

REVIEW ARTICLE

Understanding the drivers of unethical behaviour intention among working young adults: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT - This paper reviews the factors influencing unethical behaviour intention among working young adults. Unethical behaviour among working young adults poses a significant challenge in today's society, as these individuals represent the future leaders of our world. The values of ethics and integrity among working young adults must be nurtured to produce a Malaysia Madani aimed at leading the country forward. Current literature shows that unethical behaviour intention is influenced by various antecedents such as greed, peer influence, parental influence, capability, and financial pressure. Initially, this review focused on these five factors. Due to the limited number of studies meeting these criteria, the scope was broadened to include personal motivations, social and environmental influences, situational pressure, and control and capability. This paper systematically reviews past studies to comprehensively understand factors influencing unethical behaviour intention. For this study, the authors examined databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar to select related articles. All the related articles were subjected to a thorough and systematic quantitative review and content analysis. The present study provides valuable insights for working young adults and offers practical implications to address the factors influencing unethical behaviour intention. Essentially, the results of this study using a systematic literature review, provide a complete summary of antecedents influencing unethical behaviour intention. This topic should be researched further in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Unethical behaviour such as corruption, has been a problem in Malaysia since the days of the Malacca Sultanate, where greed and envy among the nobility led to actions that hurt the Sultanate's integrity (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) & Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), 2020). This culture of unethical behaviour has continued into modern times, affecting both the public and private sectors. Despite efforts to fight corruption, unethical behaviour is still a big problem, especially among working young adults. Recent data from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) shows that many working young adults, especially those between the ages of 21 and 40, have been involved in unethical acts. From 2012 to June 2024, many arrests for unethical actions involved young adults. This highlights the importance of addressing this issue (Cawangan Perisytiharan Harta & Statistik, 2024b). The problem of unethical behaviour among working young adults is not only a personal matter but also a serious issue for governance in Malaysia. Acts like corruption, dishonesty, and fraud weaken public services, disrupt the proper enforcement of laws, and reduce people's trust in government. A recent survey by the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), 2024) found that 80% of Malaysians believe corruption harms foreign investor confidence, slows down economic growth, increases poverty, reduces competitiveness, and weakens the national currency. This shows why it's crucial to address unethical behaviour in working young adults, especially in the public sector, to maintain strong and trustworthy governance.

A key factor in understanding and preventing unethical behaviour is looking at the intention behind it. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) says that a person's intention to do something is a strong sign of whether they will actually do it (Ajzen, 2011). When it comes to unethical acts, people's intentions often lead to the actual behaviour. A study by Owusu, Amoah Bekoe, Koomson, & Simpson (2019) supports this idea, arguing that the stronger a person's intention to act unethically, the more likely they are to follow through. This makes it important to focus on why people might plan to act unethically, not just on the actions themselves. Examining the intention behind unethical behaviour is important because it impacts many different groups. Understanding these intentions helps the government spot potential signs of unethical actions and take steps to prevent them. Toleikienė, Balčiūnas, & Juknevičienė (2020) argue that unethical behaviour is dangerous because it demotivates those in authority, weakens the creation and enforcement of policies, and harms public services. It's particularly important to study the intentions of working young adults because they often face unique challenges early in their careers. In the Malaysian public sector, the work environment tends to be strict, with clear

hierarchies and centralized power. This may make working young adults feel excluded from decision-making, and they may feel pressured to follow unethical orders from their superiors to avoid conflict or protect their job. By understanding the reasons behind their intentions to act unethically, policymakers and organizations can take steps to stop unethical actions before they happen.

