Mediterranean Journal of Social & Behavioral Research
2024, 8(2), 61-69
ISSN 2547-8559 (Print)
ISSN 2547-8567 (Online)
https://www.mjosbr.com/

Research Article **OPEN ACCESS**

Relationship between moral intelligence and corruption tolerance among public sector employees: Does life satisfaction matter?

Bolanle Ogungbamila [1]*, Oluwaseyi Femi Ajayi [1]

[1]Department of Pure and Applied Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, NIGERIA
***Corresponding Author:** bolanle.ogungbamila@aaua.edu.ng

Citation: Ogungbamila, B., & Ajayi, O. F. (2024). Relationship between moral intelligence and corruption tolerance among public sector employees: Does life satisfaction matter?. *Mediterranean Journal of Social & Behavioral Research*, 8(2), 61-69. https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/15789

ABSTRACT

Corruption tolerance may encourage corruption in public sector employees and reduce their willingness to engage in whistleblowing or support anti-corruption crusades. Though previous studies have shown that corrupt tendencies may reduce with morality and life satisfaction, there is a need to investigate the level at which corruption tolerance (which may be an important variable in whistleblowing) is related with moral intelligence and whether life satisfaction moderates the relationship. Using a cross-sectional survey, 495 public sector employees (207 males; 288 females), whose ages ranged between 21 and 60 years ($mean_{age}$ = 38.39; standard deviation = 7.46), were selected across 7 ministries in Nigeria. The participants responded to measures of corruption tolerance, moral intelligence, and life satisfaction. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that moral intelligence and life satisfaction had a significant joint influence on corruption tolerance. Corruption tolerance significantly reduced as employees' level of moral intelligence increased and as they became more satisfied with important aspects of their life. Results of the moderation test indicated that life satisfaction significantly increased the level at which moral intelligence reduced corruption tolerance; leading to 18% further reduction in corruption tolerance. Moral intelligence and life satisfaction reduced employees' tolerance for corruption. In order to reduce tolerance for corruption, public sector organizations, in conjunction with relevant agencies, should design and implement psychological programs that would help employees manage their moral intelligence and life satisfaction.

Keywords: corruption, life satisfaction, morality, employees, Nigeria

Received: 20 Aug. 2023 ◆ Accepted: 31 Oct. 2024

INTRODUCTION

Corruption, generally conceptualized as the misuse of position or authority for personal gain at the expense of others and against the prevailing rules, regulations, and ethical principles (Balán, 2011), has received considerable research attention in recent years (Bobkova & Egbert, 2012). This may be because corruption and its pervasiveness have been associated with low organizational, national, and individual well-being (Ayamba, 2019; Li & An, 2019; Ojukwu & Chukwuma, 2018; Tay et al., 2014). Studies have linked the level of pervasiveness of corruption in public and private sector establishments (especially in developing countries) with nature of organization and management of resources (Fan et al., 2009; Gorsira et al., 2018), cultural and value orientations (Getz & Volkema, 2001).

In two separate reviews of the literature on corruption, Abraham et al. (2018) and Julián and Bonavia (2020) submitted that anti-corruption drives may be more effective if energies are not expended solely on legal framework to fighting corruption. This is because individuals respond differently to corruption and its environment (Vera, 2019). Therefore, such individual differences and corruption-promoting environment (Clarke & Xu, 2004; Olken, 2009; Olken & Pande, 2012; Rabl, 2011) must be effectively captured in anti-corruption efforts. Research, which focus how moral intelligence and life satisfaction connect with corruption tolerance, may be an important step in the quest to further comprehend the individual and psychological factors underlining corruption and anti-corruption activities, especially among public sector employees.

Corruption tolerance, the act of condoning, ignoring or indirectly supporting corrupt acts (Chang & Kerr, 2009), can also dampen employees' whistleblowing drive and reduce their inclination to supporting anti-corruption activities. The danger inherent in corruption tolerance is that employees may perceive a widespread tolerance for corruption as an indirect way of encouraging and supporting corruption in the workplace (Manzetti, 2000). A high level of corruption tolerance may, therefore, "force" more employees to accept corruption and continuously set a new norm of reacting to corruption; thereby creating lower moral standard that tolerates corruption the more.

The current study is situated within Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. The theory posits that moral thoughts, actions, and affective self-reactions develop through intricate and bi-directional interactions with the moral environment, which mold the individual's moral conduct through the application of multi-dimensional ethical principles and their associated rewards and punishments (Bandura, 1991). Affective self-reactions to moral situations are selectively activated or disengaged by the individual (Bandura, 1991) in order to cope with moral and social anxieties associated with inability to meet subjective goals and aspirations through morally acceptable corridors. Therefore, corruption may also become pervasive if majority of employees tolerate it by selectively activating or disengaging their affective self-reaction to corruption based on whether corruption would jeopardize or enhance the achievement of subjective goals and aspirations.

