4.49 [‡])	-0.51 (-5.03 [‡])	-0.12 (-1.07)	0.11 (1.00)
4. Organizational commitment	0.03 (0.29)	-0.08 (-1.07)	-0.35 (-3.50 [‡])	-0.06 (-0.57)	-0.09 (-0.91)
5. Age	0.16 (1.74)	0.03 (0.46)	0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.42)	0.04 (0.44)
6. Education	0.12 (1.35)	0.05 (0.69)	-0.12 (-1.46)	-0.14 (-1.62)	-0.09 (-1.10)
7. Job status (temporary)	-0.07 (-0.81)	-0.21 (-3.19 [†])	-0.18 (-1.96*)	-0.16 (-1.54)	-0.07 (-0.79)
R^2	0.18	0.40	0.33	0.20	0.33
Adjusted R^2	0.14	0.37	0.29	0.16	0.29
F	4.43 [‡]	17.49 [‡]	9.33 [‡]	4.71 [‡]	8.19 [‡]

* $p \leq 0.05$; [†] $p \leq 0.01$; [‡] $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 4. Summary of the main direct and indirect relationships in the model (standardized coefficients)*

Relationships	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Direct relationships			
1. OP → DS	0.27	0.33	0.22
2. DS → AG	—	—	0.45
3. OP → AG	—	—	0.29
Indirect relationships			
4. OP → DS → AG	—	—	0.10
Total relationship between OP on AG	—	—	0.39

*OP, Organizational politics; DS, Distress; AG, Aggressive behavior.

$p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.33$; $p < 0.001$, and $\beta = -0.51$; $p < 0.001$, respectively). Job distress was further related to organizational commitment in Study 3 ($\beta = -0.35$; $p < 0.001$).

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3 Equations 4a and b were needed. Equation 4a regressed aggressive behavior on the independent variables when job distress was not controlled, while Equation 4b also controlled for job distress. H2 suggested that organizational politics would be positively related to aggressive behavior. When Equation 4a was run, organizational politics was positively related to aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.01$), which was consistent with H2. This finding was also in line with the first condition for mediation, which was tested in H3. According to this condition, a correlation should exist between the independent variables (organizational politics) and the dependent variable (aggressive behavior). This led to the examination of the third condition for mediation, which requires that the mediator (job distress) relate with the dependent variable (aggressive behavior). When job distress was controlled in Equation 4b, this condition was met by a strong positive relationship between these two variables ($\beta = 0.45$; $p < 0.001$). Last is the fourth condition, which requires that for *full* mediation the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables, controlling for the mediator, should be zero. Here a significant decrease appeared in the relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior, down from 0.29 to 0.19. However, since the decrease was not close to zero I had to conclude that this was not a case of full mediation. As Kenny et al. (1998) argue, this does not indicate complete mediation, yet it may definitely be considered partial mediation. Thus, we may conclude that the findings of Study 3 were consistent with H3 but in a form of partial instead of complete mediation.

Finally, I summarized the main direct and indirect relationships of the model in Table 4. According to this table the direct relationship between organizational politics and job distress in Study 1 was 0.27. The direct relationship between organizational politics and job distress in Study 2 was higher and reached 0.33. In Study 3, however, I could also compare direct and indirect relationships between organizational politics and aggressive behavior. The total indirect relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior in Study 3 was lower than the direct relationship (0.10 versus 0.29). Nonetheless, while the direct relationship was dominant the indirect relationship was also prominent, reaching a total level of 0.39. The meaning and interpretations of these results are discussed more extensively below.

Discussion

With the growing scholarly interest in organizational politics, studies have suggested assessing the possible relationship of influential behavior, perceptions of workplace politics, and job distress (Ferris

et al., 1994, 1996). While some evidence exists today on the nature of this relationship, no implicit model has so far been advanced for a comprehensive examination of longer-range stress-related aftermaths of organizational politics. I believe that this gap in the literature deserves closer scholarly attention and exploration. As suggested by Cropanzano et al. (1997), work stress has an obvious negative impact on the individual and equally deleterious effects on the organization and the economy. Studies have demonstrated that the costs of a stressful work environment and burnout among employees can be enormous due to lost time, reduced effectiveness and production, loss of interpersonal coordination, higher rate and severity of accidents, as well as an increase in absenteeism and turnover, and other human considerations (Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Shirom, 1989; Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Golembiewski et al., 1996). The purposes of the present paper were first to overview the literature on job distress and organizational politics and to integrate these studies in a useful manner. Second, it focused on two stress-related consequences of workplace politics that have been overlooked in the literature. Relying on previous knowledge and accumulated evidence from closely related yet separate sub-fields, I developed and empirically examined a general model that related organizational politics to job distress (which also consists of job burnout) and aggressive behavior at work.