Table 1. Age of corruption offenders as of June 2024

Year	20 and below	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 and above	Total
2012	0	86	67	67	67	1	288
2013	0	36	58	48	30	0	176
2014	0	57	72	32	54	0	225
2015	0	69	137	98	94	0	398
2016	0	129	160	85	80	2	466
2017	0	70	191	61	84	3	409
2018	0	48	219	79	69	3	418
2019	0	46	233	123	114	9	525
2020	0	42	184	82	77	6	391
2021	0	29	192	117	66	7	411
2022	0	17	146	98	47	15	323
2023	1	34	178	142	75	7	437
2024	0	6	122	151	35	5	319
Total	1	669	1,959	1,183	889	58	4,786

Source: Adapted from MACC Records and Information Management Division, 2024)

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of working young adults arrested among public servants starting the year 2012 until June 2024 (Cawangan Perisytiharan Harta & Statistik, 2024a). The year 2019 reported the highest number of corruption cases involving public servants of which 525 have been arrested. A systematic literature review (SLR) is an effective way to gather existing study on unethical behaviour and the reasons behind it. This study aims to review and summarize past studies on what causes working young adults to intend to engage in unethical behaviour in Malaysia. It also looks for gaps in current studies to guide future research. As Malaysia continues its fight against corruption, the SLR can provide useful information to help design better policies. For example, by looking at trends in the data, policymakers can develop more effective anti-corruption programs, ethical training sessions, and changes to the work environment that specifically address the needs of young adults in the public sector. These programs can help young workers understand how to deal with pressures like financial pressure or the need to comply with higher-ups, without resorting to unethical actions.

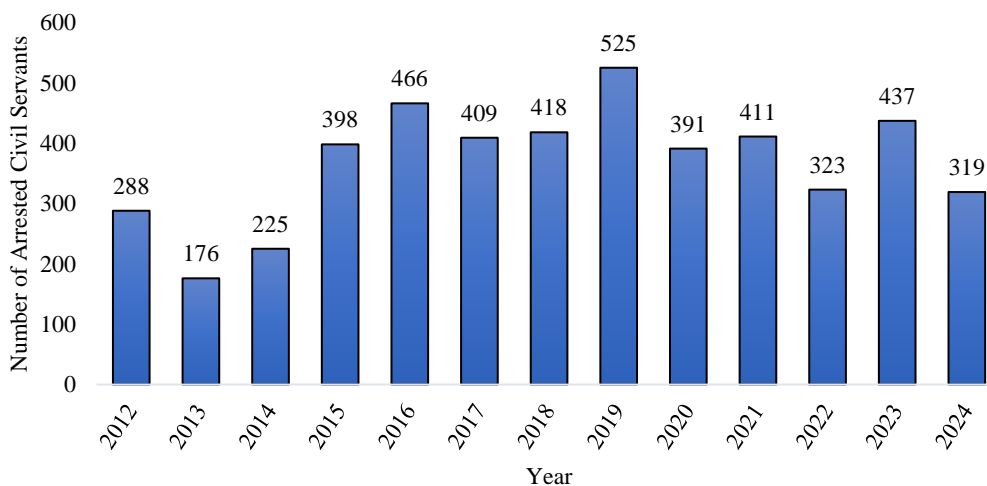


Figure 1. Offenders corruption statistics (civil servants) as of June 2024

Source: Adapted from MACC Records and Information Management Division, 2024

In addition, the results of this study can help improve governance in Malaysia by focusing on early intervention. Ethical training programs that teach working young adults how to deal with ethical dilemmas and pressures can help stop unethical behaviour before they happen. By addressing the reasons behind unethical intentions, policymakers can create a more ethical and transparent work environment in the public sector. In conclusion, studying the intention to act unethically is very important because it helps us understand why people might do something wrong before they actually do it. This study focuses on working young working adults in Malaysia and aims to find out what drives them to act

unethically. By reviewing existing studies, this paper will point out the gaps in knowledge and suggest areas for future studies. The findings will give policymakers useful information to help design programs that promote ethical behaviour in the workplace and strengthen governance in Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

Intention is a person's motive to act. Ajzen (2011) has mentioned that when someone has the intention to act, the chances for that person to be involved are high. Individuals' intentions to engage in unethical behaviour have been the focus of studies on unethical behaviour. Several studies have employed intention as the subject of study. Three dimensions of temptation which include cognitive impairment, getting rich and lack of self-control, are positively associated with the propensity to engage in unethical behaviour (Owusu et al., 2019). The result indicates that people who are unable to control their desire for money are more likely to engage in unethical behaviour at the workplace.