Manzetti (2000) submitted that high level of corruption tolerance encourages corruption and makes it widespread, socially accepted, and condoned. Corruption tolerance may also heighten employees' willingness to engage in corruption (Alvarez, 2015). This implies that corruption tolerance may encourage corruption, which in turn may promote higher levels of corruption tolerance. Against this background, breaking the mutual link between corruption tolerance and corruption may require further understanding of how individual factors (e.g., moral intelligence) discourage corruption tolerance and the level at which subjective appraisal of the extent to which present life condition met personally set standard (life satisfaction). This study was, therefore, designed to investigate the extent to which moral intelligence predicts corruption tolerance and how life satisfaction moderates the relationship.

Moral Intelligence and Corruption Tolerance

Moral intelligence is conceptualized as the ability to use universal ethical principles to differentiate wrong from right and apply such distinctions to guide one's intentions, goals, beliefs, values, and actions, in relation to issues, other persons, and situations (Mohammadi et al., 2020). Moral intelligence is reflected in and epitomizes the principles of compassion, integrity, forgiveness, and responsibility (Lennick & Kiel, 2005). Compassion refers to the capacity to passionately pay attention to and be concerned about the welfare and well-being of others (Toprak & Karakus, 2018). The principle of forgiveness is wrapped in the deep understanding and the ability to encourage the understanding of the proneness of others to errors and mistakes; and, on the basis of that tolerate others and show clemency (Martin & Austin, 2010). Integrity is the outcome of the harmony between an individual's word and action that mirrors the right principles, beliefs, and values (Mohammadi et al., 2020).

Responsibility, as a component of moral intelligence, refers to the keen feelings of obligation to help and serve others, be accountable and responsible for the consequences of one's mistakes, failures in decisions, and actions (Lennick & Kiel, 2005). Mohammadi et al. (2020) submitted that moral intelligence, though less inherent, is largely learnt and developed through formal and informal methods in the social environment. In the same vein, employees can also learn, develop, and apply inappropriate and selfish principles that fail to distinguish between right and wrong in their intentions, goals, beliefs, and values that hurt the society, the organization, and others at work.

In a cross-national study, which comprised 122 students (46 Indonesians, 50 Polish, and 26 Americans), Wankel et al. (2011) reported that the ranking of participants' countries on the corruption perception index (CPI) significantly reduced as participants' scores on the measure of moral intelligence increased. Though this study can be criticized for its sample size and the fact that CPI may not directly reflect corruption tolerance level, its outcomes are an indirect pointer to the possible connections of moral intelligence and moral decision with corruption tolerance.

In taking moral decisions employees may also be caught in the dilemma of acting for the benefit of self or others. This may determine whether or not employees would tolerate corruption to protect the interest of self or others (Dungan et al., 2014). The level of perceived ethical disposition of leaders in the organization may also direct employees' moral decision and determine the level at which they tolerate or engage in corruption. Manara et al. (2020) found that corruption reduced significantly as employees perceived their supervisors' behaviors to be guided by ethical principles.

Apart from the perceived moral integrity of supervisors and leaders, the moral integrity of employees may also determine whether or not they would behave in a corrupt or non-corrupt manner. For example, Wahyuni et al. (2015) investigated the connections of anti-corruption behavior with religious orientation, personality characteristics, organizational climate and moral integrity. The participants were 203 civil servants in Indonesia. They found that moral integrity exerted the greatest influence on anti-corruption behavior (other variables, except religious orientation, which exerted minimal influence, were not related with anti-corruption behavior); with individuals who were high on moral integrity behaving less corruptly compared with those with low moral integrity.

Employees with high moral intelligence, compared with those that have low moral intelligence, may be committed to higher moral standards and exhibit lower level of corruption in the discharge of their duties. Tanner et al. (2022) tested, in a 2-step experimental study involving 225 students at a metropolitan business school in France, the extent to which resistance to corruption (opposite of corruption tolerance) is depended on moral commitment. They found that moral commitment, as reflected in integrity and honesty-humility, led to high resistance to corruption. Against the backdrop of the reviewed studies, it was hypothesized that:

H1: Moral intelligence will significantly predict corruption tolerance in such a way that corruption tolerance reduces as moral intelligence increases.

Life Satisfaction and Corruption Tolerance

Life satisfaction is defined as the personal assessment of how well one's present condition approximates his or her subjective goals and aspirations (Diener et al., 1985; Pavot & Diener, 2008; Zheng et al., 2016). Ogungbamila and Ojogo (2020) submitted that the extent to which the outcome of such cognitive and emotional assessments reflects and are in consonance with the person's subjective goals and aspirations, would indicate the level at which he or she is satisfied with life. Based on the outcome the subjective evaluation of their present condition of life, those who react negatively or hold unpleasant feelings towards life may engage in activities that are targeted at improving the current state of affairs or creating opportunities for meeting their subjective goals and aspirations (Ogungbamila & Ojogo, 2020).

When employees, who are unsatisfied with life, attribute their present condition to corruption or individuals who engage in

corruption (Tay et al., 2014), they may also become intolerant of corruption and also engage in activities that frustrate corruption, in order to create the morally acceptable and needed conditions to meeting their subjective goals and aspirations (Ogungbamila & Ojogo, 2020). However, such employees may also be tolerant of corruption if they feel that corruption would provide the needed opportunities of meeting their subjective standard faster, especially when they can easily trade off some moral burdens (Dungan et al., 2014) using neutralization techniques (Ogungbamila, 2017).

