

Does Nepotism Trigger Quiet Quitting? A Research on Local Governments

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Abstract

The concept of quiet quitting, which denotes a cognitive and/or emotional, if not physical, detachment, has recently become one of the most frequently studied topics in organizational psychology. The term refers to performing only the tasks stipulated in job description with minimum organizational commitment and not going beyond that. Due to the detrimental effect of quiet quitting on both individual and organizational performance, it is crucial to study the phenomenon in depth. By referring to the organizational justice perspective, the study is designed to determine whether one of the negative employee experiences, nepotism, in local governments trigger quiet quitting. The main assumption of the research is that nepotism deteriorates the sense of justice, which leads employees to quit quietly. Structured questionnaires were administered to 259 local government workers in Adana. The results suggest that exposure to nepotism triggers quiet quitting in local governments where preferential treatments are allegedly pervasive. The study is expected to guide managers in establishing effective human resources practices in such institutions.

Keywords: *Quiet quitting, nepotism, organizational justice, local governments.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Scholarly debates on burnout and burnout-like concepts have intensified in recent years, largely following the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these concepts being discussed is *quiet quitting*. The term refers to performing only the tasks specified in the job description and not going beyond that (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). In a sense, workers do not literally quit their job, but rather, minimize their effort with a continuance commitment. The phenomenon has been linked '*hustle culture*' that ignores work-life balance, strives for continuous high performance, and ignores personal needs (Hamouche et al., 2023). Others have suggested various individual and work-related factors that may trigger quitting quietly (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023; Öztürk et al., 2023). Regardless of its motive, quiet quitting can have a detrimental effect on individuals' performance and therefore organizations' (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024; Karrani et al., 2023).

Taking an organizational justice perspective, nepotism may be one possible cause of quiet quitting among employees. When employees perceive that family ties rather than merit influence decisions about hiring, promotions, and rewards, it erodes their belief in fairness and equality within the workplace (Hudson et al., 2019). This perception of injustice can diminish employee motivation and commitment, as individuals who work hard and demonstrate competence feel undervalued and overlooked (Sidani & Thornberry, 2013; Serenko, 2024). Consequently, these employees may resort to quiet quitting, where they fulfill only the minimum requirements of their job, withdrawing their engagement and enthusiasm for going above and beyond. This passive response to nepotism reflects a disillusionment towards organization's values, ultimately deteriorating the overall morale of the workforce.

The current research sets out to evaluate the relationship between nepotism and quiet quitting in local governments. The main assumption of the study is that the intricate dance between nepotism and quiet quitting was choreographed on the organizational justice stage. Unlike previous, this study is among the first to examine nepotism as a potential predictor of quiet quitting. Thus, the study adds substantially to our understanding of the mechanisms that lead to quiet quitting. Studying nepotism in local governments, which is one of the most typical workplaces for nepotism to occur, makes the study even more intriguing.

As this article will explore, the perception of nepotism can corrode the bedrock of meritocracy, leading to a silent withdrawal of employee engagement and effort (Anand et al., 2023; Boy & Sürmeli, 2023)- a phenomenon now colloquially known as *quiet quitting*. By examining the multifaceted layers of this relationship, we aim to not only understand the impact of nepotism on individual and collective morale but also to offer insights into the mechanisms by which organizational justice might be upheld to prevent the insidious effects of such workplace dynamics. It is through this lens that the study will dissect and discuss the potential pathways to foster a more equitable work environment.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Quiet Quitting

Quiet Quitting is a concept that has emerged in both psychological and self-help literature, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges. The term implies a phenomenon where employees do not formally resign from their positions but disengage from going above and beyond their job requirements (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). Essentially, quiet quitters do the minimum required work and refrain from extra efforts that exceed their job descriptions. Quiet quitting highlights the growing importance employees place on work-life balance. It reflects a shift away from the glorification of overwork and towards a more sustainable approach to employment, where personal time and well-being are prioritized (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023).

