Research Article

Influence of Organizational Power on Human Resources (HR) Recruitment in Afghanistan: Nepotism, Conflict of Interest, and Beyond

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 30 Dec 2024 Revised: 05 Feb 2025 Accepted: 25 Feb 2025	**Purpose** – This study examines unethical recruitment practices within Afghanistan's HR sector, including nepotism, favoritism, and external pressures. **Design/methodology/approach** – A survey was conducted among 127 HR professionals from various organizations in Afghanistan, including HR & Admin Officers, HR Assistants, HR Coordinators, HR Directors, HR Managers, HR Officers, HR Panel Members, and HR Specialists & Analysts. Participants were from international (50), national (65), and public (12) organizations. **Findings** – Significant unethical practices such as nepotism, conflicts of interest, harassment, coercion, favoritism, personal connections, gender biases, local authority influences, financial incentives, and external pressures impact recruitment decisions. These practices violate principles of procedural fairness and trust in recruitment. **Research limitations/implications** – Limitations include belief on self-reported data, sample representation, and cross-sectional design. Future research should involve longitudinal studies, broader samples, mixed-method approaches, and digital tools. **Practical implications** – Implementing strict anti-nepotism policies, guidelines for conflicts of interest, measures to prevent harassment and coercion, and promoting transparency are essential. Training HR professionals in ethical practices is crucial. **Social implications** – Addressing unethical recruitment practices promotes fairness, transparency, and inclusivity, enhancing organizational performance and employee commitment. **Keywords:** Cronyism, Favoritism, Harassment, HR Recruitment, Nepotism.

INTRODUCTION

The influence of organizational power on HR recruitment is a critical area of study, particularly in contexts where various unethical practices can significantly impact hiring decisions. This research investigates the impact of nepotism, conflicts of interest, favoritism, harassment, coercion, and external pressures within Afghanistan's Human Resource (HR) sector. By conducting a comprehensive survey among 127 HR professionals from various organizations, including international, national, and public sectors, this study aims to shed light on these practices and their implications for recruitment processes. Participants included HR & Admin Officers, HR Assistants, HR Coordinators, HR Directors, HR Managers, HR Officers, HR Panel Members, and HR Specialists & Analysts. The findings reveal significant unethical practices influencing recruitment decisions, such as personal connections, gender biases, local authority influences, financial incentives, and external pressures from influential individuals. These unethical practices not only violate principles of procedural fairness but also erode trust in the recruitment

process. For instance, the survey highlights that 25.2% of respondents believe that nepotism never affects recruitment, while 22.8% say it rarely does. Meanwhile, 21.3% feel nepotism sometimes plays a role, 16.5% believe it often does, and 14.2% think it always does. Similarly, conflicts of interest and coercion were reported as significant factors, with many HR professionals acknowledging their frequent impact on hiring decisions.

The prevalence of harassment and favoritism further complicates the recruitment landscape, creating an environment where merit-based hiring is often overlooked. The influence of local authorities and external pressures from influential individuals also plays a critical role in shaping recruitment practices, with varying degrees of significance reported by the participants. These insights underscore the necessity for robust policies and practices to combat these unethical influences and ensure fair, transparent, and merit-based hiring within Afghanistan's challenging socio-political environment. This research aims to enhance the theoretical understanding of HR recruitment practices, emphasizing the importance of addressing unethical behaviors to foster a more equitable and effective hiring system. By examining the perceptions and experiences of HR professionals, the study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms behind these practices and offers recommendations for promoting ethical recruitment in challenging contexts like Afghanistan. To understand the influence of organizational power on HR recruitment, several theoretical frameworks can be applied. Human Capital Theory emphasizes that employees are an organization's most valuable assets and suggests that recruitment should focus on acquiring candidates with valuable skills and knowledge [1]. The Person-Organization Fit Model focuses on the compatibility between an individual's values, personality, and goals with those of the organization, leading to higher job satisfaction and commitment [2]. Social Exchange Theory highlights the common relationship between employees and organizations, positing that individuals who perceive fairness during the selection process are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of commitment and performance [3]. The Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that organizations can achieve a competitive advantage by effectively managing their internal resources, including human resources [4]. Institutional Theory examines how organizational practices, including HR recruitment, are influenced by institutional norms and regulations, highlighting the role of external pressures and societal expectations [5]. Lastly, the Behavioral Perspective focuses on the behaviors and attitudes of employees, suggesting that recruitment practices should aim to select individuals whose behaviors align with organizational goals [6] The findings of this study reveal significant unethical practices influencing recruitment decisions in Afghanistan. Survey results from 127 HR professionals indicate that nepotism, conflicts of interest, harassment, coercion, favoritism, personal connections, gender biases, local authority influences, financial incentives, and external pressures from influential individuals are prevalent in HR recruitment processes. For instance, nepotism affects recruitment decisions to varying degrees, with 16.5% of respondents believing it often plays a role and 14.2% think it always does. Similarly, conflicts of interest and coercion are acknowledged as frequent factors impacting recruitment. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how organizational power dynamics influence HR recruitment practices in Afghanistan. The findings will contribute to the development of more effective and ethical recruitment strategies, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and fairness in the recruitment process. This study not only contributes to the academic field but also has practical implications for improving HR recruitment practices in Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource (HR) recruitment practices in Afghanistan have been extensively studied, revealing significant challenges influenced by socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. [7] and [8], highlight that HR practices in Afghanistan are heavily influenced by geographical, social, and political factors, impacting both public and private sector organizations.