There are limited studies on the connection of corruption tolerance with life satisfaction. This may be due to the fact that corruption tolerance is relatively new in literature (Chang & Kerr, 2009; Alvarez, 2015). Therefore, studies on the relationship of life satisfaction with corruption, attitude towards corruption or corrupt tendencies may serve as indirect indicators of the possible relationship between life satisfaction and corruption tolerance.

In a cross-national study that compared 29 transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe and five countries in Western Europe on life satisfaction and corruption, Amini and Douarin (2020) reported that life satisfaction reduced significantly as corruption became pervasive. Pervasiveness of corruption may reflect the fact individuals highly condoned, supported, and tolerated corruption (Keller & Sik, 2009), which might have adversely affected their level of life satisfaction. This may be because corruption adversely affects the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities as well as encourage the diversion of the resources that are meant for critical areas of human and national development for personal gains (Keller & Sik, 2009).

Ogungbamila and Ojogo (2020) investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and corrupt tendencies of 285 employees that were selected across two large public sector organizations in Nigeria. They reported that corrupt tendencies significantly reduced as employees became more satisfied with life. Incidentally, the finding of this study could be an indication that the employees who were unhappy with life might have shown preference for corruption as a road to providing opportunities for meeting their subjective goals and aspirations. Such employees may also support or be tolerant of corruption if the proceeds of corruption are or would be beneficial to them or relevant others in the short or long run.

However, if such employees attribute their unsatisfactory life to specific and general corrupt acts of others, especially if such corrupt acts are injurious to their well-being (Li & An, 2019), they may be motivated to frustrate and be intolerant any act of corruption. In essence, corruption tolerance may reflect in employees' perception of whether or not corruption prevents them from meeting the subjective standards they set in important domains of their life. At this level, the employees who did not attribute their low level of life satisfaction to corruption may feel justified to trade-off their moral principles (Dungan et al., 2014) and might feel *morally compelled* to support corruption. Based on this backdrop, it was expected that:

H2: Life satisfaction will significantly predict corruption tolerance in such a way that corruption tolerance reduces as life satisfaction increases.

H3: Life satisfaction will significantly moderate the relationship between moral intelligence and corruption tolerance such that life satisfaction will further enhance the way moral intelligence reduces corruption tolerance.

METHOD

Design and Participants

This cross-sectional survey involved 495 public sector employees (male = 207 or 41.8% and female = 288 or 58.2%). They were sampled from 7 Federal Ministries in Nigeria. Their ages averaged 38.39 (standard deviation [SD] = 7.46) with a range of 21 and 60 years.

The participants varied in terms of academic qualification. Fifty-three (10.7%) of the participants had up to ordinary level certificate; 102 (20.6%) had either Nigeria certificate in education or national diploma; 246 (49.7%) had either higher national diploma or first degree; and 94 (19%) had postgraduate degree. In the case of marital status, their responses showed that 114 (23%) of them were single; 348 (70.3%) were married; 12 (2.4%) were divorced; 10 (2%) were separated from their spouses; and 11 (2.2%) lost their spouses to death. In terms of religious affiliation, 352 (711%) were Christians; 119 (24%) were Moslems; and 24 (4.8%) of them were affiliated to other religions. The participants had spent an average of 10.51 years (SD = 6.54) on the job; with a range of 2 to 34 years.

Measures

Moral intelligence was measured with moral competency inventory (MCI). This measure, originally referred to as moral competency index was developed by Lennick and Kiel (2005) to assess the extent to which the thoughts and actions of individuals, including employees, reflect the application of the moral principles of integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion. This 40-item scale, which had four subscales (integrity = 10 items; responsibility = 10 items; forgiveness = 10 items; and compassion = 10 items), was predicated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = infrequently; 3 = sometimes; 4 = in most situations; and 5 = in all situations). Sample items include: "My friends and co-workers know they can depend on me to keep my word" (integrity); "I spend a significant amount of time providing resources and removing obstacles for my co-workers" (responsibility); "I am able to "forgive and forget" even when someone has made a serious mistake" (forgiveness); and "I am able to deliver negative feedback in a respectable way" (compassion).

Lennick and Kiel (2005) did not provide clear psychometric properties for the original scale. Martin and Austin (2010) and Toprak and Karakus (2018) provided elaborate psychometric properties for the scale. Martin and Austin (2010) reported that the MCI is largely valid and reliable in terms of factor, content, convergence, discriminant validity properties with some level of reservations. However, Toprak and Karakus (2018) submitted that the reservations noted by Martin and Austin might be connected with the fact that their analyses were not done in strict consonance with Lennick and Kiel's (2005) conceptualization and dimensionality of moral competency. Using Lennick and Kiel's (2005) dimensions and version of the scale, Toprak and Karakus (2018), reported that subscales of MCI had Cronbach's alpha that ranged from .70 (compassion) to .79 (integrity). The overall scale had .89 and .80 Cronbach's alpha and Spearman-Brown reliability coefficients, respectively.