Hamouche et al. (2023) suggest that quiet quitting evolved as a reaction against the hustle culture that demands constant superior performance in working life. The Covid-19 pandemic brought into question the meaning of life once more, which made the concept even more visible (Ratnatunga, 2022). This turbulent period, in a sense, has been a wake-up call for workers to take back control of their lives. Consequently, employees have made it a priority to achieve a work-life balance by spending less time at work (Lee et al., 2023; Gabelaia & Bagociunaite, 2022). From this perspective, quiet quitting can be seen as a coping mechanism for preserving mental health. It underscores the significant impact that job stress and burnout can have on individuals, pushing them to set boundaries to protect their mental well-being (Wu & Wei, 2024).

Beyond cultural trends or individual well-being, there may be other factors compelling individuals to quit quietly. The perception of organizational injustice may be one of the factors mentioned. Hamouche et al. (2023) argued that to fully understand the phenomenon, organizational justice perspective must be employed, since it can be a reaction to unfair practices. Similarly, Arar et al. (2023) and Wicker & Van Hein (2023) proposed that injustice in the workplace can lead to unintended consequences such as quiet quitting. Anand et al. (2023) reported that discrimination that might lead to a sense of unfairness inside the organization can be the catalyst for quiet quitting. As noted by Esen (2023), unfair practices may cause employees to stop making efforts, leading to withdrawals.

This new fashion but old phenomenon (Wu & Wei, 2024) is significant because it serves as an indicator of employee satisfaction, engagement, and evolving attitudes towards work-life balance (Pevec, 2023). It encourages both individuals and organizations to rethink and potentially reshape the future of work to be more fulfilling, balanced, and sustainable. In a sense, it challenges traditional notions of success and productivity in the workplace. On a broader scale, the widespread occurrence of quiet quitting reflects changing societal values regarding work, personal fulfillment, and the role of employment in one's life. It has implications for labor market dynamics, employee retention strategies, and economic productivity.

2.2. Nepotism

The practice of nepotistic human resources practices is prevalent in both public and private institutions. The term refers to granting favors based on family or friendship ties, rather than on merit (Padgett & Morris, 2005; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2020). Cambridge Dictionary (2024) defines the term as “*the act of using power or influence to get good jobs or unfair advantages for family members*”. There are several ways in which this phenomenon manifests itself, including the appointment of relatives to key positions without an objective assessment of their qualifications (Safina, 2015). This creates an environment where personal connections outweigh professional competence (Büte, 2011).

A variety of organizational practices, decisions, and outcomes can be affected by nepotism, including personnel decisions, pay, and rule enforcement (Schmid & Sender, 2021; Spranger et al., 2012). This phenomenon poses a serious threat to fair competition and meritocracy, which in turn erodes organizational culture as a whole (Bünyamin, 2023). In situations where individuals are granted preferential treatment based on family ties rather than their qualifications or abilities, equal opportunities are undermined (Jaskiewicz et al., 2013). Due to these reasons, managers and employees consider nepotism negatively, believing it has negative effects on employee outcomes, such as reducing innovation and increasing turnover intentions (Jain et al., 2022).

Although nepotism has a negative connotation, there are certain forms in which it is acceptable or even valued (Burhan et al., 2020). Vveinhardt & Bendaraviciene (2022) suggest that nepotism can be beneficial for certain organizational forms, and social connections may help employees to gain a better attitude toward their jobs and perform better. Nepotistic practices in such forms have resulted in shorter learning curves, greater loyalty, lower risks, and lower turnover, meeting peak needs, maximizing performance, and maintaining commitment over time (Vinton, 1998). A similar claim is made by Gibb Dyer Jr. (2006) that nepotism can be a significant competitive advantage for family businesses.

The prevalence of nepotism is higher in societies with strong traditional ties and relationships (Aktan, 2021, p.16). In such societies, public institutions such as local governments are particularly prone to such practices, where political relations have a stronghold (Sezik, 2020). This can be attributed to deeply ingrained cultural values that emphasize group loyalty, economic strategies for ensuring family stability, the strategic use of social capital, and the historical normalization of nepotism. For instance, Putnam (1993) suggests that in societies with limited economic opportunities, securing jobs for relatives within local governments can be perceived as a way to ensure economic security and stability for one's family. Rothstein & Teorell (2008), on the other hand, asserted that in social environments where governance systems lack transparency and accountability, nepotism tends to thrive. Finally, Alesina and Giuliano (2010) explore the historical roots of family ties and their impact on economic outcomes, suggesting that in societies with strong familial networks, nepotism is not merely a modern phenomenon but a historically rooted practice that is considered normative and even virtuous.

