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The Toxic Dynamics of Perceived Leader Favoritism: How Jealousy and Malicious Envy Drive Counterproductive Work Behavior

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Abstract

The research investigates the psychopathological mechanisms through which perceived leader favoritism (PLF) can affect counterproductive work behavior (CWB) through the mediating effects of employee jealousy toward their coworkers and the specialized form of envy known as malicious envy. Integrating Social Comparison Theory with Affective Events Theory, the study proposes that perceived favoritism triggers unfavorable social comparisons, which in turn evoke negative emotional states that manifest in dysfunctional workplace behaviors. The research used a quantitative study design to gather information from 436 employees working in hotels. The researchers used structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the research data while they also conducted reliability and validity assessments. The study shows that perceived leader favoritism leads to higher organizational counterproductive work behavior (CWB-O) and higher interpersonal counterproductive work behavior (CWB-I) among employees. The study found that PLF leads to higher employee jealousy levels which result in higher malicious envy levels that drive CWB behavior. The research found that jealousy and malicious envy function as central psychological pathways which connect favoritism to workplace deviance. This study offers a new contribution to the existing body of knowledge about leadership by extending its scope to investigate how subtle favoritism practices lead to harmful results while explaining the emotional mechanisms which cause counterproductive behavior. The research develops an integrated framework which helps people comprehend how perceived leader favoritism affects emotional responses and behavioral patterns within modern workplaces.

Keywords: perceived leader favoritism; organizational psychology; counterproductive work behavior; jealousy; malicious envy; toxic leadership

Check for updates

Received: 3 June 2026
Revised: 22 July 2026
Accepted: 22 July 2026
Published: 25 July 2026

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1. Introduction

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has become an increasing interest nowadays because it ultimately undermines organizational effectiveness, employee well-being, and also service quality (Abdelghani et al., 2025a). CWB consists of voluntary actions that intentionally harm individuals inside the organization or the organization itself (Spector et al., 2006). In the hospitality industry, where the whole service delivery basically leans on teamwork, employee interaction, and relatively close supervisor–subordinate relationships, these behaviors can spoil the work relationships, lower customer satisfaction, and then still hurt organizational performance (Lin et al., 2025). Consequently, figuring out which organizational factors nudge or encourage CWB has turned into a key research priority.

One factor that might contribute to these behaviors is perceived leader favoritism (PLF), which kind of captures employees' sense that supervisors provide preferential treatment to a few chosen subordinates (Shamsudin et al., 2023). Since hospitality organizations really depend on fairness, cooperative efforts, and everyday interpersonal trust, this kind of perceived favoritism can be especially damaging (Agina et al., 2023). It can spark unpleasant emotional responses in employees who feel left out, and it may also nudge them toward dysfunctional workplace conduct (Palermo et al., 2019).

Even though earlier studies have looked at what happens when employees feel their leader is showing favoritism, most of the work so far has basically centered on results like organizational justice, psychological withdrawal, employee well-being, and leader–member exchange, or LMX differentiation (Su & Chen, 2023). More generally, leadership research has leaned heavily toward relational and interaction-based views, but it has given much less attention to the emotional atmosphere at work plus how employees emotionally and behaviorally react to leadership practices (Abdelghani et al., 2025a; Fouad et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025). Thus the emotional pathways, meaning how perceived leader favoritism actually leads to counterproductive work behavior, still aren't obvious. Perceived leader favoritism can drive unfavorable social comparisons, which then lead to negative feelings among employees who are not favored (Su & Chen, 2023). However, jealousy toward coworkers and malicious envy are usually studied separately, even though they are separate but still related mediators.

Jealousy shows up when people think a valued workplace relationship might be threatened (Abdullah & Malik, 2025), while malicious envy comes from disadvantageous upward comparisons and tends to involve ill-will, or a kind of spiteful intent, toward colleagues who perform better (Chang & Cheng, 2018). Looking at both emotions at the same time helps to flesh out the psychological processes through which perceived leader favoritism supports different types of counterproductive work behavior. In that way, it also helps fill an important hole in the leadership and workplace behavior research, because, well, these mechanisms haven't really been mapped as a set before.

This question is especially relevant in tourism and hospitality, because cooperation, day-to-day employee interactions, and service quality are basically the core of organizational performance (Santa et al., 2025). When employees interpret leader actions as unfair or partial, it can trigger uncomfortable emotional reactions, which then weaken workplace relationships and also nudge people toward counterproductive behaviors, in turn reducing organizational effectiveness (H. Kim & Leach, 2021). To address this gap, this study develops and tests an integrated model, and it tries to look at both the direct and indirect effects of perceived leader favoritism on counterproductive work behavior. In particular, the analysis separates counterproductive work behavior aimed at individuals (CWB-I) from counterproductive work behavior aimed at the organization (CWB-O), and it does both at the same time. Then it also looks at jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy as sort of matching emotional mediators, almost like parallel channels. Next, the

study blends social comparison theory with affective events theory to make sense of how these relationships happen in a rather sequential way. Finally, by focusing on the Egyptian hospitality sector, the research provides contextual evidence from an emerging economy, which extends the generalizability of leadership and workplace behavior findings beyond the settings that were most often used in earlier studies. Accordingly, the overall objective of this study is to develop and test an integrated model, explaining how perceived leader favoritism influences counter productive work behavior, in the hospitality industry. Specially, the study aims to examine the direct impact of perceived leader favoritism on counterproductive work behavior directed toward particular people (e.g., supervisors and co-workers) as well as toward the organization. It also digs into how perceived leader favoritism shapes jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy, and then how those feelings ripple into both parts of counterproductive work behavior. Finally, the study reviews the mediating functions of jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy in the link between perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior within the hospitality industry (Fouad et al., 2025).

Based on these objectives, the proposed conceptual model puts perceived leader favoritism as the independent variable, while jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy act as the parallel mediating variables. Then, counterproductive work behavior aimed at individuals (CWB-I) and counterproductive work behavior aimed at the organization (CWB-O) become the dependent variables. Drawing from Social Comparison Theory and Affective Events Theory, the model suggests both direct and indirect relationships among these constructs. It was laid out in Hypotheses H1a-H7b and empirically tested in this study.