With the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha of the four dimensions of MCI were .74 (integrity), .76 (responsibility), .72 (compassion), and .75 (forgiveness). The overall scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .82. The present study was designed to assess employees' level of moral intelligence, rather than the dimensions of it. Therefore, each

participant's overall score on MCI was used in the current study. Scores on MCI were interpreted in such way that scores that were up to or higher than the mean reflected high level of moral intelligence while scores that were lower than the mean showed that the employee had low level of moral intelligence.

Life satisfaction was assessed with Diener et al.'s (1985) satisfaction with life scale (SWLS). The 5-item scale focused the participants' subjective assessment of the extent to which they were satisfied with their present state of affairs in relation to the personal standard they had set for themselves. SWS was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = slightly agree; 6 = moderately agree; and strongly agree = 7). Sample items included: "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "I am satisfied with my life". SWLS had 2-month test re-test and coefficient alpha reliability values of .82 and .87, respectively (Diener et al., 1985). Ogungbamila and Ojogo (2020) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for a Nigerian sample. With the present sample, SWLS had a Cronbach's alpha of .86. Scores on SWLS were interpreted such that life satisfaction increased as participants' scores on the scale increased.

Corruption tolerance was measured using corruption tolerance inventory (CTI) (**Appendix A**). In developing the CTI, 25 items were generated based on a focused group discussion with 4 employees (private sector = 2 and public sector = 2) on how and why individuals condone corruption in the workplace.

In a pilot study, the initial items of the CTI, which were rated on a 6-point scale (0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = moderately, 3 = quite often, 4 = most of the time, and 5 = always), were administered with Ogungbamila and Udegbe's (2014) corrupt tendencies scale (CTS) to 123 public sector employees (73 males and 50 females) who had spent a minimum of 10 years on job. This major criterion was used in order to ensure that the participants had had opportunities to witness, frown at, punish or report corruption in the workplace.

The results of the item analysis indicated that 4 out of the 25 items were not valid. When the 4 items were deleted, the Cronbach's alpha of the CTI increased from .58 to .74. Consequently, subsequent analyses on the scale were based on the 21 valid items. Exploratory factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was also performed on the scale. The explained variance showed that the scale had one factor with 57.4%. A concurrent validity test was performed on the CTI by correlating its total score with the total score on CTS. This was because CTI and CTS appeared to measure similar behavior. Consequently, those who show high tendencies of engaging in corruption as measured by CTS may also be more tolerant of and unwilling to punish or report corruption. Results showed that CTI had a positive significant relationship with CTS [r (121) = .47, p < .05].

The final 21-item CTI were used in the main study to measure the extent to which employees condoned corruption or were lenient with those who engage in corruption. The final CTI had a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Sample item of the CTI included: "I think others describe me as someone who condones wrongdoing" and "I feel upset when others try to cover up corruption" (reverse scored). Scores on the CTI were interpreted in such a way that scores that were up to or higher than the mean indicted that the employee was tolerant of and condone corruption while score that were lower than the mean showed that the employees did not condone corruption.

Procedure

The 26 federal ministries in Nigeria were listed in alphabetical order. Table of random numbers was used to select 7 ministries, which represented 26.9% of the 26 ministries. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from heads of the selected ministries after the purpose of the study had been duly explained. In most of the selected ministries, the head of the unit assigned a staff who ensured that employees freely participated in the study. The aim and nature of the study were duly explained to all potential participants, and they were assured that the study had no adverse physical or psychological effect. They were assured that their responses would be confidential and could not be traced to them. They were also told that they were free to participate in or withdraw their participation from the study at any time because the study had nothing to do with promotion, other work-related benefits or punishments.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents who showed willingness to participate in the study. Data collection spanned 3 weeks. Out of the 500 copies of the questionnaires that were administered, 495 were retrieved and found usable for analysis. This yielded a 99% response rate.

RESULTS

Test of Relationships Among the Variables

All the categorical variables were coded. In order evaluate the type of relationships that existed among the socio-demographic and psychological variables, Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the data. The mean and standard deviation scores of some of the variables were also calculated. The results are presented in **Table 1**.

The results in **Table 1** show that there was a significant negative relationship between moral intelligence and corruption tolerance [r (493) = –.53 p < .001]. This implies that as the level of moral intelligence of public sector employees increased, they became intolerant of corruption. Similarly, employees' tolerance for corruption significantly reduced as they became more satisfied with life [r (493) = –.42, p < .001]. Life satisfaction significantly increased with moral intelligence [r (493) = .31, p < .001].