They found that hiring and promotion decisions are often driven by ethnic and regional affiliations rather than established HRM principles [8]. [9], examined the relationship between HR practices and organizational performance in Afghanistan's public sector. Their study indicated that recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance appraisal practices have a significant impact on organizational performance [10]. Similarly, [11], discussed the pervasive corruption in the Afghan justice sector, emphasizing how nepotism and bribery undermine the recruitment process. [12], explored the impact of recruitment and selection on organizational effectiveness, noting that economic constraints and inadequate training programs for HR professionals hinder effective recruitment practices. Also [13], founds that recruitment and selection criteria significantly affect organizational performance, highlighting the need for transparent and merit-based recruitment policies.

Nepotism, Favoritism, and Cronyism in HR recruitment

Nepotism is defined by [14], as the act of showing favoritism to family members during a recruitment process or during promotional decisions. These acts serve as the beginning of corruption because people who benefit from the process may give in to the requests demanded from them. Indeed, [15], and [16], is an unprofessional phenomenon because it disregards the qualification and experience of non-relatives, even though these are key factors. [17], defined favoritism as the provision of special privileges to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in areas of employment, career, and personnel decisions. Favoritism essentially provides a shortcut to friends and colleagues as far as recruitment and promotions within the organization are concerned. People with closer ties to leaders or managers are offered positions without going through the laid-down procedures at the expense of the most deserving applicants or employees due to the power they wield. Cronyism is defined by [18], as favoritism shown by one member of a social network toward another member with the intention of producing personal gains for the latter at the expense of parties outside the network, guided by a norm of reciprocity. Similarly, defined cronyism "as giving preference to cronies (close friends of long standing), especially as evidenced in the appointment of hangers-on to office without regard to their qualifications" [15]. Among the forms of unethical behaviors, only favoritism is associated with position. Favoritism in terms of positions reflects the desire by employees to have close ties with people in top positions within the organization to protect them against unfair decisions after hiring in situations such as promotions. Such position-based favoritism allows employees to build their way up the ladder by undermining other employees and pleasing leaders in top positions to gain favors over other colleagues. For instance, [19], highlighted that it is very difficult for employees with no connections to be promoted when they compete with employees who have friends in higher-level positions due to the powers they wield. Nepotism and cronyism in terms of position were not seen because nepotism and cronyism give de facto powers or favors to their beneficiaries by virtue of their relatives or political affiliation and do not need to please any leader to get favors [14].

Economic Constraints and Corruption

[20], explored the impact of recruitment and selection on organizational effectiveness, noting that economic constraints and inadequate training programs for HR professionals delay effective recruitment practices. [21], also found that recruitment and selection criteria significantly affect organizational performance, highlighting the need for transparent and merit-based recruitment policies. [22], discussed ethical practices in HR, emphasizing the importance of fairness and transparency in recruitment to combat nepotism and favoritism. [23], examined diversity and inclusion in the workplace, noting that biases based on gender, race, and region can significantly impact recruitment decisions. [24], provided insights into recruitment policy and conflict of interest management, stressing the need for clear guidelines to prevent unethical practices.

Research-Practice Gap

Despite the extensive research on HR recruitment practices, several gaps remain.[21], identified a significant research-practice gap in Human Resource Management (HRM), noting that many studies are conceptually driven with limited practical relevance. They emphasized the need for more empirical research to bridge this gap and provide actionable insights for HR practitioners. [25], highlighted the disparity between topics of interest to HR academics and professionals, particularly in areas such as compensation and rewards, and organizational behavior and motivation. This gap suggests a need for more research focused on practical HR issues that directly impact organizational performance. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies addressing the combined impact of multiple factors such as nepotism, conflict of interest, financial incentives, and power abuse on HR recruitment. Most studies tend to focus on individual factors in isolation, which limit the understanding of their interconnected effects on recruitment practices. NFC (Nepotism, Favoritism, and Cronyism), a set of unethical behaviors used by leaders to satisfy their self-interest as against the overall interest of the organization [26]. When leaders give opportunities to an undeserved employee, the employee would be remote-controlled to suit their interest, and because the employee knows they were favored to occupy such a position, they would not have the power to question any wrongdoing of the leader. A set of unethical behaviors such as NFC have largely been studied at the organizational level [27], as well as at the individual level [16] – our study explores this from leaders' (individual) perspective.

Ethical Leadership and Minimizing Corporate Scandals

Researchers are looking for one leadership style that upholds ethics to minimize these scandals, and Authentic Leadership (AL) has been identified as one such style. AL possesses ethical attributes that can help minimize

corporate scandals. This study seeks to explore the relationship between NFC and AL. [14], have argued that NFC serves as the foundation for corruption to thrive. Therefore, getting a leader who is highly ethical and abhors behaviors that yield NFC would possibly help to minimize these corporate scandals and corrupt acts. While NFC rests on disregard for fairness, honesty, and ethics, AL thrives on honesty, fairness, transparent decision-making, optimism, and high moral standards that reflect in their daily interactions with followers [28]. Leaders possessing these characteristics may not condone NFC because it contravenes their integrity, values, and beliefs. [29], reported that honesty on the part of the leader is the attribute most admired and cherished by followers. [30], stated that authentic leaders do not take decisions to serve their interest but rather make decisions fair to everyone to avoid favoring one party over another. AL is defined by [30], as "the pattern of leadership behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development." Thus, authentic leaders evaluate their actions objectively to ensure every decision aligns with their professed beliefs due to their high level of authenticity [31]. Authenticity is the ability to know one's true self, behave in line with one's acknowledged beliefs and values; and this belief must reflect in the management of one's followers and the organization at large [32].