2.2 Personal Motivation and Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

Personal motivations refer to internal psychological drivers, such as moral identity, ambition, and self-interest, that push individuals toward unethical actions. These factors are intrinsic to the individual and often form the foundation of unethical behaviour intentions. Greed is a fundamental human characteristic that is often associated with something immoral and negative. It arises when someone takes more than they need in their life because they are never satisfied with what they have achieved. Previous study shows that greed is associated with status. Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-denton, & Keltner, (2012) found that individuals from the upper class have a higher tendency to act immorally. Therefore, this study will use personal motivation for greed. Greed represents a strong internal desire for personal gain, often at the expense of ethical considerations

2.3 Social and Environmental Influences and Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

Unethical behaviour is not solely driven by personal motives but is also strongly influenced by social and environmental factors. Social and environmental influences could refer to peer influence and family influence. Individuals do not make decisions in isolation, as their choices are shaped by interactions with peers, family, workplace culture, and societal norms. This category includes peer and parental influence, which collectively contribute to shaping ethical or unethical behaviour. The influence of parents is crucial in instilling strong values in working young adults. Since a child's morals develop at a young age, it is the parents who shape their children's morals. A study by Almeida, Dallago & Williams (2020) found that children who are confronted with unethical behaviour by their parents are more likely to engage in similar behaviour themselves. Therefore, the role of parents is vital. Integrity is a learned type of behaviour and the family needs to be the main role model for learning integrity (Sihombing, 2018).

In terms of peer influence, James (2014) highlighted that individuals are more prone to engaging in unethical behavior when in a group setting compared to when they are alone, largely due to environmental influences. In a similar trend, the study by Lokman & Mahadzir (2019) found that positive peer pressure is one of the key factors influencing employees' integrity levels. This study will use themes social and environmental as this reflects subjective norms in TPB, where the behaviour of peers significantly influences an individual's ethical decisions. If unethical actions are normalized within peer groups, individuals may feel pressured to conform. For parental, early socialization parents shape moral values and ethical frameworks, influencing decisions later in life.

2.4 Situational Pressure and Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

Situational pressure consists of external stressors that may drive individuals toward unethical behaviour as a way to cope, survive, or succeed in challenging situations. Situational pressures could be divided into more specific categories, such as workplace pressures, economic pressures, and social pressures. Pressures can be categorized as occupational, economic, and social (Rustiarini, T, Nurkholis, & Andayani, 2019). Occupational pressure can be pressure from superiors or politicians. Workplace stress can drive employees to unethical behaviour as a coping mechanism (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2020). One of the factors that may motivate an individual to misappropriate assets is personal problems such as financial pressure and the working environment (Kazemian, Said, Nia, & Vakilifard, 2019). Esaku (2021) agreed that those who feel struggling with the cost of living are more inclined towards various forms of illegal activity. For situational pressure, based on FDT, financial pressure is a primary motivator for unethical behaviour, especially when individuals face significant personal or professional financial burdens. This pressure creates a perceived need to engage in unethical acts as a coping mechanism.

2.5 Control and Capability and Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

Capability occurs when an individual has any skills or abilities that lead them to intend to perform any unethical behaviour. Wolfe & Hermanson (2004) stressed how crucial it is to have the right person and the right capabilities in place. The researcher added that position, intelligence, ego, coercion, lies effectively and the ability to cope with stress are significant elements that contribute to an individual committing unethical behaviour. For instance, people who were skilled and self-assured enough to take advantage of flaws in the system were more likely to commit fraud (Arkorful et al., 2022). For control and capability, in both TPB and FDT, capability refers to an individual's skills, knowledge, and

confidence to commit unethical acts. In TPB, this aligns with perceived behavioral control in which the belief that one can successfully engage in a behaviour increases the likelihood of doing so.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic review to look at the factors that influence unethical behaviour intention among young working adults. A systematic review is a clear and structured method of gathering and reviewing studies on a specific topic. This approach, following the PRISMA guidelines, is widely used in academic studies to ensure a fair and thorough process when selecting and analysing data from previous studies (Adnan et al., 2019). To make the results as complete as possible, this study used two well-known databases which are Scopus and Google Scholar. Scopus was chosen for its large collection of peer-reviewed journals, while Google Scholar was used to include other sources, such as grey literature and open-access publications. Using both databases helped to ensure that the study didn't miss any important information, as advised by Halevi, Moed, & Bar-ilan (2017).

