

Cynicism as a Mediator of Relations between Job Stress and Work Alienation: A Study from a Developing Country – Turkey

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of job stress and cynicism on work alienation in nurses. Three distinct contributions beyond the existing literature are examined. First, cynicism is positioned as a mediator in the relationship between job stress and work alienation. Second, the differences in job stress, cynicism and work alienation according to demographic variables are investigated.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative survey was carried out among the one of the largest public hospitals in Istanbul, Turkey. The data from 199 nurses was collected via surveys and SPSS Statistics version 18.0 and these were employed as statistical techniques to carry out the objectives of the study.

Findings: It was determined that there was a significant relationship between job stress, cynicism and work alienation. According to the aim of this research it was concluded that cynicism is a partial mediator in the relationship between job stress and work alienation. The results indicate that cynicism and work alienation on the part of the participants differs according to organization seniority.

Originality/value: The main objective of this study is to focus on the problem of job stress, cynicism and work alienation. Few studies have been carried out on these topics in the health sector in the context of a developing country. The original nature of this research is that it fills in the gaps in this topic. The health care sector was selected for this study for a number of reasons. First, health care is one of the most important and rapidly growing sectors in Turkey. Second, it is a huge economic power in the Turkish economy. Third, a literature review demonstrates that job stress, cynicism and work alienation are important topics for success in the health sector. Thus, it is expected that this research will contribute to the success of the health sector.

Keywords: Job Stress, Cynicism, Work Alienation, Health Sector,

Nurse

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Introduction

The health sector is one of the growing sectors in the Turkish economy; for this reason, many professionals attempt to solve the problems that are inherent in this sector while also exploring the ways in which to increase success in the sector (Sulu, Ceylan, 2010). Job stress plays an important role in the success of any sector. Almost every problem that people come across in their life is related to stress. There is increasing evidence that nurses experience job stress in their working life which causes physical and mental problems. It was discovered that job stress not only affect nurses at work, but also their social life, including families and friends. This has also been established by reviews of public opinion or news in the media. The job stress level of nurses also affects the success of their work (Moustaka, Constantinidis, 2010). Job stress can cause an increase in issues such as cynicism and work alienation. In other words, cynicism and work alienation could increase due to job stress, as cynicism includes negative employee attitudes and negative behavioral outcomes of employees. Work alienation means that employees become isolated from the work and work activities (Ceylan, Sulu, 2010; Brandes, 1997). Moreover, both cynicism and work alienation have an impact on explaining the prosocial behavior of people in organizations (Poole, 1978). Thus, it is very important to understand the sources of job stress, cynicism and work alienation for nurses and to propose strategies to reduce or cope with it. Nurses, as individuals, deal with job stress, cynicism and work alienation in different ways. Some of them are able to solve these problems. However, others demonstrate negative behavior. For this reason, there is a need to discover what the impact of job stress on cynicism and work alienation is in the Turkish health sector. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of value in academic research as an example from a developing country like Turkey.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Job Stress

Even though there have been many views about the stress in the literature, researchers do not have common definition of stress (Parker and Decotis, 1983). It is a topic that was originally related to physics. However, over time, the idea has been transferred to psychology (Azman, et al., 2013). Stress is "the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response" (Rehman, et al., 2012). Furthermore, stress is a situation in which demands are made on the individual to perform duties that threaten to be beyond the skills and materials of the individual (Mansoor, et al., 2011).

Even if there is no common definition of stress, job stress is "any characteristics of the job environment which pose a threat to the individual" (Beehr, Newman, 1978). In other words, job stress is generally defined as a "situation in which the individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand on being, having, and/or doing what he or she desires and for which the outcomes are perceived as important and uncertain" (Chen, et al., 2011). That is, job stress is an individual psychological and physiological phenomenon that occurs when the individual is uncomfortable and when undesirable threats occur in the work environment (Azman, et al., 2013). People who work intensely with other people are more likely to be stressed. Professions that particularly suffer from stress are those in the field of "medicine, social work, nursing, teaching, public safety, child care and occupational therapy" (Suresh, et al., 2013).