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

To achieve this study objective, the following model **"Fig 1"** has been designed to outline the relationship between various factors influencing HR recruitment in Afghanistan:
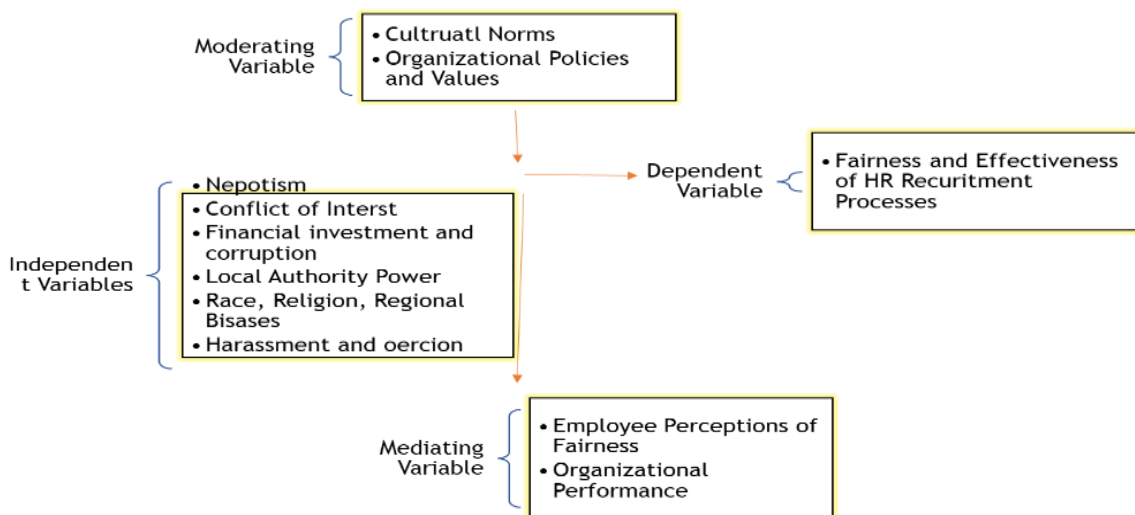

Fig. 1. Framework of Organizational Power and HR Recruitment in Afghanistan

Source (s): *Author's owns work

Based on the proposed model **"Fig 1"**, the following hypotheses have been developed to guide this study:

Independent Variables

H1: Nepotism

Nepotism refers to the act of showing favoritism to family members during a recruitment process or during promotional decisions [14]. These acts serve as the start of corruption because people who benefit from the process may give in to the requests demanded from them. Nepotism is perceived negatively, regardless of the relative's competence, affecting organizational fairness and attractiveness [15]. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H1: Nepotism negatively influences the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H2: Conflict of Interest

Conflict interest in HR recruitment refers to situations where personal interests 'conflict with professional responsibilities, leading to biased decisions [33].

Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H2: Conflict of interest negatively influences the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H3: Financial Incentives and Corruption

Financial incentives and corruption undermine the recruitment process by allowing financial gains to influence hiring decisions [20]. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H3: Financial incentives and corruption negatively influence the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H4: Local Authority Power, Race, Religion, Regional Biases

Local authority power, race, religion, and regional biases can significantly impact recruitment decisions, highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion [23]. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H4: Local authority power, race, religion, and regional biases negatively influence the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H5: Harassment and Coercion

Harassment and coercion during the recruitment process create an environment of fear and unfairness, affecting the overall recruitment landscape [34]. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H5: Harassment and coercion negatively influence the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

Moderating Variables

Cultural norms and organizational policies and values can moderate the impact of the independent variables on HR recruitment processes. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H6: Cultural norms moderate the relationship between the independent variables and the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H7: Organizational policies and values moderate the relationship between the independent variables and the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

Mediating Variables

Employee perceptions of fairness and organizational performance mediate the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize:

H8: Employee perceptions of fairness mediate the relationship between the independent variables and the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

H9: Organizational performance mediates the relationship between the independent variables and the fairness and effectiveness of HR recruitment processes.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were HR professionals from various organizations in Afghanistan. The sample comprised 127 professionals, including HR & Admin Officers, HR Assistants, HR Coordinators, HR Directors, HR Managers, HR Officers, Human Resource (HR) *Panel Members, and HR Specialists & Analysts. These participants were recruited from International, National, and public organizations: 50 from international organizations, 65 from National organizations, and 12 from public organizations.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and the data were collected by sharing the form link with individuals who had an HR background and who had been involved in the recruitment process and were close members of panel members in their organizations. The participants completed the survey individually

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the survey was analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data, and inferential statistics were utilized to identify patterns and correlations. The analysis focused on understanding the prevalence and impact of identified unethical practices on HR recruitment.

Table 1: Demographic details of respondents

Role	Number of Participants	International NGO (including UN)	National NGO	Public Governmental Administrative
HR & Admin Officers	10	5	3	2
HR Assistants	15	6	7	2
HR Coordinators	12	5	5	2
HR Directors	8	4	3	1
HR Managers	20	8	8	4
HR Officers	22	9	9	4
HR Specialists & Analysts	15	7	6	2
* HR Panel Members (Including Roles and Number of Participants)				
Hospital Manager	7	2	3	2
Operation/Finance Manager	10	4	4	2
Provincial Health Officer	6	2	2	2
Nutrition Officer	5	2	2	1
Finance Manager/Officer	9	4	3	2
Provincial Coordinator	8	3	3	2
Health Extender	5	2	2	1
Deputy Technical Manager	4	2	1	1
Deputy Field Manager	6	3	2	1
HQIP Officer	5	2	2	1
Senior Internal Audit	7	3	3	1
Health Project Team Lead	8	3	3	2
Senior Regional Manager	6	2	3	1
Medical Doctor	10	4	4	2
Project Director	5	2	2	1
Health Program Manager	9	3	4	2
MHPSS Manager	4	2	1	1
HMIS Manager	6	2	3	1
Assistant Regional Polio Officer	5	2	2	1

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Region

Region	Percentage of Respondents
Central	60.6%

Region	Percentage of Respondents
North	18.9%
Northeast	7.1%
East	3.9%
Southeast	3.9%
South	2.4%
Southwest	1.6%
West	1.6%

The above table illustrates the distribution of respondents from various regions in Afghanistan. The survey was conducted among 127 HR professionals, with the Central region having the highest participation at 60.6%, followed by the North region at 18.9%. Other regions, including the Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, and West, had varying levels of participation. The data were analyzed using statistical software to identify patterns and correlations, focusing on the prevalence and impact of unethical practices on HR recruitment.