This study mainly focuses on Malaysia, but it also includes studies from other places to give a better overall understanding of why people intend to behave unethically. The reason for this is that unethical behaviour can be influenced by common psychological, social, and organizational factors that apply everywhere, not just in one country. By including studies from different settings, this review provides a more complete view of the issue and offers useful comparisons to deepen our understanding. Additionally, the paper explains how these studies are relevant to Malaysia. It connects the findings from other places to the Malaysian context, helping to draw meaningful conclusions about governance and integrity in Malaysia. This makes the inclusion of studies from other countries both reasonable and helpful, strengthening the analysis and giving a broader perspective on unethical behaviour intentions.

3.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This stage helped the authors to finalize and screen the articles available in the database. This study classifies the inclusion and exclusion criteria into five aspects. The summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature review	Journal (research articles)	Book series, chapter in the book, poster presentation
Publication Timeline	Between 2010-2024	2009 and before
Language	English	Non-English
Nature of the study	Focus on factors influencing intention to perform unethical behaviour	Not focus on factors influencing intention to perform unethical behaviour
Target population	Working young adults	University students or non-working population

3.2 PRISMA Flowchart

The PRISMA flowchart follows established guidelines that ensure transparency in systematic reviews which involve four key stages, i.e., identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The first stage, identification, involved locating studies in databases. A comprehensive search was conducted using keywords related to unethical behaviour intention, working young adults, and factors influencing unethical behaviour. These search terms were based on earlier studies and a thesaurus of related words (Table 3). There are 205 identified studies, including 78 from Scopus and 127 from Google Scholar. The goal was to capture a broad range of studies to consider all relevant literature.

In the next stage, screening studies were reviewed to remove duplicates and those that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Non-English articles, book chapters, and studies published before 2010 were excluded. Studies that did not focus on the intention to engage in unethical behaviour were also filtered out. As a result, 157 studies remained, with 51 from Scopus and 106 from Google Scholar. The third stage, eligibility, involved reviewing the full-text articles to ensure they focused specifically on unethical behaviour intention, rather than actual unethical behaviour. This step was essential to keep the study focused on the factors influencing the intention to act unethically. Studies that did not meet this requirement were excluded. This phase left 49 studies from Scopus and 98 from Google Scholar.

Table 3. The search string used for the systematic review process

Database	Keywords used
Scopus	(("intention to perform unethical behavior" OR "unethical behavior intention" OR ("unethical behavior" AND ("intention" OR "intent" OR "motivation" OR "willingness"))) OR ("unethical conduct" AND ("intention" OR "intent" OR "motivation" OR "willingness"))) OR ("fraudulent behavior" AND ("intention" OR "motivation" OR "willingness"))) OR ("deviant workplace behavior" AND ("intention" OR "motivation" OR "willingness"))) OR ("unethical decision-making" AND ("intention" OR "motivation" OR "willingness"))) AND ("personal motivation" OR "greed" OR "moral justification" OR "rationalization" OR "peer influence" OR "parental influence" OR "social influence" OR "environmental influence" OR "organizational culture" OR "financial pressure" OR "situational pressure" OR "job insecurity" OR "workload pressure" OR "capability" OR "perceived behavioral control" OR "opportunity" OR "lack of oversight") AND ("working young adults" OR "young professionals" OR "early career employees" OR "young workers"))
Google Scholar	("intention to perform unethical behavior" OR "unethical behavior intention") AND ("greed" OR "peer influence" OR "parental influence" OR "financial pressure" OR "capability" OR "personal motivation" OR "social influence" OR "environmental influence" OR "situational pressure" OR "opportunity" OR "rationalization") AND ("working young adults" OR "young professionals" OR "young employees" OR "early career workers")

