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Exploring perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes among correctional staff in NSW

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Aims

To understand staff perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes across different organisational contexts within NSW correctional settings.

Methods

A self-report online survey was administered to all Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) staff. The current study focused on frontline staff working in correctional centres and Community Corrections offices. Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) were conducted to validate adapted measures of organisational fairness and safety attitudes. Bivariate correlations, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to explore associations and variations in staff perceptions of each measure across individual and organisational factors.

Results

The EFAs provided evidence for the validity of a single-factor structure for the organisational fairness measure. The modified safety attitudes measure demonstrated a five-factor structure, representing dimensions of perceptions of management, job satisfaction and commitment, safety climate, teamwork climate, and working conditions. Significant associations were identified between perceptions of organisational fairness and all dimensions of safety attitudes, regardless of organisational context. Staff in Community Corrections offices consistently reported more positive perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes than those in correctional centres.

Conclusion

This study gives positive findings for the validity of our measures of organisational fairness and safety attitudes, and insights about how these constructs interrelate and vary as a function of staff and organisational factors. Ongoing assessment of staff perceptions and experiences serve as a foundation for understanding the roles of organisational fairness and safety attitudes in correctional settings and developing targeted strategies to strengthen organisational climate within CSNSW.

INTRODUCTION

The successful operation of correctional agencies is closely related to the role of staff in balancing a range of responsibilities to ensure safety, security, and humane treatment of people completing custodial sentences or community-based orders (Lambert et al., 2024). These responsibilities extend beyond the immediate environment of correctional facilities, influencing the broader work environment, and shaping staff attitudes and behaviour (Lambert et al., 2010; Taxman & Gordon, 2009). Positive work-related experiences and outcomes, including job satisfaction, active engagement, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviours, are crucial for the overall effectiveness of correctional agencies (Matz et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to promote such experiences among correctional staff to create a positive, safe, and secure environment.

In recognition of the importance of these factors for the successful operation of correctional agencies, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has identified strategic objectives for delivering a correctional service that prioritises community safety and empowers individuals to positively transform their lives. A central component of these objectives includes improving staff culture to ensure all staff are engaged, feel safe, and trust the organisation. In line with this objective, CSNSW has implemented an ongoing process to measure peoples' experiences and perceptions of the organisation.

Research has identified the significance of staff perceptions of organisational justice, in addition to their safety attitudes, in shaping their experiences of and within an organisation. Organisational justice pertains to employees' perceptions of fair or unfair treatment at work and from management (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019; Greenberg, 1990). It includes three fundamental dimensions: distributive justice (equitable outcomes, e.g., pay, benefits, promotions, and responsibility), procedural justice (fair decision-making processes), and interactional justice (respectful interpersonal treatment) (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019; Colquitt et al., 2013; Greenberg, 1990). These dimensions are primarily perceived in reference to staff members' supervisors since their actions and decisions significantly impact both the economic and social wellbeing of the workforce (Colquitt et al., 2013). A significant body of research indicates perceptions of organisational justice are particularly important for shaping custodial staff attitudes towards their work, their supervisors, and a range of job-related experiences (Gyekye & Haybatollahi, 2014; Lambert et al., 2024; Lambert & Hogan, 2013; Lambert et al., 2010; Taxman & Gordon, 2009). Positive staff perceptions of fairness have been found to correlate with higher life and job satisfaction, trust in management, increased commitment, and active participation in organisational citizenship behaviours (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2010). In contrast, experiences of injustice have been associated with lower job satisfaction, increased turnover, and counterproductive behaviours (Ambrose et al., 2007; Beugre & Baron, 2001; Lambert et al., 2010). Negative perceptions of organisational justice have also been linked to adverse health outcomes, including cardiovascular issues, mental health disorders, sleep disturbances, and increased illness-related absences (Cachon-Alonso & Elovainio, 2022).

Safety attitudes encompass employees' collective beliefs, and perceptions towards safety policies, procedures, practices, and the overall safety prioritisation in the organisational context (Clarke, 2010; Neal & Griffin, 2006). Sexton et al. (2006) identified six safety attitudes dimensions: teamwork climate (quality of collaboration between personnel), perceptions of management (approval of managerial action), safety climate (strong and proactive organisational commitment to safety), job

satisfaction (positivity of work experience), working conditions (quality of the working environment and logistical support), and stress recognition (how performance is influenced by stressors). Studies from across diverse industries, including chemical processing, manufacturing, construction, and services (e.g., healthcare, hospitality, transportation, retail), highlight a significant association between organisational safety culture, safety performance, and occurrences of accidents and injuries (Beus et al., 2019; Clarke, 2010). Research within healthcare settings has also examined how safety attitudes impact broader outcomes, such as patient safety, staff wellbeing, and overall organisational performance (Braithwaite et al., 2017; DiCuccio, 2015, Lu et al., 2022; Vikan et al., 2023).

