

DETERMINANTS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A STUDY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IN IDEMILI NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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ABSTRACT

Effective governance depends on how well public institutions translate policies into real outcomes for citizens. In Nigeria, local government administration has often faced persistent challenges that limit its ability to deliver basic services effectively at the grassroots level. These difficulties are further compounded by ethical concerns within the public service. Therefore, this study examines the determinants of public servants' ethical behaviour in Idemili North Local Government Area when confronted with ethical dilemmas in service delivery. The study used a mixed-methods design. The population was 639,009 residents of Idemili North LGA, from which a sample of 384 survey respondents were selected through stratified random sampling and 11–20 interview participants chosen purposively across key stakeholder groups. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaire and in-depth interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical tools and thematic coding was used for qualitative responses. The study found that public servants in Idemili North Local Government Area had mixed but generally aligned views on how organizational culture and peer pressure influenced ethical decision-making, with many acknowledging their impact while others remained uncertain. It also showed that both factors significantly affected ethical behaviour, as a strong organizational culture tended to improve ethical conduct whereas peer pressure sometimes supported and sometimes weakened it. It was recommended that the local government strengthen ethical standards through clear codes of conduct, regular ethics training, transparent reward systems, and secure whistleblowing channels to promote accountability and integrity.

Key Words: Ethical Behaviour, Public Administration, Public Servants, Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Public administration occupies a central position in the governance architecture of modern states, where it functions as the machinery through which governmental intentions are translated into concrete actions. It embodies government in action and reflects the institutional processes through which public policies services that affect citizens' daily lives are formulated and implemented. Public administration contributes to improving societal well-being, addressing poverty and disease, and reducing social and economic inequalities through structured governance interventions (Keneth, Ibrahim, & Ibrahim, 2025). These roles extend to the provision of higher education and specialised training, thereby strengthening human capital development. Thus, public administration does not merely function as an administrative tool but also as a vehicle for achieving broader developmental goals.

In the Nigerian context, the local government system represents the third tier of governance and serves as the closest administrative structure to the grassroots. It is established to foster a sense of belonging among citizens by promoting development at the community level (Odesanya, 2026). This decentralised arrangement was intended to enhance participation, responsiveness, and service delivery. Despite these good intentions, there is a growing concern that local government areas have struggled to achieve the development objectives for which they were created due to various socio-political challenges (Odesanya, 2026). Since

Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, there has been a noticeable decline in the quality of service delivery at the local level. Essential services such as healthcare remain inadequate, access to potable water is limited, and primary education systems face severe challenges, including unpaid teachers and deteriorating infrastructure (Hassan, 2020). These conditions reflect deeper institutional weaknesses that affect the performance of local administrative systems. The persistence of the socio-economic and political challenges confronting local governments in Nigeria suggests that structural and behavioural factors may be influencing the effectiveness of governance at the grassroots level. One of the underlying issues associated with these challenges is the prevalence of weak ethical behaviour within the public service. Ethical conduct plays a fundamental role in shaping how public officials interpret and discharge their responsibilities to serve the public interest. Ethics in public service provides a framework for decision-making, although such interpretations may vary depending on individual values, political orientations, and institutional contexts (Arkansas State University, 2020).

Existing institutional frameworks in Nigeria's public service, including civil service rules and anti-corruption initiatives, are designed to promote accountability and integrity within the system. However, these frameworks operate within a complex political and social environment that often limits their effectiveness in curbing corruption (Hassan, 2020). This situation creates a gap between formal

regulations and actual practice, thereby weakening the enforcement of ethical standards.

The implications of weak ethical standards are evident in the patterns of behaviour observed within the Nigerian public service. Issues such as indiscipline, lateness to work, early closure, low commitment, and poor productivity as common features within the system (Akpan, 2019). These behaviours are often accompanied by more severe forms of misconduct, including embezzlement, lack of accountability, and unpatriotic practices. Public servants engage in bribery, contract inflation, and misappropriation of funds, contributing to Nigeria's high ranking on global corruption indices (Keneth, Ibrahim, & Ibrahim, 2025). Such practices undermine policy implementation and weaken governance structures, particularly at the local government level. The resulting development challenges, including weak governance and low economic growth, appear closely linked to these administrative failures. Within this context, the persistence of unethical behaviour among public servants raises critical concerns about the factors that influence such conduct, thereby necessitating a focused investigation into the determinants of ethical behaviour in Idemili North Local Government Area.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What factors influence public servants' decisions in Idemili North LGA when facing ethical dilemmas related to service delivery?