Finally, in the inclusion stage, only studies that met all inclusion criteria were included in the final analysis. This ensured that the studies selected were high-quality and relevant to the research objectives. The data extracted from the selected studies were analysed using a thematic approach as shown in Table 4. Four main themes that influence unethical behaviour intention among young working adults were identified:

- Personal motivation: This includes factors like greed, moral justification, and rationalisation, which encourage unethical behaviour.
- Social and environmental influences: These include influences from parents, peers, organisational culture, and social norms that affect ethical decision-making.
- Situational pressure: This includes pressures such as financial strain, workload, and job insecurity that can lead to unethical behaviour.
- Control and capability: This theme look at factors like the opportunity to engage in unethical behaviour and a lack of oversight that can enable unethical actions.

Table 4. List of journals reviewed and their four main focuses (themes)

Journals (Authors)	Four Main Focuses (Themes)			
	Personal Motivations	Social and Environmental Influences	Situational pressure	Control and Capability
(Wang et al., 2022)	x	x	x	
(Arciniega et al., 2019)	x	x	x	
(Tang et al., 2014)	x	x	x	
(Santalla-Banderali & Malavé, 2022)	x	x	x	
(Elshaer et al., 2022)	x	x	x	
(Tang & Sutarso, 2013)	x	x	x	
(Gürlek, 2020)	x	x	x	
(Kish-Gephart et al., 2010)	x	x	x	x
(Tang et al., 2023)	x	x	x	x
(Hameed & Siddiqui, 2020)	x	x	x	x
Total Journals Focused on Theme	10 out of 10	10 out of 10	10 out of 10	3 out of 10

During this analysis, several key gaps in the existing studies were identified. First, many studies focus on unethical behaviour itself, but not enough on the intention to behave unethically. Second, most studies focus on university students and non-working populations, so there is a need for more studies on working young adults. In the end, 10 studies (2 from Scopus and 8 from Google Scholar) remained eligible for inclusion as shown in Table 5. Indeed, this study confirmed the focus of these journals on the intention to perform unethical behaviour. Figure 2 shows the summary of the PRISMA stages.

Table 5. Scopus and Google Scholar databases

Database	Identified literature	Screened & Removed	Excluded (Focus on actual behaviour)	Final eligible journal
Scopus	78	51	49	2
Google Scholar	127	106	98	8

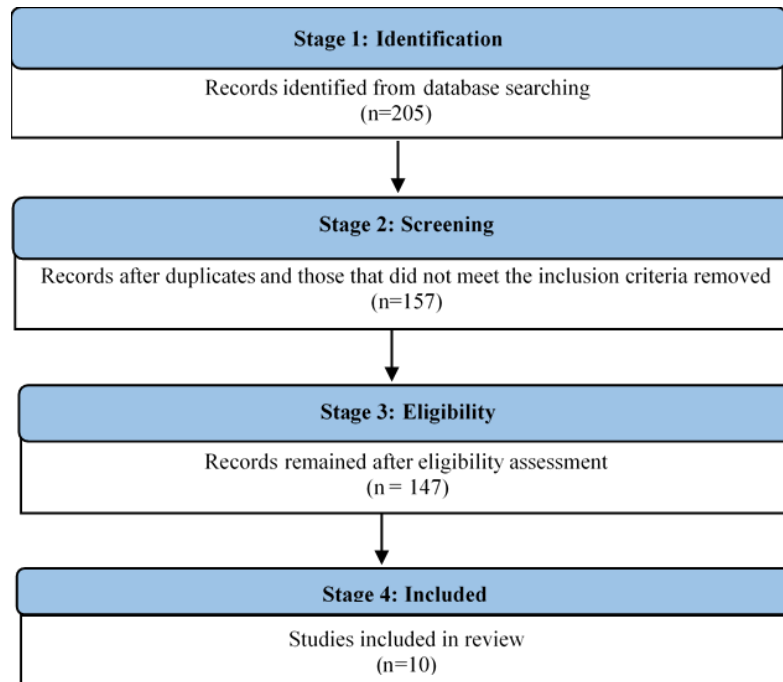


Figure 2. PRISMA approach used in the SLR study (Modified from Ismail et. al., 2022)

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The Antecedents of Intention to Perform Unethical Behaviour

This study has two main findings. First, it shows a clear gap in existing studies. Most studies focus on actual unethical behaviour, but few looks at the intention to engage in it. While unethical behaviour is widely studied, there is little focus on the factors behind these intentions. Understanding these intentions is important, as they often predict actual behaviour. By studying these factors, researchers and policymakers can create strategies to prevent unethical behaviour before it happens, instead of just reacting to it after the fact.