Organisational justice and safety attitudes are both shaped through interactions with co-workers, supervisors, managers, and senior executives within employees' work environments. Research suggests that employees' perceptions of organisational processes and events (e.g., organisational support, emphasis on rules and regulations, open lines of communication and information-sharing) significantly influence their attitudes towards safety with the broader organisational climate (Clarke, 2010; Wallace et al., 2006; Zacharatos et al., 2005), with potential lead on effects for increased job satisfaction, adherence to safety policies, and reduced accident rates (Gyekye & Salminen, 2007). Such findings are in line with the principles of Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that interactions in organisational settings influence employees' attitudes and behaviours, particularly through perceptions of fairness and support from supervisors (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Emerson, 1976; Lambert & Hogan, 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2010). Positive interactions foster trust and commitment, leading to positive organisational outcomes (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lambert & Hogan, 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2010), while

negative interactions can lead to mistrust and diminished organisational success (Colquitt et al., 2012; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Riggle et al., 2009). Therefore, promoting fair treatment and cultivating positive workplace interactions are important factors for creating an organisational culture built on safety and trust where staff feel secure operating within the often-challenging work environments associated with correctional agencies.

The current study

In line with CSNSW objectives to improve staff culture, Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) is conducting an agenda of research to assess and explore staff perceptions of organisational climates across correctional settings. The current study aims to examine the validity of measures used to assess staff perceptions on key dimensions of organisational fairness and safety climate and provide initial insights about characteristics and sources of variance in these constructs. In doing so, this study contributes to broader aims to understand staff perceptions of organisational fairness and key dimensions of safety culture that will inform CSNSW's goal of improving staff culture, and in turn how staff perceptions of organisational climate are associated with outcomes relevant to CSNSW strategic objectives. Through this work, CRES aims to establish an evidence base within the NSW correctional framework that informs the complexities of promoting safe, respectful, and trustworthy organisational and correctional climates.

Moreover, despite the enduring interest of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the interplay between organisational justice and safety attitudes, which is reflected in CSNSW's parallel assessment of these constructs to inform understanding of its organisational climates, empirical research on this subject remains scarce within Australian correctional settings. The limited

progress in this area is hindered by a lack of conceptual clarity in defining 'safety culture' and how this construct can be effectively operationalised in the unique context of correctional institutions (Taxman & Gordon, 2009).

The current study aims to address four key research questions:

1. What is the factor structure of the adapted organisational fairness measure?

2. What is the factor structure of the modified Safety Attitudes Questionnaire?

3. How do staff perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes vary as a function of individual characteristics and organisational contexts?

4. What are the associations between perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes among staff?

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Data was collected via a self-report survey administered through the Alchemer online survey platform, which aimed to capture the perceptions of all CSNSW staff (N = 10,142 individuals as of April 2023). To facilitate widespread participation, a survey link was disseminated to all staff via a biweekly internal email broadcast in May 2023. The survey remained open for 2 weeks and was estimated to take 5 to 10 minutes to complete, ensuring that staff could contribute meaningfully without an excessive time commitment. Reminder emails were also sent in June 2023 prior to the survey closing to further encourage participation. Participants were asked to self-report their demographic and job-related details, as well as their perceptions of the organisation.

The survey aimed to capture insights from individuals across various roles and organisational contexts, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the entire staff population. In total 2,083 staff completed the survey (response rate = 20.54%).

In order to reduce statistical noise associated with the sampling approach and improve interpretability of results, the current study focuses on frontline staff working in correctional centres and Community Corrections offices. A total of 1,162 frontline staff provided complete responses to the survey. For those who completed at least 80% of each measure, missing data was imputed using linear interpolation, resulting in a maximum possible sample available for analysis of 1,315 frontline staff. Four broad frontline staff groups were considered in the current study, which included Community Corrections Officers (CCOs), Correctional Officers (COs), Corrective Services Industries (CSI) Overseers, and Offender Services and Programs (OSP) staff (See Table 1 for staff demographic and organisational factors).[1]

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[1] **CCOs** include (Senior) Community Corrections Officers and Community Corrections Team Leaders engaged in community-based supervision, support, and intervention for people serving community-based sentences. **COs** include (Senior/Principal) Correctional Officers responsible for maintaining security and order within correctional centres. **CSI Overseers** encompass supervisory roles (e.g., (Senior) Overseers, MIBU, Education Services Coordinator, Teacher, and Learning and Development) involved in vocational training, education, and industry programs within the correctional settings. **OSP** staff consist of various roles related to offender assessment, classification, case management, and program delivery aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration (e.g., (Senior) Assessment and Planning, (Senior) Classification and Placement Officer, (Senior) Custodial Case Management Officer, (Senior) Psychologist, (Senior) Services and Program Officer, Other custodial (e.g., Aboriginal mentor, Chaplain), and Other Community Corrections staff (e.g., Aboriginal Community Engagement and Culture Officer).