RESULTS

Overview of Key Findings

This study presents the findings from a comprehensive survey conducted among **127** HR professionals across various regions in Afghanistan. The analysis highlights the influence of multiple factors on recruitment practices, including nepotism, conflicts of interest, harassment, coercion, acting as agents for organizational leadership, favoritism, hiring based on connections rather than qualifications, and overlooking merit-based criteria. Additionally, it examines gender biases, the influence of local authorities, challenges faced by panel members, financial incentives, racial, religious, and regional biases, power abuse, political influences, and external pressures from influential individuals. These insights underscore the critical need for robust policies and practices to combat these unethical factors and ensure fair, merit-based hiring in Afghanistan's challenging environment.

Influence of Nepotism on Recruitment Decisions

The survey highlights the influence of nepotism on recruitment decisions. According to the responses, 25.2% of respondents believe that nepotism never affects recruitment, while 22.8% say it rarely does. Meanwhile, 21.3% of respondents feel nepotism sometimes plays a role, 16.5% believe it often does, and 14.2% think it always does. These findings reveal that although some perceive little to no impact of nepotism, a significant portion acknowledge it as a frequent or constant factor. This underscores the importance of addressing and mitigating unethical practices to ensure fair, merit-based hiring. The distribution of respondents' perceptions on the influence of nepotism is illustrated in *Fig 1*.

Impact of Conflicts of Interest on Recruitment Decisions

The survey highlights the varying impact of conflicts of interest on recruitment decisions among HR professionals in Afghanistan. Responses show that 22.8% believe conflicts of interest never influence recruitment, while 11.8% think they rarely do. Conversely, 30.7% of respondents feel these conflicts sometimes play a role, 16.5% often see them as a factor, and 18.1% think they always affect recruitment. These insights emphasize the need to address and mitigate conflicts of interest to ensure fair, merit-based hiring. *Fig 2* provides a visual representation of respondents' perceptions on the influence of conflicts of interest.

Prevalence of Harassment in Recruitment Processes

Survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan highlight the prevalence of harassment during recruitment. According to the data, 50.4% of respondents reported never witnessing harassment, while 18.9% rarely observed such incidents. However, 24.4% acknowledged that harassment sometimes occurred, and 6.2% indicated it was often or always present. These findings underscore the need to address and eradicate harassment in HR recruitment to ensure a safe and equitable hiring environment. *Fig 3* illustrates the detailed distribution of respondents' perceptions on harassment during recruitment.

Impact of Coercion on Recruitment Processes

Survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan shed light on the prevalence of coercion during recruitment. According to the data, 26% of participants believe coercion never influences recruitment, while 18.9% report it rarely does. A substantial portion, 27.6%, indicates coercion sometimes affects recruitment decisions. Additionally, 18.1% acknowledge it often plays a role, and 9.4% believe it always does. These findings highlight the need to address and mitigate coercion to ensure fair and transparent hiring processes. *Fig 4* illustrates the distribution of respondents' perceptions on the influence of coercion.

The Unseen Influence of Organizational "Agents" on Recruitment

The survey sheds light on the covert world of organizational "agents" those enigmatic influencers wielding power during recruitment processes. The responses reveal a spectrum of experiences with these undercover operatives. According to the data, 20.5% of respondents assert that employees never act as agents for organizational leadership during recruitment, while 27.6% suggest that it's a rare occurrence.

However, 29.9% of participants confess that this phenomenon sometimes unfolds in their organizations. Interestingly, 16.5% admit that it's a common practice, and a daring 5.5% reveal that it always happens. These findings paint a vivid picture of the clandestine influence that organizational agents exert on recruitment. The presence of such influences underscores the necessity of addressing and mitigating these covert operations to ensure transparent and merit-based hiring processes. The distribution of respondents' perceptions regarding the role of organizational agents is humorously depicted in *Fig 5* providing a playful visual representation of these undercover activities.

Prevalence of Favoritism in Recruitment Processes

Survey results shed light on the prevalence of favoritism in recruitment. According to the data, 18.1% of respondents believe favoritism based on personal relationships never occurs in their organization's recruitment process. Meanwhile, 19.7% say it rarely happens, 33.9% feel it sometimes plays a role, 20.5% think it often does, and 7.9% believe it always does. These findings underscore the need to address favoritism to ensure fair and merit-based hiring practices. The distribution of respondents' perceptions regarding Favoritism is vividly illustrated in *Fig 6* providing a visual representation of this critical issue.
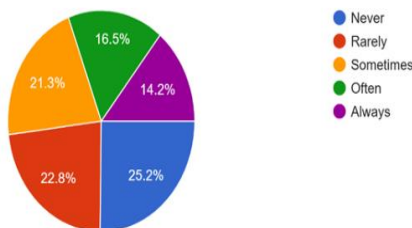

Fig. 1. Influence of Nepotism on Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results
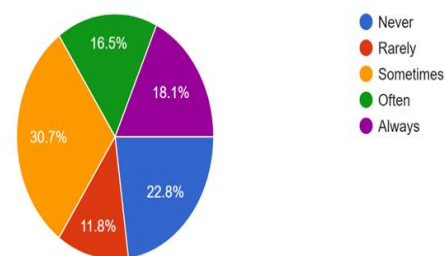