Social Comparison Theory suggests that employees kind of gauge where they sit by looking at themselves against certain favored coworkers, so preferential treatment becomes a fairly noticeable cue for how they compare and judge (Festinger, 1954). When those comparisons come back showing uneven treatment, employees often interpret that as a break in distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. That then tends to weaken the norm that employees and leaders should exchange benefits back and forth in a balanced way. If you look at it from social exchange theory, perceived favoritism can be read as a sign that the exchange relationship is off, which usually lowers employees' trust, perceived organizational support, and their readiness to reciprocate back with positive work conduct. Employees can experience jealousy when they feel their valued relationships are threatened and malicious envy when they are annoyed that privileged colleagues were given benefits they did not deserve (Jang & Kang, 2025). In line with Affective Events Theory, such emotions then influence what employees do next, potentially increasing the likelihood of counterproductive work behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Because of that, jealousy and malicious envy are treated as central mediating pathways that connect perceived leader favoritism to workplace deviance. By combining these theoretical lenses, the study answers newer requests for explanations that focus more on the process itself, rather than only testing direct-effect links between leader favoritism and employee behavior. It also aims to provide a fuller picture of how perceived leader favoritism ends up shaping employee behavioral outcomes in today's organizations (Abdelghani et al., 2025b).

This study is expected to contribute to the literature in several ways, in a twofold manner. First, it extends the understanding of perceived leader favoritism by looking at its direct effects on both dimensions of counterproductive work behavior. Second, it clarifies the emotional mechanisms that connect favoritism to employee misconduct by simultaneously testing jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy as mediators. Third, it pulls together social comparison theory and affective events theory into one unified framework, giving a broader explanation for how leader favoritism turns into counterproductive work-

place behaviors in practice. Finally, the findings are also expected to offer practical insights for managers and policymakers who want to lower counterproductive work behaviors and build a healthier work setting within the hospitality industry, especially in developing economies such as Egypt (Simbine & Tukamushaba, 2020).

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Perceived Leader Favoritism and Counterproductive Work Behavior

Workplace favoritism, defined as the preferential treatment of certain employees over others, represents a prevalent yet insufficiently studied phenomenon in organizational settings (Pearce & Wang, 2024; Abdullah & Malik, 2025). Favoritism occurs when leaders display different treatment patterns, which results in distinct leader–member exchange levels and different employee resource access and recognition (Lin et al., 2025). Employees who perceive themselves as disadvantaged may interpret such behavior as a violation of the psychological contract, thereby triggering negative emotional and behavioral responses (Shamsudin et al., 2023).

Leaders who show favoritism create unjust treatment, which leads to employees wanting to take revenge against their leaders. Employees perceive that their leaders show preferential treatment to specific employees because of their personal relationships or their biases (Palermo et al., 2019). Employees respond with counterproductive organizational behavior to show negative reciprocity when they perceive that their leaders show unfair favoritism toward specific employees (J. Li & Xu, 2025). Prior research shows that fairness perceptions fail to explain such behaviors because they need researchers to study specific leader dynamics, including favoritism (Holtz & Harold, 2013). Counterproductive work behavior includes intentional actions which result in harm to both people and organizations (Ahmed et al., 2024). CWB follows the categorization system which was created by Robinson and Bennett (1995) to analyze different types of workplace misconduct.

Individuals evaluate their position by comparing themselves with others in the same work environment. When favoritism from leaders appears to be genuine, employees make upward social comparisons, especially when they see supervisors giving preferential treatment, more help, or more opportunities to some colleagues (M. Li et al., 2023). And then, pretty often, those views make employees feel like they are the ones losing out, or not quite as appreciated, compared with the colleague who seems favored (Shoukat et al., 2025). This kind of thinking doesn't just intensify the unfair, unfavorable comparison. It also tends to strengthen beliefs tied to distributive, procedural, and interpersonal injustice. Seen through social exchange theory, perceived unfairness cuts down on employees' sense of give-and-take, and it chips away at trust and reciprocity in the supervisor relationship, which then sets up more negative feelings and often leads to counterproductive workplace actions. These adverse comparisons lead to sentiments of relative lack and anger and hostility. González-Navarro et al. (2018) argued that employees use counterproductive work behavior (CWB) to restore equity or deal with perceived status loss by targeting both individuals and the organization. The societal comparison theory demonstrates that perceptions of leader partiality result in more unfavorable self-evaluations, in addition to emotional discomfort, and that sort of feeling then leads to higher workplace wrongdoing. The investigation posits that:

H1a. *Perceived leader favoritism has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward supervisor/coworkers.*

H1b. *Perceived leader favoritism has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.*

2.2. Perceived Leader Favoritism, Jealousy and Malicious Envy

By indicating unequal access to organizational resources, recognition, and supervisory support, it influences workers' cognitive and affective reactions (M. Li et al., 2023). When supervisors repeatedly show preferential treatment to certain employees, others may perceive this treatment as inequitable, making them more prone to unfavorable social comparisons and emotional reactions (Shamsudin et al., 2023; Abdullah & Malik, 2025). These perceptions are amplified because favoritism gradually undermines employees' assumptions about fairness and equal treatment, leading to increased emotional distress (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Even if jealousy and malicious envy are both negative social emotions, they don't really match in psychological emphasis or in what triggers them in the first place (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Fam et al., 2020). Jealousy tends to start when employees believe there's a risk to something they value in interpersonal ties, especially their relationship with the supervisor or in their ability to tap important organizational resources. Thus, when supervisors give selected employees an advantage, others might worry about losing supervisory attention, trust, influence, or even future career chances, and that worry can turn into jealousy (S. Kim et al., 2010; Palermo et al., 2019). In this way, jealousy is almost relationship-based rather than purely outcome-based, because it points to concerns about protecting valued social bonds. By contrast, malicious envy emerges from unfavorable upward social comparisons with more advantaged coworkers. Employees who think that they receive fewer benefits, recognition, or developmental opportunities than their preferred colleagues may experience feelings of inferiority, resentment, and frustration (Gaviria et al., 2021). Unlike jealousy, malicious envy is a comparison-based emotion characterized by hostility towards the privileged individual and a desire to reduce or undermine that individual's superior position (Carraturo et al., 2023). Previous studies have also distinguished malicious envy from benign envy, indicating that benign envy motivates self-improvement, whereas malicious envy encourages destructive behaviors aimed at diminishing others' benefits (Fam et al., 2020; Gaviria et al., 2021).