Table 1. Characteristics of staff

	n	%
Age, years		
18–25	33	2.5
26–35	258	19.7
36–45	307	23.5
46–55	397	30.4
56–65	274	21.0
≥66	38	2.9
Gender		
Male	679	54.8
Female	560	42.6
Tenure, years		
≤5	458	35.1
6–10	294	22.5
11–20	309	23.7
21+	244	18.7
Officer's affiliation		
Correctional centres	1,003	76.3
Community Corrections Offices	312	23.7
Role		
CCOs	296	22.5
COs	627	47.7
CSI	112	8.5
OSP	280	21.3
Security level§		
Minimum	218	23.7
Medium	148	16.1
Maximum	552	60.1
Correctional centres by inmates' gender§		
Male only centres	664	72.3
Female only centres	57	6.2
Mixed centres	197	21.5

Measures

Organisational fairness

The organisational fairness measure was adapted from a measure of organisational justice developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) that was comprised of 5 items for distributive justice, 6 items for formal procedures (i.e., procedural justice), and 9 items for interactional justice. The adapted measure focuses on formal procedures (7 items, including Niehoff and Moorman's (1993) original 6 items and an additional bespoke item developed with the CSNSW context in mind) and interactional justice (including 4 of Niehoff and Moorman's (1993) original 9

items).[2] All items followed a 5-point response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Development and adaptation of the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (SAQ)

To evaluate healthcare providers' perspectives on patient safety, Sexton et al. (2006) developed a 30-item Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (SAQ) consisting of six factors, including teamwork climate, safety climate, perceptions of management, job satisfaction, working conditions, and stress recognition. Acknowledging the distinct dynamics of correctional settings, CSNSW undertook the task of adapting and refining this questionnaire for application in such environments. In collaboration with subject matter experts and key stakeholders, CSNSW tailored the SAQ to create a contextually relevant tool for gauging staff attitudes towards primary domains associated with developing a safe work environment. The adapted measure for correctional settings incorporates a pool of 37 items, including items from each SAQ factor with the exception of the stress recognition domain, in addition to bespoke items. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Analytical Plan

To evaluate the structural validity of the modified organisational fairness and safety attitudes measures, Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) were conducted. An EFA is used for exploring the underlying factor structure of scales when the theoretical framework is not fully established (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). To ensure the data's

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[2] Items for inclusion underwent a review and selection process by the CSNSW Senior Executive to ensure their applicability to the local operational context prior to implementation.

appropriateness for EFA, we calculated the Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Sphericity test. Both measures were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with direct Oblimin rotation. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the measures of interest. Bivariate correlations were then employed to examine the associations between these measures, including across different staff groups and organisational contexts.

A series of independent samples t-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were also conducted to compare differences between various individual and organisational factors across each of the measures of interest. Finally, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed to investigate associations between perceptions of organisational fairness and dimensions of safety attitudes, while accounting for variance in individual and organisational factors. For the hierarchical regression analyses, demographic and employment-related variables (age, gender, tenure, and organisational context) were introduced in the first step, followed by the addition of organisational fairness in the second step. The statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed) for all analyses.

RESULTS

What is the factor structure of the adapted organisational fairness measure?

An EFA was conducted to assess the structure of the organisational fairness measure utilising the sample of respondents with complete responses to the scale. The EFA results present a robust single-factor structure, supporting the retention of a unidimensional structure after adaptation. Table 2 displays the EFA results and factor loadings for each of the 11 items. The loadings ranged from .81 to .89, indicating strong associations between the items and the underlying construct. The Cronbach's alpha statistic for the single factor was .97, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 2. Rotated principal axis factor matrix for the organisational fairness measure items

Item	Loadings
When decisions are made about my job, my manager deals with me in a truthful manner	.89
My manager clarifies decisions and provides additional information when requested by employees	.88
When decisions are made about my job, my manager treats me with kindness and consideration	.88
My manager makes sure that all employee concerns are heard before job decisions are made	.88
To make formal job decisions my manager collects accurate and complete information	.87
When decisions are made about my job, my manager treats me with respect and dignity	.87
Managers make consistent and transparent decisions around workplace complaints and disputes within my team	.86
When decisions are made about my job, my manager is sensitive to my personal needs	.85
All job decisions are applied consistently across all affected employees	.85
Job decisions are made by managers in an unbiased manner	.84
Employees are allowed to challenge or appeal job decisions made by managers	.81
Eigenvalues of 1 and above	8.416

Total variance explained = 74.18%
KMO = .956
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2 (55, N = 1,162) = 15991.76, $p < .001$)

What is the factor structure of the modified Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (SAQ)?