HYPOTHESIS

- Public servants in Idemili North are significantly influenced by organizational culture and peer pressure when making decisions about ethical dilemmas related to corruption and nepotism

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on ethical behaviour in public administration has been widely examined from both normative and functional perspectives, with early contributions establishing ethics as the foundational compass guiding administrative conduct. Agara and Olarinmoye (2016) conceptualise ethics in the public service as a system of internalised norms, values, and attitudes that shape how public servants exercise discretion in official duties, thereby embedding morality within administrative action. This view aligns with Davies and Egbuc (2019), who define ethics as standards used to evaluate behaviour, emphasising universal values such as honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness. However, while Agara and Olarinmoye stress internalisation, Davies and Egbuc draw attention to contextual influences, noting that ethical standards often vary depending on professional roles and institutional

expectations. Building on this, Akpan (2019) introduces a more introspective dimension, describing ethics as both a process of inquiry and a code of conduct, likening it to an "inner eye" guiding moral judgement. The author's emphasis on habits of mind, heart, and action extends the discussion beyond institutional norms to personal character formation. This progression from institutional to individual perspectives establishes a foundational understanding that ethical behaviour in public administration is shaped by both internal moral consciousness and externally imposed standards. This sets the stage for examining how these dynamics operate within local government systems. Further, scholars have explored the role of ethical behaviour in enhancing organisational outcomes within public administration. Yatich and Musebe (2017) and Ghory (2020) argue that ethical conduct reduces corruption, improves decision-making, and boosts employee morale, thereby strengthening institutional performance. This functional perspective is reinforced by Okorie, Adedeji, and Sunday (2025), who highlight that ethical behaviour is indispensable for maintaining public trust and ensuring effective service delivery. The authors, however, introduce a more complex view by identifying socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and career stage as determinants of ethical decision-making. They note that younger employees may exhibit stronger ethical tendencies, while older officials face more complex dilemmas. This perspective contrasts with earlier generalisations that treat ethics as universally applicable across individuals. Furthermore, Okorie et al. notes the centrality of leadership in shaping organisational ethics, arguing that leaders act as role models whose behaviour influences institutional culture. This argument creates a bridge to broader administrative structures, suggesting that ethical behaviour is not merely an individual attribute but is deeply embedded in organisational hierarchies and leadership dynamics.

The understanding of ethical behaviour cannot be separated from the broader purpose and scope of public administration itself. Mela, Mohammed, and Tella (2024) define public administration as a mechanism for maximising societal welfare, thereby positioning ethics as essential to achieving collective goals. Similarly, Chapman, Page, and Mosher (2026) describe it as the implementation and, increasingly, the formulation of government policies, highlighting its expansive and influential role. In contrast, Nwanisobi and Christopher (2020) present a more traditional view, initially restricting public administration to policy implementation within the executive branch, before acknowledging its evolution into a broader, multi-branch function. This divergence illustrates an ongoing debate about the scope of administrative responsibility, which has implications for ethical expectations. If public administration is confined to implementation, ethical responsibility may be limited to

compliance; however, if it includes policy formulation, ethical considerations extend to decision-making at higher levels. This shift in understanding broadens the terrain within which ethical dilemmas arise, particularly at the local government level where public servants often engage directly with citizens and policy execution simultaneously. Despite the recognised importance of ethics, public administration, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, faces persistent challenges that undermine ethical conduct. Okorie, Adedeji, and Sunday (2025) identify corruption, political interference, and bureaucratic inefficiencies as major obstacles to maintaining ethical standards. The authors argue that performance pressures and reform models prioritising efficiency can inadvertently encourage unethical practices such as data manipulation and procedural shortcuts. This observation is complemented by Okoye (2025), who emphasises ethical leadership as the cornerstone of trust and good governance, asserting that leaders must embody fairness, transparency, and accountability. However, Adegoke (2020) presents a critical counterpoint, highlighting the paradox within the Nigerian public sector, where the acknowledged importance of ethics coexists with widespread practices of nepotism, favouritism, and corruption. This contradiction reveals a gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities. This suggests that the presence of ethical frameworks alone is insufficient without effective enforcement and genuine commitment from leadership.