There are different factors that make jobs stressful; these are known as job stressors (Mansoor, et al., 2011). Job stressors include lack of social support, autonomy (Chen, et al., 2011), role conflict (Azman,et.al.,2013) role ambiguity (Rehman, et al., 2012), lack of job satisfaction (Mansoor, et al., 2011) or organizational policies (Zhang, et al.,



2011). In addition to this, time pressure, unfair rewarding for employees, responsibility for others, career progress, leadership style and organizational structure can all lead to employee job stress (Hsieh and Wang, 2012).

In general, stress outcomes include psychological and physical symptoms and complaints (Ramasundaram and Ramasundaram, 2011). Job stress can lower employees' performance and job satisfaction (Azman, et al., 2013; Rehman, et al., 2012). Job stress is directly related to absenteeism, turnover, violence in work, and employee exhaustion (Ramasundaram, Ramasundaram, 2011), cynicism (Tükeltürk, et al., 2012) and work alienation (Michaels, et al., 1988).

One research was carried out on 674 nurses; this study claimed that job stress is related to life stress (Johnston, et al., 2006). The research findings, made in universities in Malaysia, indicates that there is a positive relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload and job stress (Azman, et al., 2013). Another study, which was made on 298 hotel supervisors in Taiwan, verified that task characteristics and workload are major job stress factors. According to research, one of the best ways to solve this problem is to develop coping strategies; that is, to set new strategies to solve the problem (Hu and Cheng, 2010). Research carried out on 319 kindergarten teachers claims that leisure activities decrease job stress and increase the quality of life (Kuo and Sun, 2011). Another study, carried out on 220 policemen, indicates that policemen are more stressed because of time pressure, not spending time with their families, political pressure and a lack of facilities. To solve the problem, the researcher claims that making changes in the organization and developing training programs could decrease the level of job stress for policemen (Suresh, et al., 2013).

1.2. Cynicism

Cynicism has a long history that can be traced back to the philosopher Antisthenes in the 4th century B.C. in ancient Greece (Bedeian, 2007). Goldner et.al. firstly studied topics of cynicism and its consequences to the organizations and the employess. The study focusing on production of cynical knowledge (Goldner, Ritti, & Ference, 1977). Nowadays, it is a topic with many different aspects and applications, especially in social science disciplines, such as organizational behavior etc. (Cole, et al., 2006; Stanley, et al., 2005). Psychological contracts theory and affective events theory are the basis of cynicism. In psychological contracts theory, employees create an assumption of their employer that is dependent on general views about how organizations ought to act or what they have previously experienced. On the other hand, affective events theory asserts that work events can have an influence on work attitudes like frustration (Brown and Cregan, 2008).

In prior studies, cynicism has been defined as "an attitude distinguished by a 'dislike for and distrust of others'". This is "a generalized and specific attitude involving frustration, disillusionment, and negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution or object(s)" (Andersson and Bateman, 1997). However, cynicism or social cynicism is different from organizational cynicism, as the former is related to the social world and not with employee(s) (Leung, et al., 2010).

Organizational cynicism is defined by Dean that is a "negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect" (Dean, et al., 1998). Organizational cynicism is concerned with the employees' belief that their employers have a lack of integrity (Leung, et al., 2010). In



short, organizational cynicism refers to a distrust or doubt about the management (Li, 2011).

The concept of organizational cynicism has "cognitive, affective and behavioral" components. (Stanley, et al., 2005; Tükeltürk et al., 2012). With the *cognitive* dimension, an organizational employee feels that there is a lack of integrity in the organization. They believe that their personal values and aims are not in harmony with those of the organization. The *affective* dimension consists of the employee's powerful emotional reactions towards the organization. When employees think about the organization they feel negative emotions, such as anger or disgust. The *behavioral* dimension consists of employees' negative behavioral tendencies towards the organization. In other words, this is the expression of powerful criticisms about the organization, which can take various forms, such as propounding that there is a lack of intimacy and honesty in the organization (Dean, et al., 1998).