This study examines the phenomenon, quiet quitting, through the lens of organizational justice. The theory postulates that employees' behavior can be influenced by their perception of fairness and justice in their workplace (Greenberg, 1990). Through the lens of reciprocity, fairness, and compatibility, the theory can offer insight into an organization's culture's impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors, quiet quitting in particular (Hamouche et al., 2023). Based on the fact that nepotism weakens the perception of organizational justice (Mijs, 2016; Hudson et al., 2019) the study proposes that such practices in the public sector may lead to quiet quitting. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed to be tested in this study:

***H1:** The nepotistic practices that public sector workers are exposed to lead them to quit quietly.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This research adopts a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between nepotism and quiet quitting among local government workers in Adana, Turkey. The study was conducted following the ethical guidelines provided by the Ethical Committee of Munzur University (2024/02-01). Artificial intelligence tools were used to improve spelling and grammar in some sections. By doing this, the content flow has been intended to be improved.

A total of 259 participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different departments and levels of seniority within the local government workforce. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage of the study without any consequences. Table 1 (on the next page) summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

The data were collected through structured questionnaires, meticulously designed to measure perceptions of nepotism and quiet quitting. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: the first part assessed respondents' perceptions of nepotism using a validated scale by Asunakutlu and Avcı (2010) which includes items on *hiring (NRS)*, *promotion decisions (NPR)*, and *the general fairness of workplace procedures (NWP)*. The second part of the questionnaire measured quiet quitting behaviors, adapted from the scale developed by Savaş and Turan (2023) focusing on reduced effort, disengagement from work tasks, and a lack of initiative beyond the basic job requirements. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire in their natural work environment for their convenience. Each questionnaire was accompanied by an informed consent form, which highlighted the study's purpose, the anonymity and confidentiality of the responses, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

(n= 259)		Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	157	60.6
	Female	102	39.4
Age	18-24	12	4.6
	25-30	83	32.0
	31-40	112	43.2
	41-50	40	15.4
	51 and more	12	4.6
Education	High school	179	69.1
	Associate degree	36	13.9
	Bachelor	38	14.7
	Post-graduate	6	2.3
Managerial Role	Low-level	2	0.8
	Mid-level	8	3.1
	Top-level	29	11.2
	None	220	84.9
Tenure (Year)	1-5	141	54.4
	6-10	82	31.7
	11-15	24	9.3
	16-20	9	3.5
	More than 20 years	3	1.2
Total Work Experience	1-5	33	12.7
	6-10	84	32.4
	11-15	98	37.8
	16-20	35	13.5
	More than 20 years	9	3.5

Upon collection, the data were coded and entered SPSS V24.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to profile the sample characteristics. The relationship between perceived nepotism and quiet quitting behaviors was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the strength and direction of the association. Further, regression analysis was conducted to explore the impact of nepotism on quiet quitting, controlling for potential confounding variables such as age, gender, tenure, and managerial role.

4. ANALYSIS & RESULTS

In the analysis section of our study, a stepwise procedure was undertaken to ensure the integrity and robustness of the findings regarding the relationship between variables to be tested. Initially, a comprehensive data check was conducted to identify and address any missing values or outliers. Following this, the internal consistency and validity of the measurement instruments were tested through

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's Alpha, confirming their reliability for our research purposes. An overview of the factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha values of the measurement tools can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Structure & Internal Validity of the Measurement Instruments

Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
QQ1	0.454	
QQ2	0.763	
QQ3	0.621	
QQ4	0.760	
QQ5	0.683	
QQ6	0.627	
QQ7	0.528	
QQ8	0.726	
QQ9	0.544	
QQ10	0.482	0.770
QQ11	0.656	
QQ12	0.674	
QQ13	0.699	
QQ14	0.712	
QQ15	0.597	
QQ16	0.510	
NPR1	0.553	
NPR2	0.772	
NPR3	0.782	
NPR4	0.827	0.794
NPR5	0.761	
NWP1	0.812	
NWP2	0.813	
NWP3	0.687	
NWP4	0.805	0.885
NWP5	0.795	
NWP6	0.888	
NRS1	0.849	
NRS2	0.876	0.826
NRS3	0.860	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Across all instruments, reliability scores ranged between 0.770 and 0.885, which meets the recommended level of 0.70. Principle component analysis with varimax rotation was employed to

perform factor analysis. In preparation for EFA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was determined to be 0.897, indicating adequate sampling adequacy for the analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded significant results at the 0.05 level, substantiating the appropriateness of factor analysis for the dataset under consideration. A total of four components (*QQ*, *NPR*, *NWP*, *NRS*) with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were yielded from the analysis. These components account for 68.42% of the total variance. Factor loadings ranged between 0.454 and 0.888 and there were no items with a cross-loading higher than 0.40.

Following validation and internal consistency assessments on the measurement instruments used, correlation and regression analyses were performed to investigate the dynamics between nepotism and quiet quitting. The table below provides a summary of the Pearson correlation coefficients among variables.

Table 3. Pearson's Correlation Matrix

N (Overall)	1	0.908**	0.952**	0.866**	0.473**
NPR (Promotion)		1	0.770**	0.688**	0.472**
NWP (Procedures)			1	0.785**	0.433**
NRS (Recruitments)				1	0.463**
QQ					1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate positive correlation between overall nepotism and quiet quitting, with a coefficient of 0.473. This suggests that higher levels of perceived nepotism within an organization are associated with increased tendencies towards quiet quitting among employees. Further analysis into the sub-dimensions of nepotism provided nuanced insights. Specifically, the nepotism-promotions relationship (NPR) and quiet quitting exhibited an identical correlation coefficient of 0.472, indicating a significant moderate positive relationship. This was closely followed by the nepotism-recruitment (NRS) and quiet quitting correlation, which stood at 0.463, suggesting a similar strength and direction of association. The nepotism-working procedures (NWP) dimension demonstrated a slightly lower but still significant moderate positive correlation with quiet quitting at 0.433.

Subsequently, a regression analysis was performed to ascertain the predictive power of nepotism on the propensity for quiet quitting among employees. A summary of the regression model is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Regression Model Towards the Relationship Between Nepotism and Quiet Quitting

Dependent Variable: Quiet Quitting					
	β	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Nepotism	0.232	0.036	0.373	6.435	.000
R= 0.488	R Square= 0.239	Adjusted R Square= 0.235	Std. Error of the Estimate= 0.3882		

Results suggest a positive but moderate relationship between nepotism and quiet quitting ($\beta=0.232$ $p=0.000$), indicating that as nepotism increases, there is a corresponding moderate increase in the likelihood or intensity of quiet quitting. The significance of this coefficient affirms nepotism's role in influencing quiet quitting behaviors. R Square value was estimated as ($R^2=0.239$). This means that approximately 23.9% of the variation in quiet quitting can be explained by nepotism. This leaves a significant portion (76.1%) of the variation in quiet quitting explained by factors not included in this model. Given these results, it is evident that there is a positive relationship between nepotism and quiet quitting, with nepotism explaining a significant but not overwhelming portion of the variance in quiet quitting.

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigates how nepotism influences quiet quitting in local governments and reveals a significant positive correlation between the examined variables. The research findings align well with the study by Nimmi et al. (2024) that suggests nepotism among superiors made some of the employees quit quietly. Similarly, the study conducted by Georgiadou et al. (2025) also found that perceptions of organizational injustice and psychological contract breaches trigger quiet quitting. In particular, it was noted that unfair practices such as nepotism reduce employee motivation and weaken organizational commitment, thereby increasing quiet quitting.