Fig. 2. Influence of Conflicts of Interest on Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results
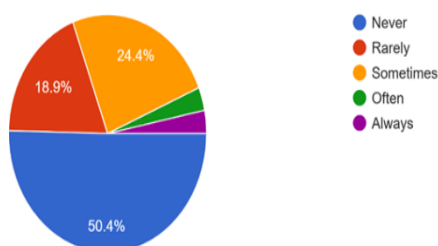

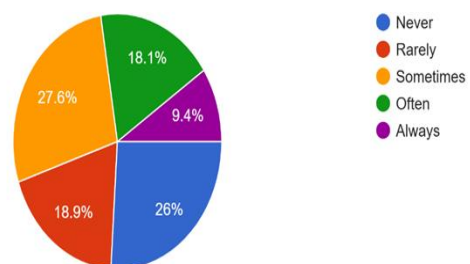**Fig. 3**. Prevalence of Harassment in Recruitment Processes: Survey Results

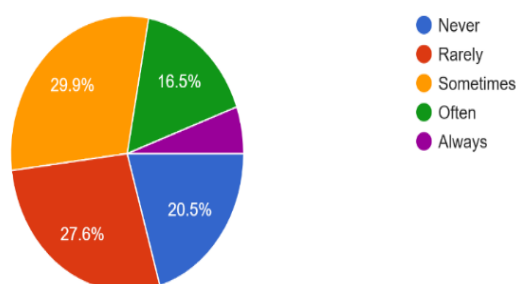**Fig. 4.** Influence of Coercion on Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results

Fig. 5. The Covert Operations of Organizational "Agents" in Recruitment: Survey Results
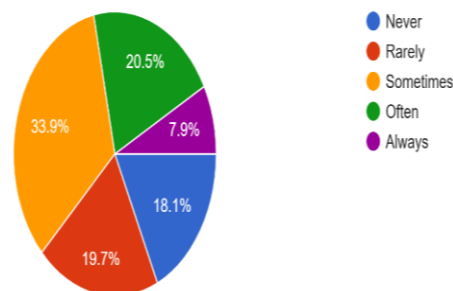

Fig. 6. Prevalence of Favoritism in Recruitment Processes: Survey Results
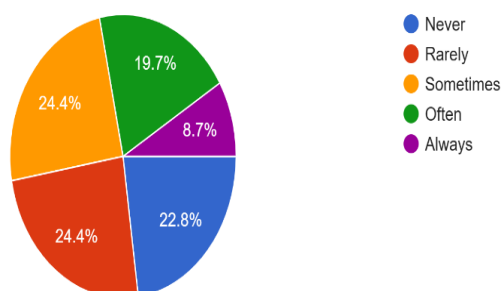

Fig. 7. Influence of Personal Connections on Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results
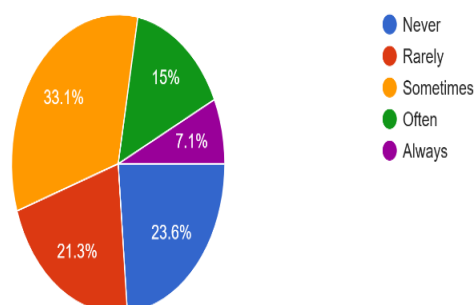

Fig. 8. Frequency of Overlooking Merit-Based Criteria in Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results

Influence of Personal Connections on Recruitment Decisions

Survey results highlight the influence of personal connections on recruitment decisions. According to the data, 8.7% of respondents believe hiring based on connections never occurs, while 24.4% say it rarely happens. Additionally, 24.4% feel it sometimes plays a role, 19.7% think it often does, and 22.8% believe it always does. These findings underscore the need to address the impact of personal connections to ensure fair and merit-based hiring practices. Perceptions regarding Personal Connections are vividly illustrated in *Fig 7*.

The Unseen Influence of Organizational "Merit-based criteria are overlooked" on Recruitment Decisions

Survey results reveal the extent to which merit-based criteria are overlooked in recruitment decisions. The data indicates that 23.6% of respondents believe merit-based criteria are never overlooked, while 21.3% say it rarely happens. However, 33.1% feel it sometimes occurs, 15% think it often does, and 7.1% believe it always happens. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing biases to ensure fair and merit-based hiring practices. Perceptions regarding Frequency of Overlooking Merit-Based Criteria in Recruitment Decisions are vividly illustrated in *Fig 8.*

Gender Biases in Recruitment Practices

The survey across various regions in Afghanistan reveals critical insights into the prevalence of gender biases in recruitment practices, especially in a country where women face severe restrictions in the workforce due to the de facto regime. According to the responses, 33.9% of participants believe that gender biases never influence recruitment decisions in their organizations. However, 21.3% mention it rarely happens, while 19.7% admit it sometimes does. Notably, 15.7% of respondents believe gender biases often play a role, and 9.4% reveal it always happens. These findings underscore the varying perceptions of gender biases' impact on recruitment. Addressing and mitigating these biases is essential to fostering an inclusive and equitable hiring process, particularly in a challenging environment where women's participation in the workforce is heavily restricted. The distribution of respondents' perceptions regarding gender biases is vividly illustrated in *Fig 9.*
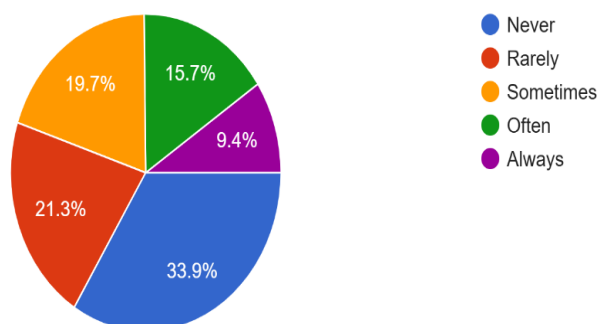
Fig. 9. Influence of Gender Biases on Recruitment Decisions: Survey Results