Table 6. Newly discovered factors influencing unethical behaviour

Newly discovered factors	Sources
Love of money & Monetary intelligence	Tang et al., (2023); Hameed & Siddiqui (2020)
Machiavellianism & career ambition	Gürlek (2020)
Workplace culture, ethical training & guidelines	Santalla-Banderali & Malavé (2022)
Workplace experience & gender	Santalla-Banderali & Malavé (2022)
Workplace environment & managerial roles	Elshaer et al., (2022)
Pay satisfaction/Dissatisfaction & Cultural norms	Tang et al., (2023)
Materialism & Demographics (age, income)	Hameed & Siddiqui (2020)
Job insecurity	Wang et al., (2022)
Performance expectations & monitoring systems	Arciniega et al., (2019)
Moral intensity in Organizational scenarios	Santalla-Banderali & Malavé (2022)
Perceived job insecurity	Elshaer et al., (2022)
Pressure to achieve career & Organizational success	Gürlek (2020)
Risk perception & Corruption index (CPI)	Tang et al., (2023)
Prospect theory & Decision framing	Tang et al., (2023)
Self-regulation & monitoring	Hameed & Siddiqui (2020)

Second, many studies focus on university students or non-working people, not on working young adults. While studies on university students give helpful insights into ethical decisions in school, they don't fully capture the challenges faced in work environments. The shift from student life to a professional job brings new challenges. Since early career

experiences shape a person's professional ethics, studying young adults in the workforce is important for understanding and preventing unethical behaviour intentions. Other than the most frequent factors used, there are fifteen newly discovered factors identified. Those factors were considered new as they were rarely found in recent literature which were published within the year 2020 to 2024 (Table 6). Future empirical studies are recommended to include these factors to see their capability to influence the intention to perform unethical behaviour among working young adults.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Personal motivation and intention to perform unethical behaviour

Personal motivation plays a significant role in driving working young adults to engage in unethical behaviour. It involves internal psychological factors that shape decisions, especially when faced with ethical dilemmas. Key drivers of personal motivation include moral identity, self-enhancement, greed, ambition, self-interest, moral disengagement, and the pursuit of personal gain. These factors can push individuals toward unethical actions. A study by Wang et al. (2022) found that individuals with a strong moral identity are less likely to engage in unethical pro-organizational behaviour (UPB), even when facing job insecurity. This suggests that moral identity is crucial in ethical decision-making, as it helps reduce the likelihood of unethical actions driven by external pressures. Additionally, Arciniega, Stanley, Puga-Méndez, Obregón-Schael, & Politi-Salame (2019) found that young professionals who value power highly often violate professional conduct guidelines, even after receiving ethics training. Gürlek (2020) discovered that individuals with strong Machiavellian traits and high career ambition are more likely to engage in unethical behaviour. Similarly, Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño (2010) highlighted that personal attributes such as personality traits, moral development, cognitive moral disengagement, and ethical ideology significantly influence unethical decision-making in the workplace.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Social and environmental influences and intention to perform unethical behaviour

Social and environmental factors play a major role in influencing unethical behaviour among working young adults. Unlike personal motivations, which come from internal psychological factors, social and environmental influences stem from external interactions. Wang et al. (2022) and Arciniega et al. (2019) both examine factors contributing to unethical behaviour in the workplace. Wang et al. (2022) focus on how job insecurity impacts unethical pro-organizational behaviour (UPB). In contrast, Arciniega et al. (2019) explore how work values influence unethical decision-making. They find that employees who value self-enhancement, such as power, are more likely to disregard professional conduct guidelines and engage in cyberloafing, even when aware of workplace monitoring. These studies suggest that both organizational conditions, like job insecurity, and personal values shape ethical behaviour in the workplace.