In case of the socio-demographic variables, as employees increased in age, they became less satisfied with life satisfaction [r (493) = –.10, p < .05] but more tolerant of corruption [r (493) = .11, p < .05]. Gender was not significantly related to life satisfaction and corruption tolerance. This implies that public sector employees were satisfied with life and tolerant of corruption irrespective of their gender. There was no significant relationship between marital status and life satisfaction. However, marital status had significant positive relationship with corruption tolerance [r (493) = .09, p < .05]. Religious affiliation was not significantly related with life satisfaction, but it had a significant negative relationship with corruption tolerance [r (493) = –.14, p < .01]. Life satisfaction significantly increased with academic qualification [r (493) = .09, p < .05]. However, corruption tolerance reduced with academic qualification [r (493) = –.13, p < .05]. This shows that the more educated a public sector employee was the less tolerant of corruption he or she became. Life satisfaction and corruption tolerance were not significantly related to job tenure.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and inter-variable correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	1								
Gender	–.09*	1							
Marital status	.25**	.15**	1						
Religious affiliation	–.01	–.05	.23**	1					
Academic qualification	.23**	–.08	.06	–.04	1				
Job tenure	.83***	–.11*	.21**	.01	.09*	1			
Moral intelligence	.03	–.05	.04	.05	.02	.09*	1		
Life satisfaction	–.10*	–.01	–.03	.05	.09*	–.05	.31***	1	
Corruption tolerance	.11*	.02	.09*	–.14**	–.13**	.04	–.53***	–.42***	1
Mean	**28.39**	-	-	-	-	**10.51**	**64.89**	**15.11**	**79.37**
Standard deviation	**7.46**	-	-	-	-	**6.54**	**4.50**	**4.45**	**9.24**

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. N = 495. Gender was coded as follows: male 0, female 1. Marital status was coded as follows: single 1, married 2, divorced 3, separated 4, and widowed 5. Religious affiliation was coded as follows: Christianity 1, Islam 2, and other religious affiliation 3. Academic qualification was coded as follows: up to ordinary level certificate 1, Nigeria certificate in education or national diploma 2, higher national diploma or first degree 3, and postgraduate degree 4.

Test of Hypotheses 1 to 3

Hypotheses 1 to 3 were tested with a 3-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis. It involved three regression models. In the first model, the socio-demographic variables were regressed on corruption tolerance. In the second step of the analysis (model 2), the independent effects of moral intelligence and life satisfaction were added to model 1. Finally, the moderation effects of life satisfaction on moral intelligence were added to the model in the third step of the analysis. The results are shown in **Table 2**.

As indicated in **Table 2**, all the socio-demographic variables, except gender and job tenure, were significantly related to corruption tolerance. All the socio-demographic variables contributed 6% to the observed changes in corruption tolerance in public sector employees (R = .24, R^2 = .06, F = 4.71, p < .001). At the individual level, employees' tolerance for corruption significantly increased with age (β = .16, t = 3.93, p < .01). Marital status had a significant influence on corruption tolerance with employees who were married or had been married (divorced, separated, and widowed) being more tolerant of corruption than those who were single (β = .11, t = 2.21, p < .05). Religious affiliation also exerted a significant influence on corruption tolerance with those who were affiliated to Christianity showing more tendency of overlooking corruption than those who were affiliated with Islam or other religions (β = –.15, t = 3.42, p < .01). The more educated public sector employees were the more tolerant of corruption they tended to be (β = .09, t = 2.01, p < .05).

Since the majority of the socio-demographic variables were significantly connected with corruption tolerance, it was important that a multi-collinearity test was conducted on the data. Results showed that the variables had *tolerance* scores that ranged between .29 (gender) and .94 (age). According to Berk (1977) and Yoo et al. (2014), a *tolerance* score that is less than 1.00 indicates that no multi-collinearity problem exists among the variables.

In order to test hypotheses 1 to 2, the influence of moral intelligence and life satisfaction were added to the regression model in step 2 of the analysis. The addition of the two variables led to 9% changes in the level of corruption tolerance in public sector employees (R = .30, R^2 = .09, ΔR^2 = .03, F = 6.23, p < .001). Public sector employees became less tolerant of corruption as their level of moral intelligence increased (β = –.36, t = 4.78, p < .001). Similarly, as public employees became more satisfied with important aspects of their life; they became less inclined to condone corruption (β = –.29, t = 4.02, p < .001). These results provided evidence to support hypotheses 1 and 2.

Hypothesis 3 was also supported by the results in **Table 2**. The addition of the cross-product of moral intelligence and life satisfaction to the regression model in step 3, led to 18% reduction in the level at which public sector employees condoned corruption (R = .43, R^2 = .18, ΔR^2 = .09, F = 8.20, p < .001). Life satisfaction significantly moderated the relationship between moral intelligence and corruption tolerance in such a way that when employees lived in accordance with universal ethical and moral principles and their current state of living approximated their subjective standard, they tended to frown at and became intolerant of corruption (β = –.45, t = 6.11, p < .001). These results provided support for the position of hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

Corruption tolerance may increase the prevalence of corruption in the workplace, especially if employees perceive that the environment created by widespread corruption tolerance has adversely affected the manifestation of high moral principles. The level at which employees condone corruption may also depend on whether or not they belief that corruption has reduced or may enhance the opportunities of meeting their subjective goals, aspirations, and well-being. This study, therefore, tested the extent to which moral intelligence predicts corruption tolerance and how life satisfaction moderates the relationship.