A historical and socio-economic perspective further deepens the understanding of ethical behaviour in public service. Ndukwe and Nwoba (2018) trace unethical practices in Nigeria to colonial legacies, low wages, and socio-economic pressures, arguing that these factors have normalised behaviours such as bribery and bureaucratic delays. The authors' emphasis on structural conditions contrasts with earlier moral-centric explanations, shifting the focus towards systemic determinants. However, their analysis may be critiqued for placing significant weight on historical and economic factors while underplaying individual accountability and contemporary institutional reforms. The persistence of weak accountability systems, outdated laws, and slow judicial processes, as noted by the authors, further exacerbates unethical conduct. This structural viewpoint connects with the argument that ethical behaviour is not solely a matter of personal virtue but is influenced by the broader institutional environment. The behavioural dimension of ethics introduces another layer of complexity, particularly in understanding decision-making processes. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) explains that public officials may engage in unethical behaviour through rational calculations, weighing potential gains against risks, or through social norms that normalise corruption. This dual perspective integrates economic and

sociological explanations, suggesting that ethical behaviour is influenced by both individual reasoning and collective expectations. Radhika (2019) complements this view by proposing the ALIR model, accountability, legality, integrity, and responsiveness, as a framework for ethical governance, linking ethical behaviour to institutional design and societal evolution. The author's reliance on Talcott Parsons' evolutionary theory provides a theoretical depth, yet it may be critiqued for being overly abstract and less grounded in practical realities of local governance. Nonetheless, the integration of behavioural and institutional perspectives highlights the multifaceted nature of ethical decision-making. This supports the idea that ethical dilemmas faced by public servants are shaped by both internal reasoning and external pressures.

Institutional frameworks and regulatory mechanisms have also been identified as critical determinants of ethical behaviour. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2025) emphasises the importance of comprehensive systems, including codes of conduct, training programmes, and accountability mechanisms, in promoting integrity. Similarly, the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life (2014) outlines seven principles, such as selflessness, integrity, and accountability, that serve as benchmarks for public conduct. Malla and Jorasia (2023), however, highlight the limitations of such frameworks in practice, pointing to political interference, weak enforcement, and inadequate training as persistent challenges. Their recommendations, including independent ethics commissions and stakeholder engagement, suggest that institutional reforms must go beyond formal guidelines to address underlying power dynamics. This critique aligns with Ireni-Saban (2015, 2022), who advocates for a broader ethics management approach incorporating audits, committees, and disciplinary measures. Together, these perspectives underscore that while institutional tools are necessary, their effectiveness depends on implementation, enforcement, and the broader political environment. Finally, the role of education, leadership, and organisational culture in shaping ethical behaviour has gained increasing attention in recent scholarship. Maw (2020) argues that ethical decision-making requires objectivity and freedom from personal bias, advocating for the integration of ethics into administrative reforms. Similarly, Iqbal (2023) identifies training, leadership commitment, and mentoring as key drivers of ethical conduct, emphasising the importance of continuous professional development. The Arkansas State University (2020) perspective further reinforces the need for ethical frameworks to balance diverse interpretations of public good, highlighting the risks of inconsistent decision-making. While these contributions provide practical solutions, they may be critiqued for assuming that training and policies alone can transform behaviour, without

adequate consideration of entrenched socio-political influences. In light of the reviewed literature, it is evident that ethical behaviour in public administration is shaped by a complex interplay of individual, organisational, and systemic factors. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these determinants specifically influence decision-making at the local government level, particularly in contexts such as Idemili North. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the factors that influence public servants' decisions when confronted with ethical dilemmas related to service delivery. This will contribute to a more context-specific and empirically grounded understanding of administrative ethics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is adopted for this study. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was developed by Icek Ajzen, a social psychologist, who formally introduced it in 1985 as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and later fully articulated and published it in 1991 in the journal *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (Ajzen, 1991). The theory emerged to address the limitations of TRA by incorporating factors that account for perceived control over behaviour, thereby improving the prediction of human action in situations where individuals may not have complete volitional control. Ajzen's work, building on earlier collaboration with Martin Fishbein, positioned TPB as a dominant framework in behavioural prediction research (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991).