The modified SAQ also underwent factor analysis utilising the sample of respondents with complete responses to the measure. A total of four rounds of EFA were carried out that followed an iterative process of removing low or cross-loading items. The first round included all 37 items, consisting of 22 items derived from the original SAQ and 15 bespoke items developed for the CSNSW context. In this round, two items from the 'safety climate' factor with loadings < .30 were removed from the analysis. In the second round of EFA, two items from the 'job satisfaction and commitment' and 'safety climate' factors with cross-loadings > .35 were removed. In the final round, another two items from the 'safety climate' and 'teamwork climate' factors with cross-loadings > .35 were also removed.[3]

The findings of the final EFA revealed a five-factor structure that varied from the original SAQ, with two 'teamwork climate' items loading on the 'perceptions of management' factor and two 'job satisfaction and commitment' items loading on the 'teamwork climate' factor. Factors derived from the final EFA solution were subsequently renamed to reflect the relevant structure for the CSNSW context, and included perceptions of management, job

satisfaction and commitment, safety climate, teamwork climate, and working conditions (see Table 3). The Cronbach alpha for each factor ranged from .86 to .95, demonstrating strong internal consistency for all five dimensions.

How are staff perceptions of organisational fairness associated with safety attitudes?

Table 4 shows correlations among key variables in the current study. The correlation analysis revealed significant associations between perceptions of organisational fairness and various dimensions of safety attitudes within the workplace. According to established guidelines for interpreting Pearson correlation coefficients, values ranging from 0 to .29 suggest a weak or small association, between .30 and .49 indicate a moderate association, and values of .50 or higher indicate a strong or large association (Cohen, 1988). All correlations demonstrated positive and moderate-large effect sizes, indicating a substantial amount of shared variance between the constructs. Specifically, staff who perceive their organisation as fair were more likely to report positive safety attitudes across all five dimensions. Perceptions of organisational fairness exhibited the strongest positive correlation with perceptions of management, while the association with job satisfaction and commitment was the weakest.

Correlations among each of the five safety attitudes dimensions were also positive and strong. This indicates that positive perceptions in one dimension are associated with positive perceptions in all other dimensions of safety attitudes.

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[3]Conventional practice typically recommends excluding cross-loadings at a threshold of .5 or higher (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019), however, our analysis used a conservative cutoff of .35 to enhance the robustness of the factor structure (Hair et al., 2009). We retained two items with cross-loadings of $\geq$ .35 and four items with cross-loadings < .35, following Tabachnick and Fidell's (2019) guidance that theoretically relevant items may remain in the model despite exceeding the threshold. Further exclusion of these items led to challenges with interpretability of a coherent factor structure, therefore the items were retained based on their theoretical relevance to the model.

Table 3. Factor loadings of each item of the modified SAQ

Item	Factor loadings				
	1	2	3	4	5
Perceptions of management (8 items, α = .95)					
My manager conveys confidence in my ability to do well at my job	.89				
Management supports my daily efforts	.87				
I receive appropriate feedback about my performance	.81				
My input is well received	.79				
Management is doing a good job	.77				
Senior leaders listen to me and care about my concerns	.75				
I am able to influence and make decisions about the work I do	.50				
Problem staff are dealt with constructively	.36				
Job satisfaction and commitment (5 items, α = .87)					
My role makes an important contribution to the community		.93			
My work has significance and purpose		.89			
I am committed to my part in our plan to reduce reoffending		.82			
I understand our integrated CSNSW plan to reduce reoffending		.57			
I like my job		.56			
Safety climate (7 items, α = .89)					
The staff here pay attention to safety rules			.91		
The staff here look out for others' safety			.84		
I am encouraged by my colleagues to report any safety concerns I may have			.52		
Staff frequently disregard policy and procedures (recoded)			.45		
Safety protocols are effective in reducing injuries in my workplace	.32		.44		
I feel safe working here	.35		.40		
Management provides sufficient safety training and resources			.35		.33
Teamwork climate (6 items, α = .89)					
Working here is like being part of a large family				.53	
Staff communicate to each other with courtesy and respect			.36	.45	
Morale here is high				.43	.31
This is a good place to work				.42	
I have the support I need from other staff to do my job				.36	
The custodial and non-custodial staff here work together as a well-coordinated team				.33	
Working conditions (5 items, α = .86)					
New recruits and trainees in my discipline are adequately supervised					.69
They do a good job of training new personnel here					.68
The levels of staffing here are sufficient to handle the number of people we manage					.60
I am provided with adequate, timely information about events that might affect my work					.58
It is easy for staff to ask questions when there is something that they do not understand	.33				.35
Eigenvalues of 1 and above	15.35	2.15	1.48	1.19	1.02
Variance explained (%)	48.36	5.90	3.74	2.55	1.96

Total variance explained = 62.51%

KMO = .968

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2 (465, $N = 1{,}162$) = 27806.78, $p < .001$)

Table 4. Correlations between organisational fairness and dimensions of safety attitudes