Therefore, perceived leader favoritism can induce both emotional reactions through different psychological pathways. Favoritism threatens employees' relationships with supervisors, resulting in jealousy, and also leads to upward social comparisons that evoke malicious envy (Khatatbeh et al., 2025; Malakouti & Yarivand, 2025). Although both emotions arise in response to perceived preferential treatment, they represent conceptually distinct mechanisms that may independently transmit the effects of leader favoritism on subsequent workplace behaviors.

By contrast, malicious envy seems to come out when people make unfavorable upward social comparisons with coworkers who are more advantaged. Employees who feel like they are getting fewer rewards, less recognition, or fewer chances for development compared with favored colleagues may end up feeling inferior, resentful, and even quite frustrated (Gaviria et al., 2021). And it's kind of different from jealousy too, because malicious envy is more about the comparison itself. Furthermore, it's usually marked by hostility toward that advantaged person and some urge to bring down or undermine their higher standing (Carraturo et al., 2023). Prior work also puts malicious envy apart from benign envy, noting that benign envy tends to push people toward self-improvement, while malicious envy rather supports destructive actions meant to reduce the other person's benefits (Fam et al., 2020; Gaviria et al., 2021).

Thus, perceived leader favoritism might trigger both kinds of emotional reactions, but through different inner routes. On one hand, favoritism threatens employees' ties with supervisors, and that can cultivate jealousy. On the other hand, it can also prompt upward social comparisons, which then give rise to malicious envy (Khatatbeh et al.,

2025; Malakouti & Yarivand, 2025). Even if both emotions show up after people notice preferential treatment, they are still conceptually separate, and each one may transmit the influence of leader favoritism on later workplace behaviors on its own, or at least through its mechanism. The current study posits that:

H2. *Perceived leader favoritism has a positive effect on Jealousy toward colleague.*

H3. *Perceived leader favoritism has a positive effect on Malicious Envy.*

2.3. Jealousy Toward Colleague and Counterproductive Work Behavior

The affect-driven perspective shows that negative emotions function as the primary force that leads to counterproductive work behaviors (Holtz & Harold, 2013). Jealousy toward colleagues, in particular, represents a powerful interpersonal emotion arising from perceived threats to valued relationships or status (Gaviria et al., 2021). Employees who believe that their co-workers receive more attention and recognition and support tend to develop workplace resentment, which leads them to engage in destructive work behaviors (Khasawneh et al., 2025).

Jealousy shows up like an emotional response to messy relational dynamics that feel threatening, so people start doing things to deal with it or even retaliate (Su & Chen, 2023). Workplace jealousy can nudge employees into doing counterproductive work behaviors aimed at specific individuals (CWB-I). In practice this might look like spreading rumors, purposely sabotaging a co-worker's tasks, and showing aggression toward supervisors and also colleagues. It's the kind of stuff that drags morale down and makes everything more chaotic. Also, when those negative emotions stick around, they can spill over into counterproductive work behaviors directed at the organization itself (CWB-O). So that might lead to work withdrawal, lower output, and even violations of organizational rules (Soraci et al., 2025). Jealousy becomes hard to control because it tends to grow stronger, which increases the chances of people developing harmful behavior patterns (Battle & Diab, 2024). Employees who perceive themselves as less fortunate than their coworkers will use counterproductive work behavior to achieve psychological balance and display their discontent with others and the organization (Braun et al., 2018; Song et al., 2024).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) describes the purposeful actions employees take to damage both their coworkers and the organization (Braun et al., 2018). Employees exhibit these destructive behaviors through several actions, which include withdrawing from work, sabotaging efforts, creating conflicts with others, using verbal abuse, and working less hard (Holtz & Harold, 2013). The two main types of CWB show separate classifications, which include CWB-I, which targets individuals, and CWB-O, which targets organizations through means like lateness and absenteeism and planned work slowdowns (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has major negative consequences for organizations, because it pulls away organizational resources, messes up teamwork, and lowers productivity along with service quality (Ahmed et al., 2024). Over time these behaviors also corrode interpersonal relationships and routine operational processes that are needed for organizational success, especially in service industries where collaboration matters a lot, and where employees are expected to keep performing consistently (Aisha et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2024).

Under Affective Events Theory (AET) workplace events shape employees' emotional reactions, and those feelings then guide what employees actually do at work (Şener et al., 2022). In this view, jealousy toward coworkers counts as a harmful emotional response, often triggered by the sense that someone's professional ties, standing, or recognition might be at risk. When that kind of negative emotion builds up, employees may start showing

CWB aimed at particular people, like anger, gossip, and interpersonal hostility, or even actions aimed at the organization such as doing less, stepping back from work, or breaking rules (Jang & Kang, 2025). Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) also said that workplace emotions are sort of a core pathway that connects affective experiences to employees' attitudes and later behaviors, so it makes counterproductive workplace behavior more likely. The study posits that:

H4a. *Jealousy toward colleague has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward supervisor/co-workers.*

H4b. *Jealousy toward colleague has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.*

2.4. Malicious Envy and Counterproductive Work Behavior

People develop destructive emotions through social comparison, which leads to office environments that produce excessive harmful feelings. People experience malicious envy through their hostile feelings toward others who possess better advantages, which they use to make themselves better than others (Su & Chen, 2023). This type of envy causes serious damage because it makes workers concentrate on destroying others instead of developing themselves. Employees who make comparisons to others find themselves in a position where they perceive disadvantages which leads to feelings of inferiority and injustice which eventually result in malicious envy (González-Navarro et al., 2018). People develop stronger negative feelings when they see their leaders show bias toward selected individuals because such behavior creates an atmosphere of unfair treatment, which leads to perceptions of exclusion and inequitable treatment (Sterling & Labianca, 2015).