The core tenet of TPB is that human behaviour is primarily determined by behavioural intention, which is in turn shaped by three key constructs: attitude toward the behaviour (personal evaluation of performing the behaviour), subjective norms (perceived social pressure from significant others), and perceived behavioural control (PBC), which reflects the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). These three factors interact to form an individual's intention, which is the most immediate predictor of actual behaviour. Perceived behavioural control also has a direct influence on behaviour, particularly in situations where individuals may lack full control over external constraints. Empirical studies have consistently shown that TPB explains a significant proportion of variance in intentions and behaviours across domains such as health, education, and environmental behaviour, reinforcing its utility as a predictive framework (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Despite its wide application, TPB has been criticised for over-reliance on rational decision-making assumptions, which may not fully capture habitual, emotional, or unconscious influences on behaviour. It has also been argued that there is often a gap between intention and actual

behaviour, limiting its predictive accuracy in real-world settings (Snichotta et al., 2014).

Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, public servants in Idemili North Local Government are likely to make decisions in ethical dilemmas based on their attitudes toward ethical service delivery, the perceived expectations of colleagues, supervisors, and the wider community (subjective norms), and their perceived ability to act ethically within institutional constraints (perceived behavioural control). When officials believe that acting ethically leads to positive outcomes for public trust and service efficiency, they are more inclined toward ethical decisions; however, if workplace culture tolerates misconduct or corruption, subjective norms may weaken ethical intentions. Similarly, even where intentions are positive, limited autonomy, fear of sanctions, or systemic pressures can reduce perceived behavioural control, ultimately shaping whether ethical intentions translate into actual ethical behaviour in service delivery (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how political pressure shapes ethical governance and public service delivery in Idemili North Local Government Area. The quantitative aspect utilised structured questionnaires to gather measurable data on respondents' opinions and experiences, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and relationships. In addition, the qualitative component involved in-depth interviews to obtain detailed insights into how political pressures influence decision-making and ethical conduct in governance. The integration of both approaches ensured a well-rounded analysis, with quantitative data providing general patterns and qualitative findings offering deeper contextual understanding.

Population of the Study

Adopting an annual growth rate of 2%, the population of Idemili North LGA is projected to have increased from 614,200 in 2022 to approximately 639,009 in 2024 (National Population Commission, as cited in City Population, 2023).

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

For the qualitative component, a sample of 11–20 participants, was considered sufficient to reach thematic saturation. In the quantitative phase, a sample size of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, with adjustments made for the finite population.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the qualitative study, ensuring that only individuals with relevant knowledge and experience were included. Conversely, stratified random sampling was applied in the quantitative survey to ensure representation across major demographic groups. The sample was distributed relatively evenly across the ten towns within the LGA to enhance representativeness and support meaningful analysis of governance and service delivery.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, enabling participants to share detailed perspectives. Participants included local government officials, residents, healthcare providers, and business owners. A total of 10–20 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, and recorded with consent. In addition, focus group discussions were organised around key themes, involving 6–10 participants per session drawn from both staff and community members. Each session lasted one to two hours and was facilitated by a moderator.

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires comprising closed-ended Likert-scale items designed to assess perceptions of service quality and accessibility. Responses ranged from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1). The questionnaires were

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1

Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Respondents	% of Respondents (By Sex)
Male	130	37.14%
Female	220	62.86%
Total	350	100%

Noted. Adapted from Field Survey (2026)

Table 1 shows that out of 350 respondents, 220 are female, representing 62.86%, while 130 are male, representing 37.14%. This indicates a higher participation of female respondents compared to males in the study. The distribution

administered both online and face-to-face to ensure broader participation and an adequate sample size for statistical analysis.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

To ensure validity, the research instruments underwent content validation by experts in public administration, ethics, and Nigerian governance, who assessed their relevance and comprehensiveness.

Reliability was evaluated using the test–retest method. The same questionnaire was administered to the same group of respondents after a two-week interval, and the results were analysed using Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. High correlation values indicated strong consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis also followed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using frequency distributions and percentage tables, alongside inferential statistical methods to examine relationships among variables. Qualitative data from interviews was transcribed verbatim, systematically reviewed, and coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. These themes were then grouped into broader categories and interpreted in line with the study’s objectives.

suggests that the sample is female-dominated, which may have implications for how the findings are interpreted, especially if gender differences are relevant to the research topic.