There are some factors that influence organizational cynicism. Some of these factors are too much stress, inadequate social support, increased organizational complexity, lack of communication (Tükeltürk, et al., 2012), workload, role conflict, low autonomy, low assertiveness, top management's credibility (Kothandaraman, Agnihotri, 2012), top management salaries, poor organizational performance or layoffs (Nair and Kamalanabhan, 2010). Perceived violations of the psychological employment contract or organization experiences with an employer can significantly influence cynicism about a new employer (Johnson and O'leary-Kelly, 2003). Leadership skills, organizational support, managerial incompetence, trust in management and work environment have been found to be predictors of cynicism (Cole, et al., 2006). Some evidence indicates that employees' emotional reactions, unfair interpersonal treatment (Dolen, et al., 2012) and employees' hopelessness about their future can predict cynicism (Pugh, et al., 2003). Meanwhile, employee behavior, such as withholding effort, acting rudely to others, stealing or covering up mistake play a key role in cynicism (Evans, et al., 2011).

Cynicism can cause important negative outcomes, such as employee resistance to organizational change, reduced support from co-workers and can result in negative feelings, such as disappointment or hopelessness toward others at work (Cole, et al., 2006). Cynical employees are likely to have low levels of organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior (Johnson and O'leary-Kelly, 2003) and performance (Bommer, et al., 2005). Cynicism is related to organizational identification (Bedeian, 2007), turnover intentions, absenteeism (Dolen, et al., 2012), less motivation and interpersonal conflict (Nair and Kamalanabhan, 2010).

The topic of cynicism has been discussed according to different topics in different studies. One of the research results demonstrates that cynicism is a barrier to change and has negative consequences in employees' commitment, satisfaction and motivation (Reichers, et al., 1997). Another study, carried out on bank employees, indicates that affective cynicism fully mediates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and psychological contract breach (Johnson and O'leary-Kelly, 2003). A research carried out on 600 Swedish people working at a medical technology company claims that the emotion experienced mediated the relationships between employee cynicism, psychological hardiness and perceived supervisor support (Cole, et al., 2006). 105 employees from different organizations took part in a study, the results of which demonstrate that cynicism decreases the quality of leader-member relationships, job enrichment, job satisfaction and colleague support (Srivastava and Adams, 2011).



1.3. Work Alienation

The term alienation which refers to a person's separation from the body was first used in ancient Greece (Temel, et al., 2013). Work alienation has become an important topic in studying the sociological and psychological perspective of organizational effectiveness. The aim is to increase the quality of working life both within and outside the organizations (Kanungo, 1983).

The theoretical background of work alienation can be traced back to Marx (1844) and Weber (1930). Marx insisted that workers neglect the work processes that are given to them because they do not have the chance to control the process. For this reason, work alienation occurs (Seybolt and Gruenfeld, 1976). Weber's idea is similar to Marx's; he also claims that work alienation is the result of working conditions (Kanungo, 1990).

Work alienation is related to work conditions that isolate employees from work and work activities (Cheung, 2008). Work alienation reflects a position in which an employee does not care much about their job, in which they expend little energy and work for extrinsic rewards (Michaels, et al., 1988; Mohan, 2013). Work alienation happens when employees think that the work environment does not satisfy their needs, values or well-being (Sarros, et al., 2002). There are some synonyms for alienation; boredom, emotional and psychological withdrawal or negative affective experiences (Isralowitz, et al., 2012).

In Seeman's article the author asserts that there are five dimensions in work alienation. These are powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, meaninglessness and self-alienation (self-estrangement) (Sarros, et al., 2002; Temel, et al., 2013). *Powerlessness* is a lack of job autonomy; if employees cannot control their work processes, powerlessness occurs (Sarros, et al., 2002). *Normlessness* means acting inappropriately to reach aims and a framework of attitudes that has not been determined by society. This will occur when norms or codes of conduct do not lead to efficient behavior in relation to individual aims (Valadbigi and Ghobadi, 2011). *Isolation* means being emotionally distant from the organization and other employees. (Ceylan and Sulu, 2011). *Meaninglessness* occurs when employees believe that they do not have an important role in working activities (Sarros, et al., 2002). *Self-estrangement* occurs when employees' work does not satisfy their extrinsic needs (Valadbigi and Ghobadi, 2011).