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Organisational fairness	–					
2. Teamwork climate	.66**	–				
3. Job satisfaction and commitment	.43**	.52**	–			
4. Perceptions of management	.86**	.79**	.52**	–		
5. Working conditions	.65**	.71**	.50**	.75**	–	
6. Safety climate	.64**	.73**	.50**	.73**	.71**	–

Note. ** $p < .001$

Table 5. Bivariate correlations between perceptions of organisational fairness and various dimensions of safety attitudes, by staff group and organisational context

	Teamwork climate	Job satisfaction and commitment	Perceptions of management	Working conditions	Safety climate
Organisational fairness					
Staff role					
CCOs	.73**	.17*	.91**	.64**	.69**
COs	.63**	.49**	.83**	.67**	.57**
CSI	.71**	.46**	.84**	.68**	.68**
OSP	.59**	.36**	.83**	.55**	.61**
Staff location					
Correctional centres	.64**	.48**	.84**	.64**	.61**
Community Corrections Offices	.72**	.21*	.90**	.64**	.70**

Note. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

Bivariate correlations between scores on organisational fairness and the dimensions of safety attitudes were also examined for each of the staff groups and locations (see Table 5). Perceptions of organisational fairness again showed consistently strong positive correlations with perceptions of management and with teamwork climate across all staff groups. While correlations between perceptions of organisational fairness and job satisfaction and commitment were also consistently positive, the strength of associations varied across staff groups. For example, COs and CSI overseers demonstrated stronger correlations (rs = .49 and.46, respectively) in comparison to CCOs and OSP staff (rs =.17 and .36, respectively). Similar group variation was observed in associations between organisational fairness and safety attitude factors of working conditions and safety climate; for example, correlations with working climate were lowest among OSP staff and CCOs (rs = .55 and .64, respectively), while correlations with safety climate was lowest among COs (r = .57).

Bivariate correlations between perceptions of organisational fairness and dimensions of safety attitudes were further examined for staff working in correctional centres and those working in Community Corrections Offices. For staff in correctional centres, perceptions of organisational fairness showed strong positive correlations with all dimensions of safety attitudes. Specifically, perceptions of management had the highest correlation (r = .84), while job satisfaction and commitment had the lowest (r = .48). A similar pattern of associations was also identified for staff in Community Corrections Offices, although the strongest and weakest correlations were more pronounced (i.e., perceptions of management = .90; job satisfaction and commitment = .21).

Do staff perceptions of organisational climate vary across individual and organisational factors?

Table 6 and 7 present the results from a series of independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs, examining differences in perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes dimensions across individual and organisational factors. COs consistently scored lower on all measures of organisational climate compared to other staff roles, whereas CCOs and OSP staff reported the highest scores across all dimensions. Similarly, staff working in Community Corrections offices reported significantly higher scores on all measures compared to those working in correctional centres. Staff with shorter tenures ($\leq$ 5 years) also reported significantly higher scores on organisational fairness, teamwork climate, job satisfaction and commitment, perceptions of management, and safety climate compared to those with longer tenures.

Perceptions of teamwork climate and working conditions significantly varied with age, with younger staff ($\leq$ 25 years) and those in the $\geq$ 66 years age groups reporting higher scores on these dimensions. There were no significant differences in perceptions of organisational fairness, job satisfaction and commitment, perceptions of management or safety climate across different age groups.

In terms of gender, female staff reported significantly higher scores across job satisfaction and commitment and safety climate compared to their male counterparts. There were no significant differences in perceptions of organisational fairness, teamwork climate, perceptions of management or working conditions as a function of gender.

For staff working in correctional centres, those in minimum security settings reported significantly higher scores on most dimensions of organisational climate (except organisational fairness and job satisfaction and commitment) compared to those in medium or maximum-security settings. Additionally, staff in male-only centres reported significantly better working conditions and safety climate scores compared to those in female-only or mixed-gender centres. There were no differences in staff perceptions of organisational fairness or other dimensions of safety attitudes based on the gender of inmates housed at the centre.

Do staff perceptions of organisational fairness predict various safety attitudes dimensions?

A series of hierarchical regression analyses further examined the relationship between staff perceptions of organisational fairness and each of the safety attitudes dimensions while controlling for individual and organisational factors (See Table 8). Age, gender, tenure, and organisational context were entered in Step 1, and organisational fairness was introduced in Step 2. Due to the substantial overlap between staff location and staff role, we specified models to include staff location only as our primary index of organisational context.

After adjusting for the individual and organisational factors, organisational fairness was positively associated with all dimensions of safety attitudes. Specifically, the R-squared values increased significantly in Step 2 compared to Step 1 for all safety attitudes dimensions, indicating that the inclusion of organisational fairness substantially improved the model's explanatory power.