True to the expectations of hypothesis 1, corruption tolerance reduced with moral intelligence. This result reflected the findings of Tanner et al. (2022) and Wahyuni et al. (2015). The authors reported that individuals became less tolerant of corruption and were less likely to behave in corrupt manners as their level of moral commitment increased. This implies that employees who were morally upright might have perceived corruption and the tolerance of it as a moral transgression that should not be condoned. Those who scored low on the measure of moral intelligence might have supported or showed aversion to reporting corruption and punishing corruption maybe because they did not believe that a corruption-free workplace could enhance their well-being.

The results in **Table 2** provided support for hypothesis 2, which proposed that life satisfaction would have an inverse relationship with corruption tolerance.

Table 2. Summary of hierarchical multiple regression showing the influence of moral intelligence and life satisfaction on corruption tolerance

Models	β	**t**	**R**	**R^2**	**ΔR^2**	**F**
Model 1 (socio-demographic variables)	-	-	.24	.06	.06	4.71***
Age	.16**	3.93**				
Gender	.003	.07				
Marital status	.11*	2.21*				
Religious affiliation	−.15**	−3.42**				
Academic qualification	.09*	2.01*				
Job tenure	−.01	−.55				
Model 2 (predictor variables)	-	-	.30	.09	.03	6.23***
Age	.11*	2.34*				
Gender	.00	.002				
Marital status	.08	1.03				
Religious affiliation	−.10*	−2.45*				
Academic qualification	.07	0.99				
Job tenure	−.00	−.001				
Moral intelligence	−.36***	−4.78***				
Life satisfaction	−.29***	−4.02***				
Model 3 (moderator variable)	-	-	.43	.18	.09	8.20***
Age	.10*	2.23**				
Gender	.00	.001				
Marital status	.07	.86				
Religious affiliation	−.09*	−2.00*				
Academic qualification	.06	.78				
Job tenure	−.00	−.001				
Moral intelligence	−.31***	−4.29**				
Life satisfaction	−.27***	−3.89***				
Moral intelligence × life satisfaction	−.45***	−6.11***				

Note. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. $N = 495$. Gender was coded as follows: male 0, female 1. Marital status was coded as follows: single 1, married 2, divorced 3, separated 4, and widowed 5. Religious affiliation was coded as follows: Christianity 1, Islam 2, and other religious affiliation 3. Academic qualification was coded as follows: up to ordinary level certificate 1, Nigeria certificate in education or national diploma 2, higher national diploma or first degree 3, and postgraduate degree 4.

The findings of previous studies (e.g., Amini & Douarin, 2020; Li & An, 2019; Ogungbamila & Ojogo, 2020) on the inverse relationship between life satisfaction and corrupt tendencies have been corroborated by the results of the present study. Public sector employees who felt that their present condition of living approximated their personal standard might have frown at corruption because they did not perceive corruption was not one of the means to being satisfied with life. However, those were not satisfied with life might have felt justified to support and condone corruption maybe because

(a) they could not properly associate their negative feelings toward life with corruption or

(b) they generally perceived corruption as a direct or an indirect way of achieving their subjective goals and aspirations.

Either way, such employees could not see the negative consequences of corruption on the well-being of the organization, other employees, and even themselves. Consequently, employees with low life satisfaction might not feel "morally compelled" to be intolerant of corruption.

Lastly, as proposed in hypothesis 3, life satisfaction significantly increased the level at which moral intelligence reduced corruption tolerance. This implies that employees who were satisfied with life were highly intolerant of corruption because their moral principles reinforced their present condition of living. Those who were not satisfied with life or did not act to reflect high moral principles might have tolerated and condoned corruption because they felt it could provide an easier route to meeting their subjective goals and aspirations.

The results of the present study have shown that life satisfaction further strengthened the level at which an increase in moral intelligence was related to a decrease in corruption tolerance. These findings have implications for theory, research, and management of corruption in organizations.

The implication of the results of the present study for theory is that low satisfaction with life may provide employees with justification for behaving in dissonance with universal moral principles, especially if they perceive that corruption tolerance would provide the needed avenue for meeting their subjective goals. Since moral intelligence is acquired based on individuals' cognitive and affective self-reactions to the society through reward and punishment (Bandura, 1991), if moral transgressions are tolerated, employees may perceive corruption as an acceptable way of meeting personal goals and aspirations. The results of the current study extended Bandura's (1991) theory of moral development by indicating that employees who had low moral intelligence tended to tolerate corruption more than those who had higher level of moral intelligence probably because they believed that corruption might provide the needed avenues to meeting their subjective goals and life satisfaction.

In terms of practice, the present study has shown that organizations, especially public sector organizations, should not tolerate moral transgressions so that employees would not perceive corruption as an acceptable way of meeting personal goals and aspirations. Organizations should also provide legitimate and morally acceptable means through which employees could achieve their personal goals and meet their subjective aspirations.