Malicious envy leads people to commit destructive acts because it creates a strong impulse to retaliate against others. Employees who feel malicious envy will take actions they believe will either harm others or restore fairness, including social undermining, sabotage, information withholding, and working less with others (Dong & Xiao, 2026). The activities of people who work in this manner match the definition of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) because they choose to harm other people or their organization.

Affective Events Theory (AET) posits that workplace happenings trigger emotional reactions, which then shape employees' attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In the setting of perceived leader favoritism, preferential treatment becomes a noticeable workplace event that employees can read as unfair, especially when it clashes with their assumptions about evenhanded treatment and the idea of reciprocal exchange. In turn, these interpretations can stir up negative feelings, like malicious envy, and that envy acts as a sort of immediate pathway, turning employees' cognitive appraisals into what they actually do next. When employees keep feeling resentment toward favored coworkers or supervisors, they're more likely to show those emotions through hostility and other forms of counterproductive work behavior (Şener et al., 2022). Furthermore, when perceptions of unfairness keep going, they can erode employees' trust, organizational commitment, and even the willingness to respond in positive ways. That erosion then feeds organizational dissatisfaction, and it makes withdrawal tendencies more likely (Aisha et al., 2022). In line with earlier studies, malicious envy has been tied to various workplace deviance acts, such as interpersonal aggression, incivility, and even workplace sabotage (González-Navarro et al., 2018). So here, counterproductive work behavior looks like a maladaptive coping response, like a struggling attempt to regain a felt sense of justice or psychological equilibrium after unfavorable social comparisons and after noticing what feels like injustice. The study posits that:

H5a. *Malicious envy has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward supervisor/co-workers.*

H5b. *Malicious envy has a positive effect on counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.*

2.5. The Mediation Role of Jealousy Toward Colleague

The phenomenon of leader favoritism creates an environment which treats employees unequally (Lin et al., 2025). Employees who see themselves as treated less favorably than their colleagues who receive special treatment will make social comparisons with those better-treated colleagues (Shamsudin et al., 2023). Social comparison theory explains that people who make such comparisons will identify their advantages and disadvantages (M. Li et al., 2023). The latter will make them feel jealous when they perceive that their essential relationships and achievements, as well as their social standing are being put at stake (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024). When people perceive unfair treatment of their social relationships and workplace status, jealousy acts as an internal emotional response (Gaviria et al., 2021).

Jealousy is a complex emotional state that happens when people feel insecure about their relationships with others and fear losing those connections (Khasawneh et al., 2025). Employees develop jealousy toward their colleagues who receive preferential treatment because they believe that their relationship between their leader and themselves has been damaged when others receive advantages (Shamsudin et al., 2023). The emotional response becomes stronger in professional settings where employees must compete for recognition and limited resources (Battle & Diab, 2024). Jealousy causes employees to engage in destructive actions against their colleagues and supervisors by gossiping, undermining others, and displaying hostility (Su & Chen, 2023). Negative emotional reactions stemming from perceptions of leader favoritism tend to color employees' later actions in the workplace, in line with Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Consequently, when employees view preferential treatment as a kind of breach, not just of distributive justice but also of procedural justice, and even interactional justice, they often end up feeling organizational dissatisfaction, trusting their supervisors less, and showing less readiness to respond in a helpful way. Over time, these feelings make it more likely to see withdrawal behaviors, weaker work effort, lower productivity, and also more rule-breaking inside the organization (Soraci et al., 2025). There's also empirical support for this emotional pathway, as studies indicate that perceived leader favoritism can trigger jealousy, which then helps push counterproductive work behavior forward (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024). Jealousy acts like a key emotional conduit linking favoritism to both interpersonal deviance and organizational workplace misbehavior. Following Affective Events Theory, employees' emotional reactions shape what they decide to do next (Şener et al., 2022). As a result, employees who feel jealousy are more prone to engage in counterproductive work behaviors, as a coping strategy for the unfairness they perceive, and also to restore a psychological sense of balance or equity (Song et al., 2024). The study posits that:

H6a. *Jealousy toward colleague mediates the relationship between perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior toward supervisor/co-workers.*

H6b. *Jealousy toward colleague mediates the relationship between perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.*

2.6. The Mediation Role of Malicious Envy

Understanding the connection necessitates an investigation into the emotional dynamics linking perceived leader favoritism with counterproductive work behavior (Malakouti & Yarivand, 2025). Employees, perceiving their supervisors' preferential treatment, engage in comparisons with colleagues who enjoy greater power as disparities in resources, recognition, and opportunities become evident (Palermo et al., 2019).

When employees feel envious of a co-worker who receives special treatment, it makes them angry and hostile and want to pull down the stronger individual (González-Navarro et al., 2018). Malicious envy "levels down" the benefits of others instead of making their own better (Braun et al., 2018). Benign envy encourages personal growth. Individuals tend to react in this way because favoritism fosters perceptions of inequity and social exclusion (Malakouti & Yarivand, 2025). Conversely, malicious envy precipitates emotional suffering and the erosion of psychological reserves, thereby hindering self-control and heightening the probability of harmful behaviors (Abdelghani et al., 2025b). Unjust treatment compels individuals to develop counterproductive work habits as a means of managing stress and restoring balance (Shamsudin et al., 2023). Affective events theory posits that malicious envy precipitates immediate behavioral responses. Interpersonal deviance, which includes social undermining, gossip, and hostility directed at co-workers and superiors, represents a type of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) that adversely affects others and is exacerbated by envy (Su & Chen, 2023). Negative emotions lead to workplace distress, which in turn decreases individual engagement, encourages sabotage, and ultimately impairs performance (Soraci et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence links envy to organizational performance difficulties, specifically through the association of perceived favoritism (Şener et al., 2022). When employees feel they have been treated unfairly, they might act in ways that are harmful to themselves and the organization, trying to "even the score" (Malakouti & Yarivand, 2025). Workplace misconduct often stems from malicious jealousy, which arises when employees believe their supervisors show favoritism. Malicious envy was set out as a parallel mediator between perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behaviors. Each indirect influence was calculated separately, while the other mediator was kept in check. The research states:

H7a. *Malicious envy mediates the relationship between Perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior toward supervisor/co-workers.*

H7b. *Malicious envy mediates the relationship between Perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.* (see Figure 1)

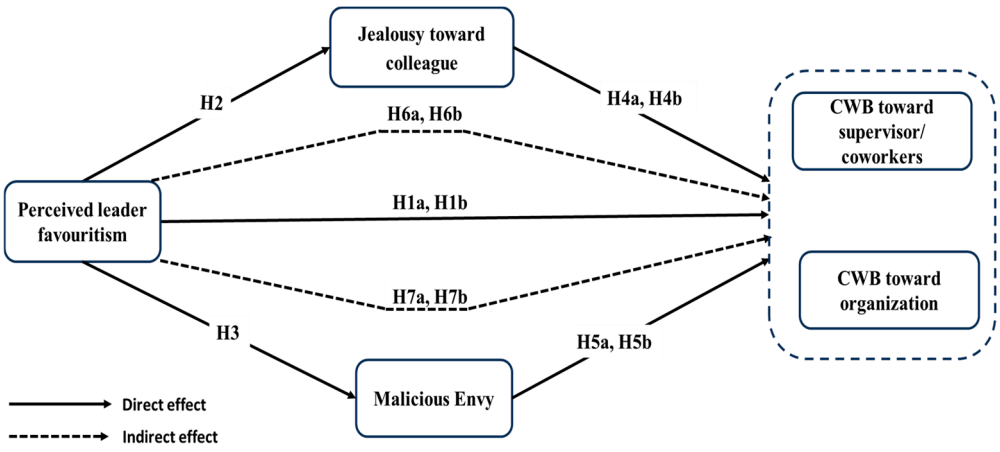


Figure 1. Conceptual model of study.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Measures

Items were adapted from various sources in the relevant literature. A 5-point scale, ranging from "(1) strongly disagree" to "(5) strongly agree," was employed for the subsequent scales. Perceived Leader Favoritism (PLF) was scaled by five items from (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024), which were originally developed and validated by (Erdogan, 2002). Malicious Envy (ME) was operationalized utilizing 5 items from (Lange & Crusius, 2015). For the operationalization of Jealousy toward Colleague (JTC), we adapted 6 items from (Vecchio, 2000), following its recent application in (Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024). To gauge Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), we adopted 12 items from (Dalal et al., 2009); specifically, the scale is divided into 6 items to measure Counterproductive Work Behavior toward Coworkers/Supervisor (CWBC.S) and 6 items to measure Counterproductive Work Behavior toward the Organization (CWB-O). A pilot study involved 27 hotel employees in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. This phase checked the face validity of questionnaire items, verified linguistic clarity, and confirmed their relevance to research objectives.

3.2. Sampling and Participants Selection

Data were collected from hotel employees in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, via an online questionnaire. We first contacted our colleagues working in these hotels who are enrolled in postgraduate programs at the authors' faculties, as well as our alumni through the alumni follow-up units at our institutions, to facilitate communication with their managers. With their support and following approval from their hotel managers, we successfully obtained the hotels' consent (17 hotels) to participate in this research. We used a convenient sampling method because it offers time efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ease of access to participants. While concerns regarding the representativeness and generalizability of convenience sampling remain, it is considered effective—particularly when applied to large sample sizes (Jager et al., 2017). Accordingly, this limitation was acknowledged as one of the study's constraints. The questionnaire required participants to answer all questions to make sure the data was complete. Participants were clearly told they could stop taking part at any time without any consequences. This survey continued for two months, from December 2025 to January 2026. 436 questionnaires were received. The questionnaire was translated from Arabic into English using a back-translation process. Five academics reviewed it, and 15 employees took part in a pre-test before data collection began. These steps helped make sure the questions were clear, easy to understand, and suitable for the participants' culture.

The study sample (n = 436) comprised 57.3% males (n = 250) and 42.7% females (n = 186). Regarding Age Group, the majority were aged 25–35 (38.8%) and under 25 (37.2%), while 21.6% were 36–50 and 2.5% were over 50. In terms of Educational Level, bachelor's degree (BD) holders represented 49.3%, followed by Postgraduates (PG) (26.1%), high school graduates (15.8%), and others (8.7%).

To reduce possible bias from common method variance (CMV), both procedural and statistical methods were used (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For the procedural steps, participants were informed of the research purpose and that taking part in the study by completing the questionnaire was voluntary. Their confidentiality and anonymity were protected. It was also made clear that "there are no right or wrong answers to the survey items". Ethical approval was obtained for the study. Participants were told that by completing and submitting the questionnaire, they were giving their informed consent to take part.

Secondly, statistically, we used Harman's Single-Factor Test with an unrotated Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The main factor explained 42.027% of the total variance, which is below the 50% threshold. This result suggests that CMV is unlikely to pose a

serious threat to the findings. However, as no single statistical procedure can completely rule out common method bias, the results should be interpreted with appropriate caution. We also checked for Multicollinearity by calculating the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) following (Kock, 2015). The highest VIF was 2.942, which is within the recommended limit of 3.3. In addition, we used a Marker Variable (MV), "Destination Identification," which is not conceptually related to our main research constructs. Following (Lindell & Whitney, 2001), including this marker variable did not change the original findings, which provides additional evidence that common method bias is unlikely to have materially influenced the observed relationships (Lindell & Whitney, 2001).