Table 6. Independent samples t–tests and on–way ANOVAs comparing organisational fairness and scores on safety attitudes dimensions by individual factors

	M (SD)					
	Organisational fairness	Teamwork climate	Job satisfaction and commitment	Perceptions of management	Working conditions	Safety climate
Age, years						
≤25	37.88 (12.06)	20.06 (6.51)	21.15 (3.42)	26.82 (8.41)	15.70 (5.16)	26.24 (6.03)
26–35	33.52 (13.70)	18.03 (6.11)	19.86 (4.57)	24.03 (8.91)	14.48 (5.37)	24.19 (6.72)
36–45	33.13 (13.43)	18.49 (6.38)	20.39 (4.35)	24.27 (9.34)	14.72 (5.40)	24.71 (6.67)
46–55	33.56 (12.57)	18.43 (6.07)	20.37 (4.18)	24.32 (8.89)	15.20 (5.21)	24.72 (6.17)
56–65	33.71 (12.50)	19.46 (5.78)	19.95 (4.44)	24.59 (8.72)	15.47 (4.91)	24.70 (6.54)
≥66	35.84 (13.80)	21.30 (6.24)	21.84 (3.94)	26.62 (8.37)	17.83 (4.25)	26.78 (5.78)
F, p–value	1.02, p = .40	**3.41, p = .005**	2.13, p = .06	1.08, p = .37	**3.55, p = .003**	1.48, p = .19
Gender						
Male	33.47 (12.39)	18.71 (6.18)	19.50 (4.53)	24.33 (8.63)	15.11 (5.23)	24.46 (6.41)
Female	34.84 (13.67)	18.97 (6.10)	21.43 (3.62)	25.24 (9.26)	15.42 (5.21)	25.36 (6.52)
t, p–value	−1.83, p = .07	−.72, p =.47	**−8.35, p < .001**	−1.79, p = .07	−1.04, p = .30	**−2.43, p = .02**
Tenure, years						
≤5	35.93 (12.97)	19.31 (6.27)	20.98 (3.88)	25.84 (8.80)	15.24 (5.39)	25.31 (6.40)
6–10	33.37 (13.12)	18.61 (6.60)	20.00 (4.49)	23.82 (9.25)	14.55 (5.50)	24.45 (6.85)
11–20	32.31 (13.31)	17.91 (6.17)	19.64 (4.79)	23.18 (9.14)	14.39 (5.21)	23.68 (6.24)
≥21	31.53 (11.87)	18.79 (6.05)	19.04 (4.61)	23.67 (8.59)	15.50 (5.01)	24.66 (6.11)
F, p–value	**8.07, p < .001**	**2.87, p = .04**	**9.71, p < .001**	**6.77, p < .001**	2.13, p = .10	**3.69, p = .01**

Table 7. Independent samples t–tests and one–way ANOVAs comparing organisational fairness and scores on safety attitudes dimensions by organisational factors

	M (SD)					
	Organisational fairness	Teamwork climate	Job satisfaction and commitment	Perceptions of management	Working conditions	Safety climate
Staff role						
CCOs	36.01 (13.66)	19.95 (5.74)	21.24 (3.42)	26.80 (9.16)	16.91 (4.93)	26.74 (6.48)
COs	30.33 (1181)	17.55 (6.15)	18.80 (4.72)	21.93 (8.32)	13.89 (5.18)	22.98 (6.32)
CSI	36.53 (12.58)	18.91 (6.18)	20.54 (3.96)	26.48 (8.48)	15.29 (5.00)	25.12 (5.88)
OSP	37.24 (13.48)	19.83 (6.09)	21.60 (3.39)	26.66 (8.81)	15.71 (5.10)	26.19 (6.03)
F, p–value	**27.21, p <.001**	**15.10, p <.001**	**50.42, p <.001**	**33.22, p <.001**	**25.60, p <.001**	**31.68, p <.001**
Staff location						
Custody	32.76 (12.75)	18.23 (6.20)	19.74 (4.48)	23.59 (8.70)	14.51 (5.20)	24.06 (6.35)
Community	36.33 (13.64)	20.15 (5.72)	21.79 (3.49)	27.09 (9.24)	16.90 (5.94)	26.72 (6.46)
t, p–value	**−4.09, p < .001**	**−5.07, p < .001**	**−8.44, p < .001**	**−6.11, p < .001**	**−7.17, p < .001**	**−6.42, p < .001**
Security levels§						
Minimum	34.57 (12.50)	19.30 (6.09)	20.11 (4.55)	25.28 (8.57)	15.32 (4.98)	25.02 (6.35)
Medium	33.32 (12.26)	18.05 (5.25)	20.22 (3.75)	23.51 (7.53)	14.79 (4.82)	24.66 (5.25)
Maximum	32.53 (12.91)	17.98 (6.35)	19.67 (4.56)	23.34 (8.91)	14.19 (5.31)	23.70 (6.52)
F, p–value	2.03, p = .13	**3.79, p = .02**	1.36, p = .26	**4.07, p = .02**	**4.93, p = .02**	**3.95, p = .02**
Correctional centres by inmates' gender§						
Male only	33.29 (12.72)	18.45 (6.14)	20.03 (4.32)	23.95 (8.57)	14.80 (5.13)	24.49 (6.23)
Female only	32.20 (11.46)	18.00 (5.66)	19.59 (3.81)	22.49 (8.02)	14.42 (4.94)	23.54 (5.97)
Mixed	32.92 (13.14)	17.89 (6.30)	19.38 (4.97)	23.81 (9.11)	13.78 (5.33)	23.26 (6.60)
F, p–value	.23, p = .79	.71, p = .49	1.77, p = .17	.75, p = .47	**2.99, p = .05**	**3.20, p = .04**