Bureaucracy, focusing on technology, conflict, employee job dissatisfaction (Temel, et al., 2013), life satisfaction, burnout, (Cheung, 2008), stress, lack of organizational commitment (Michaels, et al., 1988) and low participation in decision making (Sulu, et al., 2010) are causes of work alienation. The result of work alienation includes a decrease in quality, production, cooperation, motivation, organizational commitment, organizational identification and job involvement, absenteeism, feeling of meaninglessness in work, sabotage of work activities, change in job position, increase in unethical activities, feeling exhausted and health problems, separation between employees, lack of desire to reach organizational goals and failure to carry out responsibilities (Mohan, 2013; Sulu, et al., 2010; Valadbigi and Ghobadi, 2011).

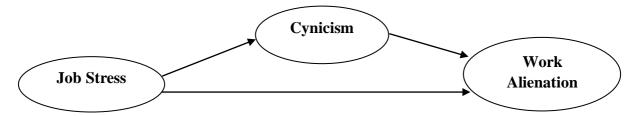
The topic of work alienation is discussed from different aspects in different studies. One research indicates that professionalism and autonomy reduce both cynicism and work alienation. The research sample is on policemen; it is claimed that policemen experience cynicism and work alienation due to the nature of their job (Poole, et al., 1978). Using data from 215 salespeople, another study indicates that role ambiguity, role conflict and organizational commitment decrease work alienation (Michaels, et. al., 1988). The data in this study, collected from 349 employees, demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between work alienation, work ethic, locus of control, work self-discipline and affective organizational commitment (Hirschfeldi and Feild, 2000). Using data from



383 health care experts who work in hospitals in Istanbul, the results demonstrate that work alienation partially mediates the relationship between procedural injustice and job stress (Ceylan and Sulu, 2010). The data collected from 110 blue-collar workers in Kyrgyzstan indicate that there is a negative relationship between work alienation, trust, job performance and productivity (Özbek, 2011).

2. Research Model and Hypothesis

The research model was designed according to the purpose of study, and is given below:



The research hypothesis can be seen below:

1H1: Cynicism significantly mediates the relationship between job stress and work alienation.

2H1: Job stress, cynicism and work alienation differ according to demographic variables

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Procedure

In this study, data were collected from nurses working at one of the largest public hospitals in Istanbul, Turkey. 199 nurses in total work in the hospital. The data was obtained from 161 nurses; that is, the response rate was approximately 81%. These data were collected by the researcher by visiting the hospital. For this reason, the researcher was easily able to determine the problems of the nurses.

All of the participants were woman. 52% of the nurses were married, and %41% of them had children. Their ages ranged from 27% at under 25, 32% at 26 to 30, 19% at 31 to 35, 15% at 36 to 40, and 7% at 41 and above. 50% of the nurses worked in the operating room, 28% worked in the internal medicine department, while 22% worked in the laboratory medicine department. The number of years that the participants had been involved in the job was 34% at 1 to 3 years, 19% at 4 to 6 years, 10% at 7 to 9 years, 37% at 10 years or more. The number of years that the participants had been involved in this hospital ranged from 65% at 1 to 3 years, 20% at 4 to 6 years, 11% at 7 to 9 years and 4% at 10 years or longer.

3.2. Instruments

Independent Variable as Job Stress: Job stress was measured via the Job Stress Scale by Parker and Decotiis (Parker and Decotiis, 1983). This scale includes 13 items. However, a shortened version was used by Nair in this study, and includes 9 items (Nair, 2007).

Moderating Variable as Cynicism: Cynicism was measured via the scale which was developed by Brandes (1997) and consists of 14 items.

Dependent Variable as Work Alienation: Work alienation was measured on the scale developed by Hirschfeldi et al. (2000). It includes 10 items. This scale is adapted by Maddi's (1979) scale.



Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree.