3.3. Data Analysis

Following established approaches in hospitality research (e.g., Aboutaleb et al., 2025; Alzadjali et al., 2026; Khairy et al., 2025), this study used PLS-SEM with SmartPLS V4 to analyze the data. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for examining complex relationships among variables, especially when the goal is to assess both mediating and moderating effects and to test several variables at once. The analysis proceeded in two main stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated by examining item loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and both convergent and discriminant validity. Next, the structural model was assessed by considering the coefficient of determination, effect size, path coefficients, and predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2019).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (Table 1) showed that all scale item loadings were above the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et al., 2019). Reliability was measured using Composite Reliability (CR) and coefficient alpha (α). Both CR and α values were >0.70 (Joseph et al., 2021), confirming the reliability of the measures (Table 1). We also used average variance extracted (AVE) to measure convergent validity. According to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), AVE values greater than 0.50 show acceptable convergent validity. As shown in Table 1, all AVEs were above 0.50, supporting convergent validity.

Table 1. Measurement model assessment.

Variables Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Perceived leader favoritism (PLF)		0.870	0.906	0.658
PLF1	0.827			
PLF2	0.820			
PLF3	0.852			
PLF4	0.792			
PLF5	0.761			
Jealousy toward colleague (JTC)		0.884	0.912	0.632
JTC1	0.722			
JTC2	0.816			
JTC3	0.807			
JTC4	0.775			
JTC5	0.823			
JTC6	0.824			
Malicious Envy (ME)		0.900	0.926	0.716
ME1	0.861			
ME2	0.859			
ME3	0.869			
ME4	0.866			
ME5	0.771			

Table 1. *Cont.*

Variables Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
CWB toward supervisor/coworkers (CWBC.S)		0.876	0.906	0.618
CWBC.S1	0.796			
CWBC.S2	0.829			
CWBC.S3	0.791			
CWBC.S4	0.765			
CWBC.S5	0.733			
CWBC.S6	0.798			
CWB toward organization (CWBO)		0.888	0.915	0.642
CWBO1	0.718			
CWBO2	0.782			
CWBO3	0.862			
CWBO4	0.847			
CWBO5	0.801			
CWBO6	0.790			

We also used two tests to check discriminant validity: the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. According to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the square root of the AVE for a variable should be greater than its correlations with other variables. In our results, the square roots of the AVEs were higher than the correlations below the diagonal in Table 2. Table 3 shows that all HTMT values were below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). These findings confirm that discriminant validity was established.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and discriminant validity.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. PLF	3.611	1.103	**0.811**				
2. JTC	3.644	1.026	0.498 **	**0.795**			
3. ME	3.741	1.126	0.574 **	0.522 **	**0.846**		
4. CWBC.S	3.810	0.993	0.508 **	0.625 **	0.552 **	**0.786**	
5. CWBO	3.847	0.944	0.564 **	0.667 **	0.653 **	0.711 **	**0.801**

Notes: Bold values in the diagonal represent the $\sqrt{}$ AVE values; SD, standard deviations; GP, Perceived leader favoritism = (PLF); Jealousy toward colleague = (JTC); Malicious Envy = (ME); CWB toward supervisor/coworkers = (CWBC.S); CWB toward organization = (CWBO). Age and education were measured in 4 categories. Gender was coded as 1 = female and 2 = male. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. HTMT ratio.

	CWBO	CWBC.S	JTC	ME	PLF
CWB toward organization					
CWB toward supervisor/coworkers	0.807				
Jealousy toward colleague	0.753	0.707			
Malicious Envy	0.730	0.621	0.583		
Perceived leader favoritism	0.640	0.580	0.563	0.646	

4.2. Structural Model

Before testing the hypotheses, the structural model was checked using R^2, f^2, β, and Q^2 (Hair et al., 2019). The R^2 values show that the proposed model explains 60.1% of the variance in CWB toward the organization and 48.6% toward supervisors or coworkers. This means the model explains organization-directed counterproductive work behavior better than interpersonal counterproductive work behavior. The model also accounts for 33.5% of the variance in malicious envy and 26.5% in jealousy toward colleagues, which suggests moderate explanatory power for these mediating factors. All R^2 values are above

the recommended threshold of 0.10 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Predictive relevance was also checked by calculating Q^2. According to (Hair et al., 2019), a Q^2 value above 0.0 means the model has predictive relevance. The Q^2 values for CWB toward organization, CWB toward supervisor/coworkers, jealousy toward colleague, and malicious envy were 0.358, 0.279, 0.154, and 0.224, respectively, showing the model has meaningful predictive relevance. The effect size (f^2) ranged from 0.031 to 0.504, which is above the 0.02 threshold for a small effect (see Table 4) (Cohen, 2013).

Table 4. Results of Q^2, R^2, and f^2.

Variables	R^2	Q^2		
CWB toward organization	0.601	0.358		
CWB toward supervisor/coworkers_	0.486	0.279		
Jealousy toward colleague	0.265	0.154		
Malicious Envy	0.335	0.224		
f^2				
Variables	**CWBO**	**CWBC.S**	**JTC**	**ME**
Jealousy toward colleague	0.276	0.232		
Malicious Envy	0.176	0.066		
Perceived leader favoritism	0.045	0.031	0.360	0.504

The significance of the path coefficients was tested using a bootstrap analysis with 5000 resamples (see Table 5 and Figure 2). Regarding the direct effects, perceived leader favoritism (PLF) demonstrated a significant positive influence on both counterproductive work behavior toward coworkers/supervisors (CWBC.S) ($\beta = 0.162$, $t = 2.850$, $p = 0.005$) and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (CWBO) ($\beta = 0.172$, $t = 3.365$, $p = 0.001$), supporting H1a and H1b. Furthermore, PLF showed a positive effect on jealousy toward colleagues (JTC) ($\beta = 0.515$, $t = 12.736$, $p < 0.001$) and malicious envy (ME) ($\beta = 0.579$, $t = 13.972$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2 and H3. Additionally, JTC significantly predicted both CWBC.S ($\beta = 0.425$, $t = 7.663$, $p < 0.001$) and CWBO ($\beta = 0.408$, $t = 8.787$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4a and H4b. Similarly, malicious envy also significantly influenced CWBC.S ($\beta = 0.239$, $t = 3.486$, $p = 0.001$) and CWBO ($\beta = 0.343$, $t = 6.414$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5a and H5b.