The studies by Santalla-Banderali & Malavé (2022) and Elshaer et al. (2022) examine how social and environmental factors shape individuals' ethical behaviour in organizational settings. Santalla-Banderali and Malavé (2022) found that work experience and gender influence ethical decision-making, with employees more likely to engage in unethical behaviour than students. Elshaer et al. (2022) explored how workplace conditions, job insecurity, and the COVID-19 pandemic affect perceptions of job stability and ethical behaviour. The findings indicate that job insecurity, especially during the pandemic, increases the likelihood of unethical workplace practices. Gürlek (2020) highlighted that workplace dynamics and managerial roles can drive individuals to make unethical choices, particularly when career ambition is a motivating factor. Similarly, Hameed and Siddiqui (2020) further explored how materialistic values and demographic factors, including age and income, affect unethical behavior and job satisfaction, especially when financial motives and temptation come into play.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Situational pressure and intention to perform unethical behaviour

Workplace pressures play a crucial role in shaping employees' intentions to engage in unethical behaviour. Wang et al. (2022) found that job insecurity increases stress, leading employees to adopt unethical pro-organizational behaviour (UPB) as a way to protect their job security. Similarly, Arciniega et al. (2019) revealed that constant monitoring creates psychological pressure, pushing employees to violate ethical standards to cope. Tang et al. (2014) found that temptation and opportunity increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour, such as cheating. When oversight is weak, and accountability is low, individuals may see unethical actions as more acceptable. Similarly, Santalla-Banderali and Malavé (2022) explored the impact of moral intensity in organizational scenarios on ethical behaviour. Beyond environmental influences, working pressures also contribute to unethical decision making. Gürlek (2020) emphasized that the drive for career advancement and organizational success can push individuals toward unethical behaviour, especially in highly competitive settings. When employees or professionals believe that their success depends on meeting high performance standards or financial targets, they may justify unethical behaviour as a necessary step to achieve their goals.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Control and capability and intention to perform unethical behaviour

The ability to make ethical decisions is influenced by cognitive skills, risk perception, and self-regulation. Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) highlighted that the capacity for ethical decision-making including moral awareness, reasoning abilities, ethical training, and an understanding of consequences plays a crucial role in preventing unethical behaviour. Tang et al. (2023) used Prospect Theory to examine how individuals assess risk and make decisions regarding financial gains and losses. They found that people who focus on potential financial losses are more likely to justify corrupt or unethical behaviour to protect their financial security. Similarly, Hameed & Siddiqui (2020) explored the role of self-regulation and monetary intelligence in ethical conduct, concluding that individuals who can effectively manage their emotions, behaviour, and financial attitudes are less prone to unethical actions.

5. CONCLUSION

To address the gaps identified in this study and enhance the understanding of unethical behaviour intention, several key recommendations are suggested. Firstly, while many existing studies focus on actual unethical behaviour, they often overlook the psychological factors and thought processes that lead individuals to consider such actions. Previous studies have typically measured unethical behaviour through experiments or observations, which can capture the actions but may not fully explain why individuals engage in such behaviours. Actual behaviour can be influenced by various situational factors, making it difficult to understand the underlying motivations that guide decisions to act unethically. Therefore, studying intention of what people plan to do or think about doing can provide a deeper understanding of the reasons behind unethical behaviour. In addition, study by Vallerand et al. (1992) also supports the role of intention in predicting behaviour, particularly in ethical decision-making contexts. The model suggests that people's intentions, shaped by their attitudes and beliefs, directly influence their actions. Focusing on intention allows us to better understand the cognitive processes behind unethical decisions, offering useful insights for interventions before unethical behaviour occurs.