Factors Influencing Recruitment Decisions

The survey among HR professionals in Afghanistan reveals key factors influencing recruitment decisions. Local authority power is the most dominant, affecting 72.4% of respondents. Nepotism (60.6%) and conflicts of interest (52.8%) follow closely. Other notable factors include harassment (29.1%), racial bias (29.9%), religious bias (28.3%), regional preferences (41.7%), and monetary influence (23.6%). Less frequently cited are recommendations (7.9%), Qualifications (1.6%), and the minimal impact of friendships (0.8%). These insights highlight the complex dynamics in recruitment and the need for merit-based, unbiased practices. ***Table 3*** provides a detailed breakdown of these factors.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Recruitment Decisions

Factor	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Local Authority Power	92	72.4%
Nepotism	77	60.6%
Conflict of Interest	67	52.8%
Harassment	37	29.1%
Racial Bias	38	29.9%
Religious Bias	36	28.3%
Regional Preferences	53	41.7%
Monetary Influence	30	23.6%
Recommendations	10	7.9%
Qualifications	2	1.6%
Friendships	1	0.8%

Influence of Local Authorities on Recruitment Decisions

The survey results found the significant impact of local authorities on recruitment decisions. According to the responses, 18.1% of respondents believe local authorities' influence is not significant, while 24.4% consider it slightly significant. A substantial portion, 27.6%, feels this influence is moderately significant, 22% view it as significant, and 7.9% find it very significant. These findings highlight the varying perceptions of local authorities' influence on recruitment and underscore the need for transparent and merit-based hiring practices. ***Fig 10*** provides a detailed breakdown of the Influence of Local Authorities on Recruitment Decisions.

Significance of Recruitment Challenges

Survey results from HR professionals give significant insights into the challenges faced in the recruitment process within their organizations.

According to the responses, 12.6% of respondents believe these challenges are not significant, while 19.7% consider them slightly significant. A substantial portion, 39.4%, feels the challenges are moderately significant, and 11.8% find

them significant. Notably, 16.5% of respondents view these challenges as very significant. These findings underscore the diverse perceptions regarding recruitment challenges and emphasize the necessity of implementing robust measures to address these issues and ensure a fair, transparent, and efficient hiring process. **Fig 11** provides a visual breakdown of the respondents' views on the significance of recruitment challenges.

Impact of Financial Incentives on Recruitment Fairness

The survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan reveal a nuanced view of how financial incentives influence recruitment fairness. Of the respondents, 35.4% assert that financial incentives have no impact at all on the fairness of recruitment processes in their organizations. Meanwhile, 21.3% believe they have a slight effect, and 17.3% think they have a moderate influence. Another 17.3% feel that financial incentives significantly impact fairness, and 8.7% are convinced they have a very significant effect. These findings illustrate a spectrum of perspectives, highlighting the importance of addressing financial incentives to ensure equitable recruitment practices. **Fig 12** provides a visual breakdown of the respondents' views on the impact of financial incentives on recruitment fairness.

Impact of Racial, Religious, and Regional Biases on Recruitment

Insights gathered from the survey of HR professionals in Afghanistan illustrate the prevalence of biases in recruitment decisions. Respondents' views on the influence of racial, religious, and regional biases are varied: 31.5% believe these biases never impact recruitment, while 23.6% feel they have a slight influence. Moderately impactful, according to 19.7% of respondents, these biases also greatly affect recruitment of 15.7%, with 9.4% deeming them extremely influential. These findings underscore the necessity to tackle biases in recruitment, promoting fair and merit-based hiring practices in a challenging environment. **Fig 13** offers a visual representation of respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of biases on recruitment decisions.

Impact of Power Abuse on Employee Morale and Organizational Culture

Survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan provide crucial insights into the perceived impact of power abuse on employee morale and organizational culture. The data reveals that 20.5% of respondents believe power abuse has no impact, while 21.3% consider its influence to be slight. A notable portion, 25.2%, feels that power abuse moderately affects the organization, 18.9% view it as having a great impact, and 14.2% find it extremely impactful. These findings underscore the importance of addressing power abuse within organizations to foster a positive workplace environment and culture. **Fig 14** provides a visual representation of the respondents' views on the Impact of Power Abuse on Employee Morale and Organizational Culture.

Political influences affect recruitment decisions

Survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan highlight the influence of political factors on recruitment decisions. According to the data, 19.7% of respondents believe political influences have no effect, while 32.3% consider their impact to be slight. Conversely, 19.7% of respondents feel political factors moderately affect recruitment, 22% see them as significant, and 6.3% believe they are very significant. These findings underline the varying perceptions of political influences in recruitment and emphasize the need for transparent and merit-based hiring processes. **Fig 15** provides a visual representation of the respondents' views on the Influence of Political Factors on Recruitment Decision.

Impact of External Pressures from Influential Individuals on Recruitment

Survey results from HR professionals in Afghanistan highlight the significant impact of external pressures from influential individuals on the recruitment process.