Table 2

Marital status of respondents

Marital Status	Respondents	% of Respondents
Married	131	37.4%
Single	187	53.4%
Divorced	13	3.7%
Widowed	18	5.1%
Separated	2	0.6%
Total	350	100%

Table 2 presents the marital status distribution of 350 respondents. More than half of the respondents are single (53.4%), making it the largest group in the sample. Married individuals form the second largest category at 37.4%. A smaller proportion are widowed (5.1%) and divorced

(3.7%), while only a very small fraction is separated (0.6%). Overall, the data shows that the population is predominantly single and married, with relatively few respondents falling into the other marital categories.

Table 3

Age distribution of respondents

Age Group	Respondents	% of Respondents
Less than 20 years	30	8.57%
21–30 years	142	40.57%
31–40 years	71	20.29%
41–50 years	60	17.14%
50–60 years	30	8.57%
60 years and above	17	4.86%
Total	350	100%

Table 3 shows the age distribution of 350 respondents. The largest group is the 21–30 years category, accounting for 40.57% (142 respondents), indicating that young adults form the dominant segment of the sample. This is followed by the 31–40 years group, which makes up 20.29% (71 respondents), and the 41–50 years group at 17.14% (60 respondents). Smaller proportions are seen among

respondents below 20 years and those aged 50–60 years, each contributing 8.57% (30 respondents each). The least represented group is those aged 60 years and above, at 4.86% (17 respondents). Overall, the distribution suggests that the sample is heavily concentrated among younger and early middle-aged individuals, with fewer older participants.

Table 4

Educational qualification of respondents

Educational Qualification	Respondents	% of Respondents
FSLC	10	2.9%
SSCE/NECO	61	17.4%
OND/NCE	68	19.4%
B.Sc/HND	78	22.3%
MBA/M.Sc	40	11.4%
Ph.D	93	26.6%
Total	350	100%

Table 4 shows the educational background of 350 respondents, indicating a fairly diverse but highly educated sample. The largest group is Ph.D holders, who account for

26.6% of the respondents, suggesting a strong presence of highly qualified individuals in the study. This is followed by those with B.Sc/HND (22.3%) and OND/NCE (19.4%),

which together represent a significant portion of tertiary-level education. Respondents with SSCE/NECO make up 17.4%, while those with MBA/M.Sc constitute 11.4%. The smallest group is FSLC holders at just 2.9%, showing that

very few respondents stopped at primary education level. Overall, the distribution indicates that most respondents have at least post-secondary education, with a notable concentration in higher academic qualifications.

Analysis of Research Question

What factors influence public servants' decisions in Idemili North LGA when facing ethical dilemmas related to service delivery?

Table 5

Percentage analysis on factors influencing public servants' decisions when facing ethical dilemmas related to service delivery

S/N	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)
1	Organizational culture/peer pressure significantly impacts decision making in ethical dilemmas related to corruption in Idemili North LGA	115 (33%)	95 (27%)	80 (23%)	40 (11%)	20 (6%)
2	Organizational culture/peer pressure does not significantly impact decision-making in ethical dilemmas related to corruption in Idemili North LGA	27 (8%)	38 (11%)	76 (22%)	99 (28%)	110 (31%)
3	Peer pressure/Organizational culture significantly influences public decisions regarding nepotism and corruption in Idemili North LGA	110 (31%)	75 (21%)	40 (11%)	100 (29%)	25 (7%)
4	Organizational norms and values/peer pressure do not guide decision-making in ethical dilemmas	20 (6%)	40 (11%)	76 (22%)	98 (28%)	116 (33%)
5	Organizational norms and values moderately guide decision-making in ethical dilemmas related to corruption in Idemili North LGA	120 (34%)	90 (26%)	75 (21%)	30 (9%)	35 (10%)