In discussing the findings of our study, which revealed a positive correlation between nepotism and quiet quitting among employees working in local governments, it is crucial to delve into the underlying mechanisms that may facilitate this relationship, particularly through the lens of organizational justice and the unique context of public sector employment. Organizational justice, which pertains to employees' perceptions of fairness in their workplace, plays a pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors (Marzucco et al., 2014; Akram et al, 2020). In the context of local governments, where expectations of impartiality and meritocracy are particularly high (Mulaphong, 2023), nepotism can significantly undermine perceptions of fairness (Burhan, et al., 2020). When employees perceive that job assignments, promotions, or rewards are distributed not on the basis of merit but rather familial or personal connections, it can lead to a sense of injustice (Bünyamin, 2023). This perception of unfairness is likely to erode trust in the organization, diminish employee morale, and possibly increase intentions to engage in quiet quitting as a form of silent protest against the perceived inequities.

Incorporating the mentioned aspects, it's important to acknowledge the unique employment dynamics within the public sector that contribute to the phenomenon of quiet quitting rather than outright job resignation. Public sector jobs often provide benefits and security that are not as readily available in the private sector, such as comprehensive health benefits, pension plans, and job stability (Reichard & Schröter, 2021; Acheampong, 2021). These attractive features can lead to a situation where employees, despite feeling disillusioned or unfairly treated due to nepotism, choose not to leave their positions outright. Instead, they may engage in quiet quitting, minimizing their effort and engagement without formally resigning. This decision reflects a rational choice to retain the tangible benefits of public sector employment while internally withdrawing from active and enthusiastic participation in the workplace.

The reluctance to leave, fueled by the unique offerings of public sector employment, emphasizes the importance of addressing nepotism and fostering a fair work environment. Public employees' decision to stay but disengage highlights a critical issue: while the security of public sector jobs can act as a safety net, it can also trap employees in an environment where they feel their only recourse is to quietly quit. These dynamic poses significant challenges for public sector organizations, as it affects not only individual well-being but also organizational effectiveness and public service delivery.

6. CONCLUSION

This research has scrutinized the complex dynamics between nepotism and quiet quitting within local governments, revealing a moderate positive correlation between these variables. The findings highlight the potential detrimental impacts of nepotism on organizational morale and productivity, suggesting that nepotism could be a significant factor contributing to employees' disengagement and quiet quitting. By showing how nepotism violates the psychological contract between public sector employees and their employers, which is rooted in meritocracy and equity, the study contributes to theoretical understanding.

Unfortunately, understanding the actual impact of nepotism in the public sector proves more challenging than in the private sector. This is because, in the public domain, employees rarely resign outright when faced with nepotism due to the benefits provided by such institutions; instead, they tend to reduce their effort, adopting a behavior known as quiet quitting. Therefore, it becomes imperative for local governments to take proactive steps to combat nepotism maintaining public trust and integrity. Ensuring that all employees feel valued, recognized, and fairly treated can mitigate the inclination toward quiet quitting. Initiatives could include developing and enforcing clear policies against nepotism, creating more transparent and merit-based processes for promotions and rewards, and fostering an organizational culture that values equity and inclusiveness.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, particularly its reliance on cross-sectional data, which restricts the ability to infer causality. Future studies employing longitudinal designs are recommended to further elucidate the nature of this relationship, offering more definitive

insights into the long-term effects of nepotism on employee behavior and organizational health. Future research could also explore the mediation effect of organizational justice on this relationship. It would be insightful to examine how different dimensions of organizational justice, such as distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, specifically influence the relationship between nepotism and quiet quitting. Additionally, investigating the role of individual differences, such as personality traits and work values, in moderating the impact of nepotism on quiet quitting could offer a more comprehensive understanding of when and why nepotism leads to such disengagement behaviors.

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from Munzur University Ethics Committee on March 5, 2024, with document number 2024/2-1.

The authors declare that the study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics.

The authors confirm that no part of the study was generated, either wholly or in part, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

The authors affirm that there are no financial conflicts of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual associated with this article. Additionally, there are no conflicts of interest among the authors.

The authors affirm that they contributed equally to all aspects of the research.

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