Note. §Participants from correctional centres only (n = 918)

Table 8. Hierarchical regression analysis examining the relationship between organisational fairness and each dimension of the safety attitudes

	Teamwork climate		Job satisfaction and commitment		Perceptions of management		Working conditions		Safety climate	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	β
Age	.19**	.11**	.16**	.11**	.14**	.04*	.16**	.08*	.12**	.04
Gender	−.01	−.02	.18**	.18**	.01	−.01	−.01	−.02	.03	.02
Tenure	−.14**	−.02	−.16**	−.09*	−.17**	−.01	−.06	.06*	−.09*	.03
Organisational context	.15**	.08*	.15**	.11**	.17**	.08**	.21**	.14**	.17**	.10*
Organisational fairness	–	.65**	–	.39**	–	.85**	–	.63**	–	.63**
R^2	.05	.46	.10	.25	.05	.74	.06	.44	.04	.42
$\triangle R^2$	.05	.41	.10	.15	.05	.69	.06	.38	.04	.38
F	14.78**	204.09**	32.72**	79.61**	16.50**	698.36**	18.78**	194.34**	13.53**	175.57**

Notes. Gender (0 = male; 1 = female); Organisational context (0 = correctional centres; 1 = Community Corrections Offices); β = Standardised beta coefficients; *$p < .01$; **$p < .001$

DISCUSSION

Creating a positive workplace culture within correctional settings requires an understanding of how staff perceive their organisation. To address this need, CSNSW has developed a strategic framework that includes measuring and responding to staff perceptions of key dimensions of their organisational climate. The current study supports this aim by examining the reliability and validity of context-specific measurement tools for assessing staff perceptions of organisational climate. This study also conducts an initial exploration of the relationships between constructs of organisational fairness and safety attitudes, and how staff perceptions vary across individual- and organisational-level factors.

Validation of measures

The validity of the adapted organisational fairness measure was assessed through a factor analysis process, which provided preliminary support for its suitability in the current context within CSNSW. The results indicated that the organisational fairness scale exhibited satisfactory psychometric properties, with strong factor loadings, high internal consistency, and a robust single-factor structure.

Similarly, the factor structure of the modified Safety Attitudes Questionnaire was examined, resulting in a five-factor structure. The original SAQ was adapted to align with the specific operational context and priorities of CSNSW, necessitating the inclusion of additional items to address strategic priorities and the exclusion of those that were either less relevant or measured through alternate means and methods within the organisation. The initial analysis therefore included items from both the original SAQ and bespoke items tailored to the CSNSW context. The iterative process of factor analysis led to the removal of items with low loadings on a single factor or high cross-loadings on multiple factors, ultimately resulting in a refined instrument with good psychometric properties and high internal consistency that captures various dimensions of safety attitudes among CSNSW staff. While some factors in our adapted instrument may overlap conceptually with SAQ dimensions, they remain distinct in their focus and scope, reflecting the unique context and needs of CSNSW. These findings provide preliminary evidence for the

validity and reliability of measures utilised for assessing the organisational climate among correctional staff.

Associations between organisational fairness safety attitudes

A number of our analyses indicated that there were significant positive correlations between perceptions of organisational fairness and various dimensions of safety attitudes. Notably, perceptions of organisational fairness consistently exhibited the strongest positive correlation with perceptions of management, highlighting an important interplay between fair organisational practices and good management in staff perceptions of an organisation. By comparison, perceptions of organisational fairness consistently had the weakest associations with job satisfaction and commitment.

Hierarchical regression analyses further revealed that staff perceptions of organisational fairness were significantly associated with all dimensions of safety attitudes, even after controlling for individual and organisational variables such as age, gender, tenure, and organisational context. While individual and organisational factors were associated with all dimensions of safety attitudes, to varying degrees, perceptions of organisational fairness demonstrated the strongest associations with all dimensions, indicating that staff members who perceive their organisation as fair are more likely to report positive perceptions of teamwork climate, job satisfaction and commitment, support from management, working conditions, and safety climate. Recognising that these findings indicate a covarying relationship rather than a causal one, it is plausible that perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes influence each other reciprocally rather than there being a clear cause and effect.