Table 5. Results of hypotheses testing.

Relationships	β	t-Value	*p*-Value	95% CI Bias Corrected		Decision
Direct effect				LLCI	ULCI	✓
H1a. PLF → CWBC.S	0.162	2.850	0.005	0.056	0.278	✓
H1b. PLF → CWBO	0.172	3.365	0.001	0.058	0.264	✓
H2. PLF → JTC	0.515	12.736	0.000	0.427	0.588	✓
H3. PLF → ME	0.579	13.972	0.000	0.491	0.655	✓
H4a. JTC → CWBC.S	0.425	7.663	0.000	0.316	0.529	✓
H4b. JTC → CWBO	0.408	8.787	0.000	0.308	0.500	✓
H5a. ME → CWBC.S	0.239	3.486	0.001	0.115	0.372	✓
H5b. ME → CWBO	0.343	6.414	0.000	0.238	0.447	✓
Mediating Effect						
H6a. PLF → JTC → CWBC.S	0.219	6.355	0.000	0.151	0.285	✓
H6b. PLF → JTC → CWBO	0.210	6.574	0.000	0.147	0.274	✓
H7a. PLF → ME → CWBC.S	0.138	3.389	0.001	0.068	0.230	✓
H7b. PLF → ME → CWBO	0.198	5.780	0.000	0.143	0.275	✓

Note: Perceived leader favoritism = (PLF); Jealousy toward colleague = (JTC); Malicious Envy = (ME); CWB toward supervisor/coworkers = (CWBC.S); CWB toward organization = (CWBO); Supported = ✓.

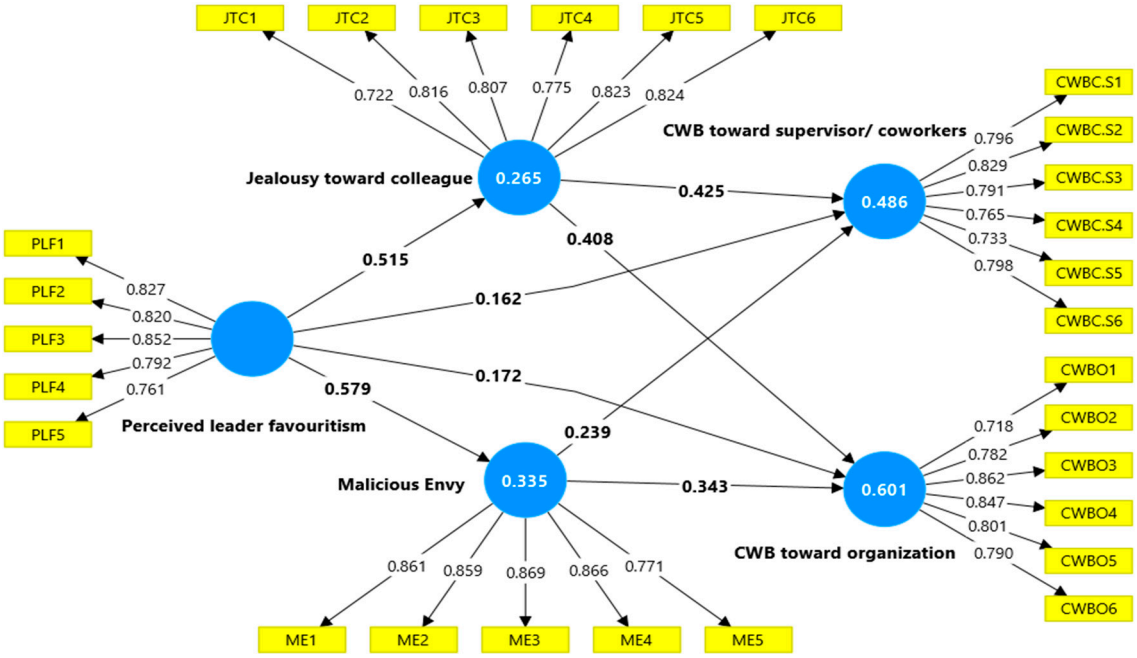


Figure 2. Evaluation of structure model.

With respect to the mediating effects, the results revealed that jealousy toward colleagues significantly mediated the relationship between PLF and both CWBC.S (β = 0.219, t = 6.355, $p < 0.001$) and CWBO (β = 0.210, t = 6.574, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6a and H6b. Likewise, malicious envy significantly mediated the relationship between PLF and CWBC.S (β = 0.138, t = 3.389, $p = 0.001$) and CWBO (β = 0.198, t = 5.78, $p = 0.000$), supporting H7a and H7b.

Beyond hypothesis testing, the effect size (f^2) values provide insights into the relative importance of the structural relationships. The results indicate that PLF has a stronger effect on malicious envy ($f^2 = 0.504$) than on jealousy toward colleagues ($f^2 = 0.360$), suggesting that perceived favoritism is more strongly associated with the development of malicious envy. Regarding the outcomes of these emotions, jealousy toward colleagues shows a stronger effect on CWB toward the organization ($f^2 = 0.276$) and CWB toward supervisors/coworkers ($f^2 = 0.232$) compared with malicious envy, which demonstrates a stronger effect on CWB toward the organization ($f^2 = 0.176$) than on CWB toward supervisors/coworkers ($f^2 = 0.066$).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Findings and Theoretical Contribution

This study examines the mediating role of jealousy towards colleagues and malicious envy in the relationship between favoritism and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among hotel employees in Egypt. The results go beyond confirming that favoritism is associated with negative workplace behaviors and help to clarify the psychological mechanisms through which employees translate feelings of uneven treatment into destructive behaviors. The results reveal in particular that employees who perceived their leaders as giving them preferential treatment are more likely to experience unpleasant emotions, which in turn leads to interpersonal and organizational counterproductive work behaviors.