In addition to that, public sector organizations should train employees, through psycho-education and modelling, to appropriately interpret and react to corruption-promoting situations in a morally intelligent manner. All these would help in creating and promoting such a moral atmosphere would discourage corruption and corruption tolerance.

Another implication of the findings of this study is in the area of research. Though the study has shown that moral intelligence and life satisfaction reduce corruption tolerance, it has not empirically demonstrated how low life satisfaction, especially among those who are morally intelligent, could lead to low or high level of corruption tolerance.

Future studies should, therefore, conduct experiments, which may involve the use of vignettes to investigate how those who have low life satisfaction could either become highly intolerant or tolerant of corruption. This may help explain why poverty may not automatically lead to corruption or corruption tolerance.

Author contributions: BO: handled data collection and data analysis, prepared the introduction, methods, and results sections; **OFA:** handled the data collection and prepared the discussion section. Both authors approve final version of the article.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Ethics declaration: The authors declared that the participants were treated in accordance with standard ethical practice for human subjects as approved by the department on 22.03.2023 (with approval number AAUA/PSYCH/HUMAN/008/2023). The participants did not provide the name of their organization, unit, any other sensitive information that could make their responses traceable to them.

Declaration of interest: Authors declare no competing interest.

Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the authors on request.

REFERENCES

Abraham, J., Suleeman, J., & Takwin, B. (2018). Psychological mechanism of corruption: A comprehensive review. *Asian Journal of Scientific Research, 11*(4), 587–604. https://doi.org/10.3923/ajsr.2018.587.604

Alvarez, J. P. (2015). Low-level corruption tolerance: An "action-based" approach for Peru and Latin America. *Journal of Politics in Latin America, 7*(2), 99–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1500700204

Amini, C., & Douarin, E. (2020). Corruption and life satisfaction in transition: Is corruption a social norm in Eastern Europe? *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement, 151,* 723–766. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02389-6

Ayamba, I. A. (2019). Whistleblowing in a depraved Nigerian economy: Challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 7*(2), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v7i2.3978

Balán, M. (2011). Competition by denunciation: The political dynamics of corruption scandals in Argentina and Chile. *Comparative Politics, 43*(4), 459–478. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041511796301597

Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. In W. M. Kurtines, & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (vol. 1: theory) (*pp.* 45–103). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Berk, K. N. (1977). Tolerance and condition in regression computations. *Journal of the American Statistical Association, 72*(360), 863–866. https://doi.org/10.2307/2286476

Bobkova, N., & Egbert, H. (2012). Corruption investigated in the lab: A survey of the experimental literature. *International Journal of Latest Trends in Finance & Economic Sciences, 2*(4), 337–349.

Chang, E. C. C., & Kerr, N. N. (2009). *Do voters have different attitudes toward corruption? The sources and implications of popular perceptions and tolerance of political corruption.* https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/110435/AfropaperNo116.pdf

Clarke, G. R., & Xu, L. C. (2004). Privatization, competition, and corruption: How characteristics of bribe takers and payers affect bribes to utilities. *Journal of Public Economics, 88*(9–10), 2067–2097. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2003.07.002

Diener, E., Emmons, R. E., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*(1), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

Dungan, J., Waytz, A., & Young, L. (2014). Corruption in the context of moral tradeoffs. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics, 26*(1–2), 97–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0260107914540832

Fan, C. S., Lin, C., & Treisman, D. (2009). Political decentralization and corruption: Evidence from around the world. *Journal of Public Economics, 93*(1–2), 14–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2008.09.001

Getz, K. A., & Volkema, R. J. (2001). Culture, perceived corruption, and economics: A model of predictors and outcomes. *Business & Society, 40*(1), 7–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/000765030104000103

Gorsira, M., Denkers, A., & Huisman, W. (2018). Both sides of the coin: Motives for corruption among public officials and business employees. *Journal of Business Ethics, 151*(1), 179–194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3219-2

Julián, M., & Bonavia, T. (2020). Psychological variables related to corruption: A systematic review. *Anales de Psicología/ Annals of Psychology, 36*(2), 330–339. https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.389371

Keller, T., & Sik, E. (2009). *The perception, the tolerance, and the practice of corruption.* https://www.academia.edu/7853571/The_perception_the_tolerance_and_the_practice_of_corruption

Lennick, D., & Kiel, F. (2005). *Moral intelligence: Enhancing business performance and leadership success.* Wharton School Publishing.

Li, Q., & An, L. (2019). Corruption takes away happiness: Evidence from a cross-national study. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 21,* 485–504. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00092-z

Manara, M. U., van Gils, S., Nübold, A., & Zijlstra, F. R. H. (2020). Corruption, fast or slow? Ethical leadership interacts with machiavellianism to influence intuitive thinking and corruption. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11,* Article 578419. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.578419

Manzetti, L. (2000). Market reforms without transparency. In J. S. Tulchin, & R. H. Espach (Eds.), *Combating corruption in Latin America* (pp. 130–172). Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Martin, D. E., & Austin, B. (2010). Validation of the moral competency inventory measurement instrument: Content, construct, convergent and discriminant approaches. *Management Research Review, 33*(5), 437–451. https://doi.org/10.1108/01409171011041884

Mohammadi, M., Mohammadi, S., Mehri, A., & Mazraeh, F. B. (2020). Investigation of moral intelligence's predictive components in students of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences (SBMU). *Journal of Medical Ethics History of Medicine, 13,* Article13. https://doi.org/10.18502/jmehm.v13i13.4389

Ogungbamila, B. (2017). An examination of the relationship between perceived injustice, workplace neutralization and corrupt tendencies: A study on employees in Nigeria. *South Asian Journal of Management, 24(3),* 7–27.