According to the data, 15% of respondents believe these pressures have no impact, while 30.7% consider their influence to be slight. Conversely, 24.4% feel these external pressures moderately affect recruitment, 23.6% view them as significant, and 6.3% find them very significant. These findings underscore the critical need to address external pressures to ensure fair and transparent hiring practices. **Fig 16** provides a visual representation of the respondents' views on the Impact of External Pressures from Influential Individuals on Recruitment**.**

Perceived Effectiveness of Harassment Prevention in Recruitment

Our survey delves into the effectiveness of current measures to prevent harassment in recruitment within organizations in Afghanistan. With 127 HR professionals participating, the responses provide a clear picture: 15%

rate these measures as not effective, 16.5% find them slightly effective, while 26% consider them moderately effective. Interestingly, 19.7% rate the measures as effective, and 22.8% find them very effective. This distribution highlights the varying perceptions of harassment prevention's effectiveness. It's evident that while some measures are in place, there is significant room for improvement to ensure a safe and fair recruitment process. *Fig 17* provides a visual representation of the respondents' views on the effectiveness of harassment prevention measures.
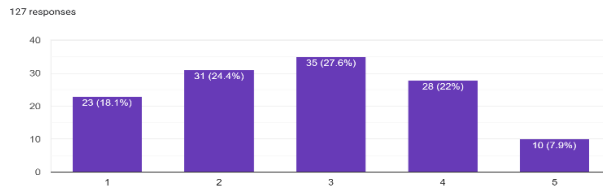
Fig. 10. Influence of Local Authorities on Recruitment Decisions
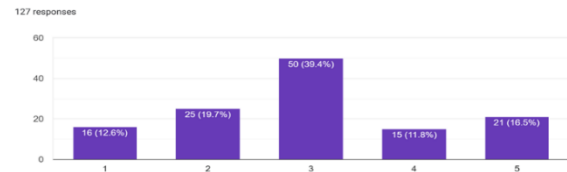
Fig. 11. Significance of Recruitment Challenges
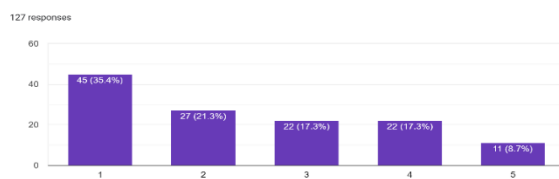
Fig. 12. Impact of Financial Incentives on Recruitment Fairness
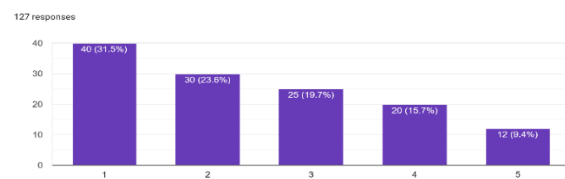

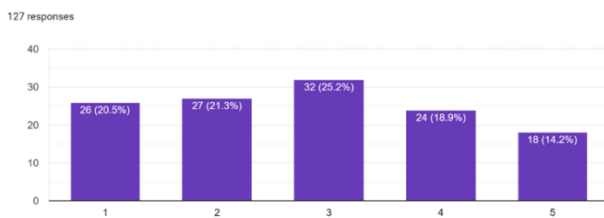**Fig. 13.** Impact of Racial, Religious, and Regional Biases on Recruitment

Fig. 14. Impact of Power Abuse on Employee Morale and Organizational Culture
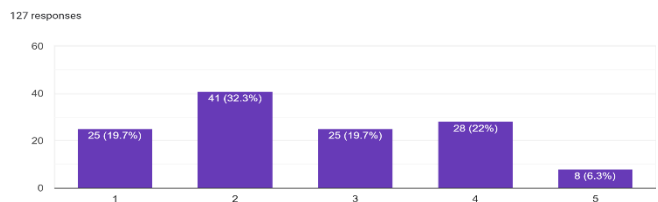

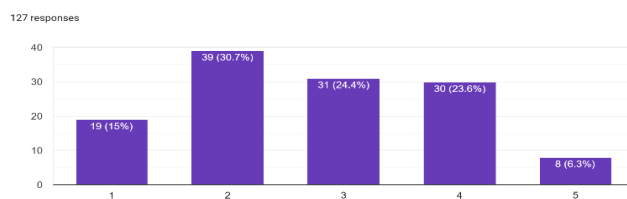**Fig. 15.** Political influences affect recruitment decisions

Fig. 16. Impact of External Pressures from Influential Individuals on Recruitment

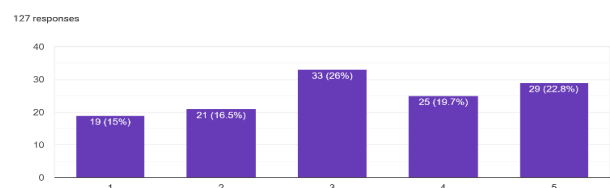**Fig. 17.** Perceived Effectiveness of Harassment Prevention in Recruitment
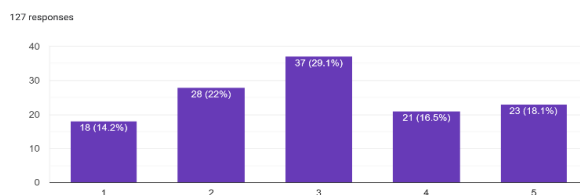

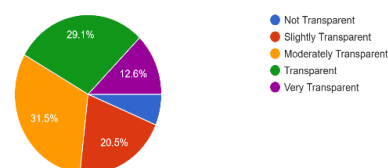**Fig. 18.** Effectiveness of Measures to Combat Nepotism in Recruitment

Fig. 19. Transparency in Recruitment Practices

Effectiveness of Measures to Combat Nepotism in Recruitment

Survey responses from HR professionals in Afghanistan reveal varied perceptions of the effectiveness of measures taken to reduce nepotism and other unethical practices in recruitment. According to the data, 14.2% of participants believe these measures are not effective at all, while 22% consider them slightly effective. A significant portion, 29.1%, rates the measures as moderately effective, and 16.5% find them effective. Interestingly, 18.1% of respondents view the measures as very effective. These findings highlight the critical need to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of these measures to ensure fair recruitment practices. The relationship between current measures and their ability to combat nepotism is paramount, as nepotism remains a significant factor disrupting equitable hiring. **Fig 18** visually presents the respondents' views on the effectiveness of measures to combat nepotism in recruitment.