The findings of the study largely supported three hypotheses. First, previous knowledge was reconstructed and reconfirmed on the elementary relationship between perceived organizational politics and job distress. This relationship was consistent across three samples, three sectors, and more than 540 subjects. Our use of a revised measure for job distress, which also included a facet of job burnout, in studies 2 and 3 further supports the solidity of the findings. The findings supported both direct and indirect relationships, which mostly cohere with the study of Cropanzano et al. (1997). In addition, the findings provided some initial evidence of another possible consequence of organizational politics, namely its relationship with aggressive behavior. Literature on the consequences of job distress and burnout has dealt with possible behavioral reactions yet knowledge is scarce on the relationship between stress in work environments and employees' aggressive behavior.

The findings of this study suggest that a revised measure of job distress (built upon both distress and burnout) plays an important mediating role, interfacing the relationship between organizational politics and aggressive behavior by employees. However, the power of the indirect/mediating relationships is still lower than the power of the similar direct relationships. One implication of these findings is that employees who work in political environments develop an emotional alienation from work as a result of inequity and unfair organizational climate (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). Such a psychological state may lead employees to suffer high levels of stress, strain, tension, and job burnout, which may eventually translate into harmful behaviors. One such behavioral reaction is aggression toward others (co-workers, clients, supervisors). As demonstrated in this study, aggression can take the form of verbal assault or, at its most dangerous, a physical attack and pure violence. Thus, in a subsequent analysis I tried to examine these constructs of aggressive behavior separately, as dependent variables. This examination yielded quite similar results to those presented up till now. The implication of these results is that our revised measure of job distress retains its mediating role in both cases and that organizational politics may lead to verbal aggression, and to a lesser extent also to physical aggression at work, via job distress and burnout.

These findings should be interpreted both theoretically and practically. First I believe that the current findings contribute to knowledge on possible reactions to organizational politics. These reactions may be affected directly by politics in the workplace but also indirectly through job distress and burnout. Second, until recently studies were mainly interested in direct implications of organizational politics, such as changes in employees' work attitudes, performance, and intentions to stay or leave the organization (e.g., Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000; Randall et al., 1999; Gilmore et al., 1996; Zhou & Ferris, 1995; Parker et al., 1995). The relationship between organizational politics and stress-related

constructs demonstrates another finding, which may prove relevant beyond the boundaries of the workplace. Stressed employees are those more likely to face higher levels of burnout, somatic symptoms of strain and tension, and, as suggested here, aggressive behaviors. These reactions can be easily carried from the workplace to day-to-day life, for example, family life or social connections. This notion is supported by an extensive literature on work and non-work domains (Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Future studies are thus encouraged to reexamine organizational politics in its wider social context and to apply it as a possible explanation for additional human conducts. Theory for such relationships undoubtedly needs to be extended too, and this is a serious challenge for future work.

The practical implications of this study are several. Most importantly, managers may well consider the possibility that organizational politics breeds stress and burnout among employees. Despite recent criticism on the likely stress-performance linkage, which according to Jex (1998) still needs stronger evidence, other studies suggest that stress and burnout negatively correlate with general organizational efficiency and performance (Golembiewski et al., 1996). A phase model of politics-stress aftermaths may suggest a continuous deterioration in organizational stability and productivity where politics exceeds a certain level and magnitude. Employees who are detached from the political process in the workplace and perceive it as contradicting their goals and interests will react emotionally with higher levels of stress and burnout. Since stress is costly in organizational terms, even those who perceive politics as personally beneficial will eventually lose due to the negative reactions of others and the need to handle stress and burnout on an organizational level.

Managers should also be aware that at least some work stressors may be translated into aggressive behavior at work. According to Andersson and Pearson (1999), data have confirmed that aggression and violence of different kinds occur in the American workplace. Romano (1994) reported that over 20 per cent of the human resource managers participating in a study stated that their organization had experienced workplace violence in the previous three years, and an additional 33 per cent reported that there had been threats of violence. According to the Northwestern National Life Insurance Company report (1993), in 1992 alone almost 25 million American workers were exposed to some kind of aggressive behavior at work. Such behavior might be actual aggression (physical attacks), threats of attack, or sexual harassment of different levels (O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, & Griffin, 2000). In light of this, managers need to develop mechanisms to cope with such dangerous activities, which may harm both the internal social structure of the organization and its reputation and image in the eyes of clients and customers. Employees who experience large-scale political activities in the workplace may react aggressively, and it is the managers' duty to identify such potential situations and eliminate them in due time.