3.3. Validity-Reliability

According to item correlation analysis, no items were eliminated from any of the scales. In order to indicate the distinctiveness of those scales, factor analysis was conducted. The job stress scale loaded on a single factor, as in the original scale, and the total explained variance was 61. The cynicism scale total explained variance was 80, and this scale reflected three different components, as in the original scale. The work alienation scale was also loaded on a single factor as in the original scale and the total explained variance was 49. All of the items were loaded strongly and distinctively on separate factors, without any exceptions; this meant that no items were dropped from the analysis. According to the reliability analysis, the reliability of the job stress, cynicism and work alienation scales was 0.92, 0.95 and 0.88 respectively.

4. Results

4.1. The Levels of Job Stress, Cynicism, Work Alienation

The means, standard deviations and correlations of job stress, cynicism and work alienation scores are illustrated in Table-1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2
1.Job Stress	3.35	1.04		
2.Cynicism	3.53	1.06	0.727^{**}	
3. Work Alienation	3.02	0.96	0.633^{**}	0.744^{**}

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

Table-1 reveals that job stress, cynicism and work alienation are statistically meaningful correlations for nurses. Moreover, the interactions between the variables were evaluated using Pearson correlation coefficients. The relationship between job stress and cynicism was strongly positive and significant (r=.727, p<.00) (Durmuş, et al., 2011). Job stress and work alienation were also medium level positively and significantly correlated (r = .633, p< .00) (Durmuş, et al., 2011). There was also a strongly positive and significant relationship between cynicism and work alienation (r=.744, p<.00) (Durmuş, et al., 2011).

4.2. Regression Analysis: Measuring Mediating Effect

In order to measure the mediating effect, a regression analysis was applied in three steps by Baron & Kenney (1986). As shown in Table-2, according to this approach, for the mediation test of the first step, job stress and work alienation were significantly related. For the second step, job stress and cynicism were significantly related. For the third step, cynicism and work alienation were significantly related, and the relationship between job stress and work alienation reduced in strength under the presence of cynicism. In other words, job stress in work alienation, when controlling for cynicism is reduced (β in step-3 which equals 0,196 is less than β in step-1 which equals 0,633), then 1H1 is supported and cynicism is a partial mediator of the relationship between job stress and work alienation.

^{*} Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)



Table 2: Hypotheses-1 Steps Regression Analysis Hypotheses 1-First Step Regression Analysis

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Dependent Variable: Work Alienation								
Independent Variable:	Beta	t	p					
Job Stress	0,633	10,315	0,000					
R =0,633; AdjustedR ² =0,397;	$\mathbf{F} = 106,395;$	p =0,000						
Hypotheses 1-Second Step Regression Analysis								
Dependent Variable Cynicism								
Independent Variable:	Beta	t	р					
Job Stress	0,727	13,350	0,000					
$R=0,727$; Adjusted $R^2=0,526$;	F =178,211;	$\mathbf{p} = 0.000$						
Hypotheses 1-Third Step Regression Analysis								
Dependent Variable: Work Alienation								
Independent Variable:	Beta	t	р					
Job Stress	0,196	2,587	0,011					
Cynicism	0,601	7,921	0,000					
$R=0,756$; Adjusted $R^2=0,566$	$\mathbf{F} = 105,224$	$\mathbf{p} = 0.000$						

4.3. Analysis of Job Stress, Cynicism and Work Alienation on Demographic Variables

The participants' job stress, cynicism and work alienation were evaluated according to demographic variables. A number of variance analyses were conducted. No differences were found in job stress, cynicism or work alienation according to age, marital, status, having children, relevant department or job seniority in the t-test or in the ANOVA analysis.

The result of this study clarifies that cynicism [F(4.460),p<.005] significantly differs according to organizational seniority. Cynicism in the 4 to 6 years of organizational seniority group (M=3.81, SD=1.04) was significantly higher than in the 10 years or more of organizational seniority (M=2.42, SD=0.79). Thus, as the organizational seniority of participants' increases, cynicism decreases. Furthermore, it was discovered that work alienation [F(3.595),p<.015] significantly differs according to organizational seniority. Work alienation for employees who were in the 4 to 6 years range (M=3.33, SD=1.00) was significantly higher than the 7 to 9 years of organization seniority (M=2.54, SD=0.70). Therefore, as the organizational seniority of participants' increases, work alienation decreases. 2H1 is supported according to these results.