Staff experiences as a function of roles and locations

Further analyses revealed significant variation in perceptions of organisational climate across organisational contexts. Staff who worked in more collaborative or therapeutic roles with people in prison or under supervision (i.e., OSP, CCOs) reported more positive perceptions across all dimensions of safety attitudes. The observed differences in perceptions across staff groups, particularly the consistently lower scores among COs compared to staff in other roles, underscored the unique challenges faced by frontline staff in custodial settings. Research suggests that frontline staff, particularly those in security-related custodial roles, may perceive organisational practices differently due to their exposure to higher levels of stress and potential safety risks (Griffin & Curcuruto, 2016). These findings raise important considerations about how different staff groups engage with and respond to their environment, with lead on effects for prevailing organisational climates and cultures. For example, the lower perceptions of organisational fairness and safety attitudes among COs may not only impact their individual experiences but also the broader prison social climate (Beijersbergen et al., 2015; van Ginneken et al., 2020), which, in turn, could have implications for producing environmental conditions in prison that are conducive to rehabilitative objectives.

Our results also indicated that facility type and security level were also associated with experiences of organisational climate. Staff in correctional centres, and especially medium- and maximum-security facilities, consistently reported lower scores compared to those in Community Corrections offices or minimum-security facilities. Previous research has also indicated that higher security levels in prisons can be correlated with increased operational challenges and pressures (Gordon et al., 2013; Palmen et al., 2022). A range of factors may

be relevant to these findings, including differences in environment, inmate cohorts, work duties and routines, and management structures, among others. Recognising these complexities and understanding how varying contextual factors affect staff experiences may have important implications for targeted strategies aimed at improving perceptions of the organisational climate across different organisational settings.

Other sources of variation in staff experiences

Analyses further revealed significant differences in perceptions of organisational fairness and various dimensions of safety attitudes across individual demographic and work profiles. For example, a U-shaped relationship between age and staff perceptions of teamwork climate and working conditions emerged, indicating that younger staff ($\leq$ 25 years) and those nearing retirement age ($\geq$ 66 years) may have more positive views due to different expectations and experiences compared to staff in the middle age ranges. Younger staff may bring enthusiasm and optimism, while older staff might have developed better coping strategies and resilience over their careers, leading to more positive perceptions (Inceoglu et al., 2012; Ng & Feldman, 2008). Additionally, the inverse relationship between length of tenure and factors such as organisational fairness, teamwork climate, job satisfaction and commitment, perceptions of management, and safety climate suggests that newer staff may initially view their organisation more favourably before encountering potential workplace challenges over time (Boswell et al., 2009). These findings align with Dobrow et al.'s (2018) study, which shows that job satisfaction increases with age but decreases with tenure, suggesting that those who start in their role at a younger age and have been with the organisation for longer feel less satisfied with their work

compared to those who may take up that occupation during a later stage in life.

In addition, female staff consistently reported more positive perceptions of job satisfaction and commitment, and safety climate compared to male staff. This finding aligns with Gyekye and Salminen's (2011) study, indicating that female employees demonstrated more positive perceptions of workplace safety and exhibited greater compliance with safety procedures compared to their male counterparts. However, these effects were limited after adjusting for other covariates, indicating that other factors may play a more substantial role in shaping staff perceptions.

Strengths and limitations

Some limitations of the current study should be noted. The measures utilised for understanding organisational climate were adapted to meet the needs and objectives of CSNSW, including both the inclusion and exclusion of items from otherwise established measures. While the modified measures underwent preliminary validation and reliability analyses, it is important to note there may be subsequent challenges in relating these constructs to existing literature that refers to the original, unmodified versions of the measures. The reliance on self-report surveys may also introduce potential response biases as they depend on participants' subjective perceptions and interpretations of the survey items. As previously mentioned, the cross-sectional and correlational design of the study limits our ability to establish causality between constructs of interest, and it is likely that there are complex and iterative bilateral relationships between individual and environmental factors that influence how a given staff member experiences the correctional organisational climate. Despite these limitations, an important strength of the study was the ability to draw on a large sample of CSNSW staff, which enhances the study's statistical power and generalisability of findings, allowing for more

robust and reliable conclusions about the factors associated with perceptions of organisational fairness and safety culture within various correctional contexts. This inclusivity ensures that the findings are more likely to accurately reflect the varied attitudes and perceptions present across staff who have different roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

Conclusions

CSNSW objectives to improve staff culture necessitate empirical assessment of and research into how staff perceive their organisation. This study offers insights into the valid measurement of organisational fairness and safety attitudes, as well as the underlying constructs and their inter-relationships, within the correctional context of CSNSW. Establishing a positive organisational climate—achieved through fair procedures, information sharing, and respectful treatment—is understood to benefit both individual staff and the success of the broader organisation. Aligning with CSNSW's strategic objectives, the ongoing monitoring and analysis of staff perceptions of the organisational climate is intended to help guide efforts to build a supportive and safe correctional organisation.

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