While the above sections discussed the main findings of the research, secondary findings exist that also deserve attention. Originally, I did not hypothesize on the relationship of job satisfaction and organizational commitment with the dependent variables. Nonetheless, findings revealed that both constructs showed a significant statistical relationship in numerous ways. Job satisfaction significantly correlated with job distress across the three samples, and organizational commitment also showed a relationship with job distress, but in a less consistent and weaker manner. While the literature on job distress and burnout frequently treats these variables as potential consequences I took one integrated measure of stress and burnout and used it as a mediating variable between organizational politics and aggressive behavior. This does not mean that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are necessarily antecedents of stress and/or burnout. On the contrary, as observed in Table 1, a bi-directional arrow better represents the role of these constructs in the model. This implies that job distress and job burnout, as well as organizational politics and aggressive behavior, may also lead to variations in job satisfaction and organizational commitment as at least some of the literature suggests (Wolpin et al., 1991).

Among the personal variables, only job status was found to have a significant impact on some of the dependent variables. For example, temporary employees reported a lower level of job distress and burnout in Study 2 ($r = -0.21$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, Study 3 provided some indication that temporary employees evince less organizational politics, lower levels of job distress and burnout, as well as less engagement in aggressive behaviors ($r = -0.24$; $p < 0.01$, $r = -0.28$; $p < 0.001$, and $r = -0.28$; $p < 0.001$, respectively). Yet, these findings proved inconsistent in most of the subsequent multivariate analyses, so they should be treated with caution. The possible explanation for job status playing some role in this model may be the feeling in temporary employees of tenuous attachment to the organization, so they are less influenced by its internal processes. Nonetheless, these findings, like others, should be replicated in future works to gain more support.

Another notable contribution of this study is its cross-sectoral orientation. As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study have the advantage of providing limited but important information on the organizational politics–stress aftermaths based on data from three different sectors. Job distress was examined across all three sectors while a revised version of it was further examined across two sectors, namely third-sector and private-sector organizations. This is an important contribution of our study, which may have prepared the ground for more extensive and broadly cross-sectoral ventures in this field. Our findings suggest that job distress may be treated as a reaction to organizational politics that exceeds sectoral differences. The fact that I used the same research tools in all studies and conducted all of them in the same cultural arena and time further supports this argument. Thus, the organizational politics–job distress relationship has acquired a more global meaning, with stronger external validity than in previous works.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this study should also be mentioned. First, although this work applied three samples that were also cross-sectoral, only one study fully examined the suggested model. The other two samples could examine only part of the model, so Hypotheses 2 and 3 received support from only one source. Second, although our data collection was spread over time, our design was definitely not longitudinal. This is a limitation of the study since, I believe, theory could benefit from a longitudinal design to test these hypotheses. Future studies would do well to adopt such an approach to reexamine this model. Third, the findings were based on cross-sectional and self-report data, incurring the possibility of source bias (e.g., social desirability effect) or common method error. However, other studies that tested similar concepts to this were also based on self-report data (e.g., Ferris et al., 1996; Cropanzano et al., 1997). Nevertheless, this study reported good psychometric properties in terms of reliabilities and variances of all research variables, which firmly supports the validity of the data and the findings. Finally, with the exception of one item, the measurement of aggression in the present study did not refer entirely to aggressive behavior as performed by the respondent. The other items may or may not indicate such behavior, so future studies may benefit from the use of other measures that are more direct and inclusive. Note also that our scale of aggressive behavior combined two types of aggression (verbal/literal and physical) into one construct. It is thus recommended that future studies retest this model, or a similar one, using separately the two types of aggressive behavior that are suggested here. Note, however, that the scale used here provides important information as to aggression that occurs around the respondent and to which he/she may be related, even if indirectly. I also believe that the best way to measure aggressive behavior in future studies is by collecting independent-objective data that are not self-reported.

Despite its limitations I believe that this study has probed a missing link in organizational politics literature and provided interesting empirical findings that will stimulate future efforts. The sparse

research on the relationship between organizational politics and constructs of job distress, as well as the little knowledge that we possess today on other possible behavioral reactions such as aggressive behavior, should encourage both theory development and empirical examination. Since neither organizational politics nor job stressors are expected to diminish in modern worksites it is essential that we understand them better to provide managers with practical tools for improvement. The findings of this study have demonstrated the usefulness of examining workplace politics in relation to stress factors, but more work is needed to provide these relationships with satisfactory external validation and predicting power.

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