Intention is a strong predictor of actual behaviour, as highlighted by the theory TPB developed by Ajzen (1991). The theory suggest that people's intentions are shaped by their attitudes and beliefs, which directly influence their actions. Focusing on intention allows us to better understand the cognitive processes behind unethical decisions, offering useful insights for interventions before unethical behaviour occurs. By examining intention, we can explore the factors that drive behaviour and find ways to prevent unethical actions from taking place in the first place. Future studies should prioritize exploring the cognitive and situational influences that shape unethical behaviour intention. Additionally, integrating psychological, social, and environmental perspectives will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these intentions develop. Secondly, it is recognized that including only 10 studies in this systematic literature review is a limitation because the sample size is small. This smaller sample may affect how widely the findings can be applied and their strength. However, the studies included were carefully selected based on strict criteria to ensure they are relevant and of good quality. Even with the small number of studies, the insights gained from them are valuable in understanding unethical behaviour intentions. The findings in this review provide a solid base that can help both theory and practice. Future studies are encouraged to increase the sample size by including more studies from different sources, especially those focusing on Malaysian contexts, to help confirm and strengthen the conclusions of this review.

Next, existing studies focus on university student samples, which do not adequately reflect the complexities of ethical decision-making in professional environments. Future studies should focus on working young adults across various industries to better understand the unique ethical dilemmas and pressures they encounter. In addition, long-term studies that track individuals from the early stages of their careers can offer valuable insights into the development of ethical behaviour over time. By observing working young adults throughout their careers, authors can identify key influences on ethical decision-making and recognize patterns that may lead to unethical conduct. Lastly, this study focuses on working young adults, which may not fully show how unethical behaviour intentions differ across other age groups or career stages. While this focus is important, comparing unethical behaviour intentions across different age groups or career stages could help us better understand how these intentions change over time. The reviewer's suggestion to explore unethical behaviour intentions across various demographic and career factors is helpful and should be considered in future studies.

Future studies could expand on this by comparing unethical behaviour intentions across a wider range of age groups, such as young adults, mid-career professionals, and older employees, as well as individuals at different stages of their careers. This would help to see how unethical behaviour intentions may change as people progress through different stages of their careers and life. These studies could provide deeper insights into how age, career growth, and changes in personal or professional values influence unethical behaviour intentions. By including more demographic and career factors, future studies could improve our understanding of unethical behaviour intentions and show how they may differ at different life stages, giving a more complete view of the issue. Finally, rather than dealing with unethical behaviour after it occurs, organizations should take proactive steps to prevent it from happening. Managing unethical intentions effectively requires a broad approach, including more studies, supporting working young adults, using preventive strategies, improving workplace policies, and promoting policy and education reforms.

To conclude, the issue of unethical behaviour, especially corruption, has been a persistent challenge in Malaysia, significantly impacting both the public and private sectors. This study, which explores the reasons behind unethical intentions among young working adults in the public sector, aligns with key principles of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks and the global push for ethical governance and social responsibility. Thus, this study looks at the reasons behind unethical behaviour among young working adults in Malaysia, linking it to global goals of good governance and ethical conduct. By focusing on the intentions behind these behaviours, the study provides useful insights into what causes unethical actions. Addressing issues like financial pressure and capability can help create more transparent and accountable institutions. Understanding these factors helps policymakers create better anti-corruption strategies and programs that encourage integrity and trust.

Additionally, the study highlights the need for ethical work environments, especially in the public sector. Young adults often face pressures, such as financial difficulties or pressure from superiors to act unethically. By recognizing these pressures, the study shows how important it is to create workplaces that reduce unethical actions. Offering ethical training and promoting transparency can help young adults deal with ethical challenges, encouraging them to act with integrity

and reduce the likelihood of unethical behaviour. In the long run, this study contributes to improving public sector performance, which is important for sustainable economic growth. Unethical behaviour, especially corruption, slows down economic development, lowers competitiveness, and damages trust in government. By addressing the root causes of unethical intentions, this study provides solutions that can improve the public sector.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Tengku Intan Nabilah Tenku Sulaiman (Conceptualization; Resources; Writing- original draft)

Fatimah Mahmud (Supervision; Editing; Revision)

Hasnah Haron (Supervision; Resources; Reviewing)

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Not applicable.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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