A summary of the results of the variance analysis of job stress, cynicism and work alienation depending on demographic variables is given in Table-3 below:

Table 3: Summary of the Variance Analysis Results

Variable	Age	Marital Status	Having Child	Department	Job Seniority	Org. Seniority
Job Stress	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cynicism	X	X	X	X	X	$\sqrt{}$
Work Alienation	X	X	X	X	X	\checkmark

5. Conclusion and Limitations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the mediating role of cynicism on the relationship between job stress and work alienation. Additionally, the differences of job stress, cynicism and work alienation according to demographic variables were



examined. It was discovered that there is a medium level positive relationship between job stress and work alienation, which means that work alienation for nurses increases if their stress level increases. Another result of this study demonstrates that cynicism has a strong positive effect on work alienation. In other words, work alienation increases as cynicism increases. Furthermore, the results revealed that there is a strongly positive relationship between job stress and cynicism, which means that as the job stress level for nurse increases, cynicism increases.

In this study, it was discovered that cynicism is a partial mediator in the relationship between job stress and work alienation. In other words, this study provides evidence that job stress and cynicism influence work alienation for nurses. The result of this research suggests that cynicism is a significant variable in the job stress and work alienation relationship.

If organizations want to decrease work alienation, it would be better for them to decrease job stress and cynicism in the working environment. Creating a good atmosphere for employees, such as an increase in the quality of communication between employees and managers, would decrease job stress, cynicism and work alienation. At the same time, encouraging managers to behave fairly would also decrease job stress, cynicism and work alienation. Organizations should also establish organizational policies and procedures according to the needs and wants of employees. Other solutions could emerge from the human resources department, such as hiring optimistic people; this could be a positive move to solving problems, as optimistic people have positive feelings that not only positively affect themselves, but also others in the organization. Another solution to these problems again is from the human resources department side; this would be defining more precisely the job description of employees and caring about the employees, listening to their problems, not only in their working life, but also in their daily life and trying to find solutions for them.

The result of this research indicates that job stress, cynicism and work alienation are not differentiated according to age, marital status, having children, relevant department or job seniority. On the other hand, cynicism and work alienation differs according to organizational seniority. The results demonstrate that as the participants' organizational seniority increases cynicism and work alienation decreases. This could be explained by the fact that as time passes, nurses become accustomed to the hospital culture, policy, practices, managers, colleagues. Therefore cynicism and work alienation decrease as organizational seniority increases. For the hospitals, it would be beneficial for nurses who have higher organizational seniority to be employed. This also could be effect the performance of nurses who are more willing to work for the benefit of their hospitals.

It would be beneficial for the organizations or managers to focus on topics of job stress, cynicism and work alienation. Employees who have such problems are less likely to be able to work efficiently and effectively. For this reason, organizations or managers should try to find and eliminate the factors that cause job stress, cynicism and work alienation. Otherwise, organizations will not be able to reach their aims and goals. Moreover, the results or consequences of job stress, cynicism and work alienation are not only effect the working life. Furthermore, those cause physical and mental problems effect the both working and social life. In other words, those health issues lead to decrease quality of both social and working life.

The topic of job stress, cynicism and work alienation are correlated to eachother. That is, the consequences of those topics also have similarities. For instance, both topics have relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and employee motivation that contribute the success of individual and organizational performance. In other words, if the employees are satisfied,



committed or motivated with their jobs, this would increase both their performance and also organization performance.

One of the most important limitations for this study was that a single public hospital in Istanbul, Turkey was used, thus, perhaps not being able to provide enough variability. If these topics are taken into consideration with different sectors, or with different people working in different positions, the results might change. For future studies, other topics, such as organizational culture, climate, empowerment, autonomy, justice, reward and characteristics of employees could be taken into consideration by researchers.

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