Transparency in Recruitment Practices

Survey responses on the perceived transparency in recruitment processes. Results indicate a spectrum of views: 14.2% of respondents believe that recruitment practices are completely transparent, while 22% consider them slightly transparent. A notable portion, 29.1%, rates the practices as moderately transparent, whereas 16.5% find them generally transparent. Interestingly, 18.1% of participants view the practices as highly transparent. These findings underline the varied perceptions of transparency in recruitment, emphasizing the need to strengthen measures to ensure a fair and open hiring process. Enhancing transparency is crucial for fostering trust and merit-based practices in organizations. **Fig 19** visually presents the respondents' views on the transparency of recruitment practices, offering a comprehensive conclusion to this analysis.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

The study's findings enhance the theoretical understanding of HR recruitment practices. Human Capital Theory underscores the necessity of merit-based hiring to maximize organizational performance, which is often undermined by nepotism and favoritism. The Person-Organization Fit Model reveals a misalignment caused by unethical hiring practices, leading to lower job satisfaction. Social Exchange Theory highlights the importance of perceived fairness in recruitment, with unethical practices eroding trust and reducing employee commitment. The Resource-Based View emphasizes effective management of human resources to achieve competitive advantage, stressing the need to address unethical recruitment practices. Institutional Theory shows how external pressures shape recruitment practices, highlighting the role of aligning organizational practices with societal expectations. Finally, the Behavioral Perspective suggests that recruitment should aim to select individuals whose behaviors align with organizational goals, a process compromised by unethical influences.

Managerial Implications

The study offers several practical recommendations for managers and HR professionals. Implementing strict anti-nepotism policies is crucial to ensure merit-based hiring and foster a culture of fairness and transparency. Developing clear guidelines to identify and mitigate conflicts of interest can enhance the integrity of the hiring process. Establishing robust measures to prevent harassment and coercion is essential for creating a safe and equitable hiring environment. Enhancing transparency and accountability in recruitment can mitigate the influence of organizational agents and external pressures. Promoting diversity and inclusion can help address biases in recruitment practices. Providing training for HR professionals on ethical recruitment practices can improve hiring fairness and effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study's geographical scope focuses on Afghanistan, and the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. The reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce biases. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between variables. Future research could involve longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of unethical recruitment practices on organizational performance, comparative studies across different regions and sectors, and qualitative research to gain deeper insights into HR professionals' experiences and perceptions regarding recruitment practices.

Interpretation of the Results

The results reveal that unethical practices significantly influence HR recruitment processes in Afghanistan. Nepotism, conflicts of interest, harassment, coercion, favoritism, personal connections, gender biases, local authority influences, financial incentives, and external pressures impact recruitment decisions. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms to promote fairness and transparency in hiring practices. Implementing robust policies and practices to combat unethical influences is essential for fostering a more equitable and effective recruitment system.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The study's findings align with existing literature on HR practices in Afghanistan and similar contexts. Consistent with [8] and [11], the study highlights the prevalence of nepotism and favoritism in recruitment. The results support [9] and [22], emphasizing the need to address conflicts of interest for fair hiring. The study confirms [20] and [23] on the impact of harassment and coercion on recruitment fairness. Like [17] and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2012), the study underscores the influence of local authorities and political factors on recruitment practices.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings have several implications for practice and policy. Policymakers should develop and enforce regulations to combat unethical recruitment practices like nepotism and so on.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the main findings

The study surveyed 127 HR professionals in Afghanistan and found that unethical practices, such as nepotism, conflicts of interest, harassment, coercion, favoritism, and hiring based on personal connections, are common in recruitment processes. Gender biases and external pressures from influential people also affect hiring decisions. The findings emphasize the need for better policies to ensure fair and merit-based hiring practices. The influence of nepotism was noted, with a significant portion of HR professionals acknowledging its frequent or constant impact. Conflicts of interest, coercion, and harassment were also found to be prevalent, affecting recruitment decisions. Additionally, favoritism and the impact of personal connections over merit-based criteria were highlighted. The study also revealed gender biases and the influence of local authorities and external pressures on recruitment decisions, emphasizing the necessity for robust measures to combat these issues.

Limitations of the study

The study's limitations include the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases due to social desirability or recall inaccuracies. The sample, comprising HR professionals from international, national, and public organizations, may not fully represent the entire spectrum of HR practices in Afghanistan, especially in regions with limited access to formal employment structures. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the survey provides a snapshot in time but may not capture the evolving dynamics of HR practices influenced by shifting political and socio-economic conditions. The study's scope is also limited to reported perceptions and experiences, lacking direct observation or triangulation with other data sources that could provide a more nuanced understanding of the recruitment landscape.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should explore longitudinal studies to track changes in HR practices and the efficacy of implemented policies over time. Expanding the sample to include a broader range of organizations and regions would enhance the generalizability of findings. Employing mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or case studies, could provide deeper insight into the mechanisms behind unethical recruitment practices. Additionally, future studies should investigate the role of digital tools and technologies in enhancing transparency and accountability in recruitment processes. Comparative studies with other countries facing similar challenges could also provide valuable insights. Engaging various stakeholders, including policymakers, HR professionals, and job seekers, in the research process would help develop more targeted interventions and policies to promote ethical hiring practices and improve the overall integrity of HR management in challenging environments like Afghanistan.

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DECLARATION STATEMENTS

Conflicts of Interest – There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethics Approval – Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms, ensuring the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants. Personal identifiers such as names, organization names, and specific areas of residence were omitted from the survey to protect participant privacy. Participation was entirely voluntary, with implied consent obtained through participants' decision to proceed with the survey. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. The data was securely stored using encryption and secure storage systems to prevent unauthorized access.

Authors' Contributions

*[Author 1] conducted the study from inception to completion, including data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing.

[Author 2] and [Author 3] served as the Promoters and Co-Promoter respectively, providing feedback and comment.

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