These results support the leader favoritism literature by indicating that the effects of favoritism are not only perceptions of unfairness or decreased well-being, but rather they are emotional mechanisms that drive employee behavior. So, like, as the Social Comparison Theory from (Festinger, 1954) (and also M. Li et al., 2023) kind of predicts, people end up

comparing their own standing with the standing of colleagues they actually prefer. Then those less-advantageous comparisons cause emotional reactions, and those emotions end up steering what they do professionally later on. At the same time, the findings line up with Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Su & Chen, 2023) pretty well, because perceived favoritism counts as a workplace event that basically sparks emotional responses, which then feed into behavioral results. Altogether, using more than one theory frame of reference helps explain in a rather fuller way why perceived leader favoritism links to counterproductive job behavior.

An important contribution of this study is the inclusion of jealousy toward colleagues and malevolent envy as parallel mediating processes. Both feelings arise from negative social comparison, yet they are different psychological phenomena. Jealousy is mainly about worries about endangered ties at work, whereas malignant envy is a sign of hatred because of the feeling of inferiority compared to privileged coworkers. This provides a more fine-grained understanding of employees' emotional reactions than studies that have examined a single emotional pathway (Abdelghani et al., 2025a; Dong & Xiao, 2026; Mohd Shamsudin et al., 2024) by demonstrating that both emotions independently mediate the relationship between perceived leader favoritism and counterproductive work behavior.

The Egyptian hospitality industry seems like a solid place to study these relationships because hotel operations rely on close personal ties, shared teamwork, and ongoing communication between supervisors and employees, you know. In some contexts, employees may actually watch the choices managers make about who gets which tasks and who ends up receiving acknowledgment and rewards, so ideas of favoritism can feel much clearer and more vivid. The current results suggest that the proposed theoretical connections are supported in the Egyptian hospitality context, rather than meaning that Egyptian staff will experience stronger feelings than workers from other nations. Looking ahead, it would be beneficial for future cross-cultural work, using comparable samples from different countries, to examine if these correlations shift across cultural norms or institutional arrangements.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide various practical implications for managers of hospitality and other service-intensive enterprises. As perceived leader favoritism is a contributor to unproductive work behavior through employees' emotional responses, businesses should aim to have transparent and consistent managerial practices. Decisions on assigning tasks, evaluating performance, promotions, and prizes should be based on clear and objective criteria that are publicly stated to the staff. More procedural clarity can lower the perceptions of favoritism and diminish the negative social comparisons among employees.

The findings also underscore the necessity to train supervisors in the fair and consistent treatment of employees. Leadership development programs should focus on unbiased decision-making, transparent communication, and equitable treatment of team members to minimize the chance that managerial actions would be viewed as partiality. Managers should also be encouraged to provide regular and constructive feedback to all staff and to ensure that recognition and developmental opportunities are equally distributed.

As jealousy and malevolent envy have been established as crucial mechanisms relating perceived leader favoritism to counterproductive job conduct, managers should pay more attention to the emotional climate of the workplace.

The Egyptian hospitality industry is an excellent place to study these relationships because hotel operations depend on close, personal ties, collaboration, and everyday communication between supervisors and employees. In certain settings, employees may notice the choices managers make regarding who is assigned which tasks, as well as who

gets credit, appreciation, and different incentives. In that kind of context, the sense of favoritism can become more obvious, almost more vivid to people. The current results suggest that the theoretical links we proposed are supported in the Egyptian hospitality environment instead of just meaning that Egyptian employees will experience stronger affective reactions than employees from other countries.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study indicates that PLF drives CWB-I and CWB-O through jealousy and malicious envy; at the theoretical level, favoritism should be viewed as a leadership event that activates social comparison and negative emotional reactions. Then on the practical side, organizations ought to apply transparent, fair, and explainable management systems so employees don't so easily develop perceptions of favoritism—and that follow-up counterproductive behavior doesn't really kick in. This study has a few limitations. First, the cross-sectional setup makes it difficult to argue for any causal link between the variables in the study. Even if the proposed relationships are theoretically sensible, future research really should lean on longitudinal or experimental designs to bring in stronger proof. Second, the information was gathered via self-reported questionnaires taken at one single moment, and this approach could up the chance of common method variance, even though the procedure and statistical steps used to reduce that worry were in place. Future work should gather data from different sources or consider time-lagged designs to further reduce this particular concern. Third, the use of convenience sampling may limit the way the sample actually represents the broader population, and it can also bring about selection bias, so in the end it constrains the external validity of the findings. Furthermore, since the study took place solely within the Egyptian hospitality sector, you should take care when trying to generalize the results to other industries or different cultural contexts. Moving forward, future research should reproduce the proposed model by using probability sampling techniques, and it should test its usefulness across various countries, service sectors, and organizational arrangements. Finally, this study examined jealousy toward colleagues and malicious envy as the emotional channels that explain how perceived leader favoritism links to counterproductive work behavior. Future work could stretch the proposed model by exploring other mediating mechanisms, for example, organizational cynicism, organizational trust, and emotional exhaustion. Researchers might additionally study potential moderating factors, such as leadership styles, organizational justice, and individual differences, so that a fuller picture emerges of the conditions where perceived leader favoritism ends up shaping counterproductive work behavior.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, I.A.E., C.K. and S.F.; methodology, I.A.E., S.F., C.K., H.A., Y.Z.A. and A.M.S.A.; software, I.A.E. and S.F.; validation, I.A.E., Y.Z.A., C.K. and S.F.; formal analysis, I.A.E. and A.M.S.A.; investigation, I.A.E., S.F., C.K., Y.Z.A. and A.M.S.A.; resources, I.A.E.; data curation, I.A.E.; writing—original draft preparation, S.F., I.A.E., Y.Z.A., H.A. and A.M.S.A.; writing—review and editing, I.A.E., S.F., C.K., Y.Z.A. and A.M.S.A.; visualization, I.A.E.; supervision, I.A.E. and S.F.; project administration, I.A.E., S.F. and A.M.S.A.; funding acquisition, I.A.E. and A.M.S.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [Grant No. KFU263083].

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of King Faisal University (protocol code KFU-263083 and date of approval 25 July 2025).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available upon request from researchers who meet the eligibility criteria. Kindly contact the first author privately through e-mail.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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