Ogungbamila, B., & Ojogo, B. F. (2020). Perception of organizational injustice and corrupt tendencies in public sector employees: Mediating roles of life satisfaction. *Romanian Journal of Applied Psychology, 22*(2), 42–50. https://doi.org/10.24913/rjap.22.2.03

Ogungbamila, B., & Udegbe, I. B. (2014). Gender differences in the effects of perception of organizational injustice on workplace reactivity. *Europe's Journal of Psychology, 10*(1), 150–167. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v10i1.575

Ojukwu, E. C., & Chukwuma, N, A. (2018). The Nigerian state and the dialectics of anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria (1999-2017). *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, II*(XII), 124–132.

Olken, B. A, & Pande, R. (2012). Corruption in developing countries. *Annual Review of Economics, 4*(1), 479–509. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080511-110917

Olken, B. A. (2009). Corruption perception vs. corruption reality. *Journal of Public Economics, 93*(7–8), 950–964. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2009.03.001

Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (2008). The satisfaction with life scale and the emerging construct of life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 3*(2), 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760701756946

Rabl, T. (2011). The impact of situational influences on corruption in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics, 100,* 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1007Л10551-01 1-0768-2

Tanner, C., Linder, S., & Sohn, M. (2022). Does moral commitment predict resistance to corruption? Experimental evidence from a bribery game. *PLoS ONE, 17*(1), Article e0262201. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262201

Tay, L., Herian, M., & Diener, E. (2014). Detrimental effects of corruption on subjective well-being: Whether, how, and when. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(7), 751–759. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614528544

Toprak, M., & Karakus, M. (2018). Teachers' moral intelligence: A scale adaptation into Turkish and preliminary evidence. *European Journal of Educational Research, 7*(4), 901–911. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.7.4.901

Vera, S. B. (2019). Accepting or resisting? Citizen responses to corruption across varying levels of competence and corruption prevalence. *Political Studies, 68*(3), 653–670. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719868210

Wahyuni, Z. I., Adriani, Y., & Nihayah, Z. (2015). The relationship between religious orientation, moral integrity, personality, organizational climate and anti-corruption intentions in Indonesia. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, 5*(10), 860–864. https://doi.org/10.7763/IJSSH.2015.V5.570

Wankel, C., Stachowicz-Stanusch, A., & Tamtana, J. E. (2011). The impact of the national culture dimension and corruption on students' moral competencies–Research results. *Journal of Intercultural Management, 3*(2), 19–45.

Yoo, W., Mayberry, R., Bae, S., Singh, K., He. Q., & Lillard, J. W. (2014). A study of effects of multicollinearity in the multivariable analysis. *International Journal of Applied Science and Technology, 4*(5), 9–19.

Zheng, W., Huang, L., & Tan, X. (2016). Life satisfaction as a buffer of the relationship between corruption perception and political participation. *Social Indicators Research: An International International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement, 132*(2), 907–923. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1318-1

APPENDIX A: CORRUPTION TOLERANCE INVENTORY

Instructions

The following are statements people often use to describe their feelings and actions. Please, read each statement carefully and indicate how often you exhibit the feeling or action expressed in the statement by ticking **(√)** one of the numbers in front of each statement. **The numbers stand for: 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = moderately, 3 = quite often, 4 = most of the time, 5 = always.**

1. I don't worry over minor acts of corruption.
2. I think others describe me as someone who condones wrongdoing.
3. I keep a dishonest act secret, no matter what.
4. I worry when others take what does not belong to them.
5. I feel uncomfortable when my favorites are punished for engaging in corruption.
6. I overlook it when others help their favorites at the expense of the organization/society.
7. To remain relevant, I overlook acts of corruption.
8. To be secure, I overlook acts of corruption.
9. I don't support any form of financial inducement.
10. I feel upset when others try to cover up corruption.
11. The thought of punishing my favorites for engaging in corruption makes me depressed.
12. I don't support cheating, no matter what.
13. I get angry when others are given undue advantage.
14. I won't punish an act of corruption if it has no direct victim.
15. I overlook acts of corruption that border on economic survival.
16. I don't criticize others for being dishonest.
17. I think others describe me as a "no nonsense person".
18. I don't tolerate bribery.
19. I feel that my behaviors indirectly encourage corruption.
20. I overlook it when others help themselves at the expense of the organization/society.
21. I feel depressed when others punish their favorites for being dishonest.

❖❖❖