Table 5 shows mixed perceptions on the influence of organizational culture and peer pressure on ethical decision-making related to corruption and nepotism in Idemili North LGA. On the positive influence side, a significant proportion of respondents agreed that organizational culture and peer pressure shape ethical decisions, as seen in Item 1 where 33% strongly agreed and 27% agreed (total 60%), and Item 3 where 31% strongly agreed and 21% agreed (52%). Similarly, Item 5 also recorded a strong leaning toward agreement, with 34% strongly agreeing and 26% agreeing (60%), suggesting that many respondents perceive organizational norms as moderately to strongly guiding

decisions. However, dissenting views are also substantial. In Item 2, 28% disagreed and 31% strongly disagreed (59%), indicating a belief that such influences are not significant. Item 4 further reinforces this division, with 28% disagreeing and 33% strongly disagreeing (61%), showing scepticism about the role of organizational norms. Neutral responses (ranging from 11% to 23%) across the items suggest some uncertainty among respondents. Overall, the data reveals a polarized but slightly stronger inclination toward the view that organizational culture and peer pressure influence ethical decision-making, particularly in matters of corruption and nepotism.

Test of Hypothesis

Public servants in Idemili North are significantly influenced by organizational culture and peer pressure when making decisions about ethical dilemmas related to corruption and nepotism

Table 6

Correlation Analysis

Statement Pair	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	H ₁ (Correlation)
1 & 2	-0.45	0.002	Accept
1&3	0.50	0.001	Accept
1&4	0.30	0.010	Accept
1&5	0.55	0.000	Accept
2&3	0.20	0.100	Reject
3&4	-0.25	0.050	Accept
3&5	0.60	0.000	Accept
4&5	0.15	0.150	Reject

The correlation results reveal meaningful relationships between organizational culture, peer pressure, and ethical decision-making among public servants in Idemili North. A significant negative correlation between Statements 1 and 2 ($r = -0.45$, $p = 0.002$) indicates that as recognition of organizational culture increases, perceived peer pressure influence declines. Statement 1 also shows strong positive correlations with Statement 3 ($r = 0.50$, $p = 0.001$), Statement 4 ($r = 0.30$, $p = 0.010$), and Statement 5 ($r = 0.55$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that organizational culture is positively associated with ethical decision-making outcomes. While the relationship between Statements 2 and 3 is weak and not significant ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.100$), a marginally significant negative correlation exists between Statements 3 and 4 ($r = -0.25$, $p = 0.050$), implying that increased peer pressure may reduce the influence of organizational norms. Furthermore, a strong positive correlation between Statements 3 and 5 ($r = 0.60$, $p = 0.000$) highlights the substantial role of peer pressure in shaping ethical outcomes, whereas the relationship between Statements 4 and 5 is not significant ($r = 0.15$, $p = 0.150$). Overall, the findings demonstrate that both organizational culture and peer pressure significantly influence ethical decision-making, though their interactions are complex and sometimes contrary.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that public servants in Idemili North Local Government Area hold divided but generally converging views on the role of organizational culture and peer pressure in shaping ethical decision-making in service delivery. A noticeable proportion of respondents believe that institutional norms and the behaviour of colleagues play an important role in influencing decisions, particularly in situations involving corruption and nepotism. However, a substantial number express scepticism, suggesting that these factors may not always be as influential as assumed. This divergence highlights a context where ethical behaviour is not uniformly guided by shared values or group expectations, with some officials appearing uncertain or indecisive about the extent of such influences.

Further analysis shows that both organizational culture and peer pressure have statistically significant relationships with ethical decision-making, although their effects are complex. Organizational culture tends to be positively associated with ethical outcomes, indicating that stronger institutional values can promote better decision-making. At the same time, peer pressure also plays a meaningful role, sometimes reinforcing and at other times undermining these values. The interaction between these factors suggests that while a supportive organizational environment can enhance ethical conduct, conflicting group dynamics may weaken its influence. Overall, the results confirm that ethical decisions among public servants are shaped by a combination of institutional

and social pressures that do not always operate in a consistent manner.

On the other hand, interview data indicate a strong consensus among respondents that organisational culture and peer influence play a significant role in shaping decision-making processes within local government. Across the interviews conducted in Idemili North Local Government Area, participants consistently reported that entrenched norms within the public service environment often normalise unethical practices such as corruption and nepotism. A number of respondents noted that conformity to prevailing workplace expectations is frequently driven by fear of exclusion or professional marginalisation. One participant explained:

Many of us feel pressured to conform to these norms because we do not want to be seen as outsiders among our colleagues (RP1, Oral interview, 21 January 2026)

This reflects a broader pattern in which informal organisational expectations override formal ethical standards. Similarly, RP10 described his initial experience upon entering public service, highlighting the role of informal networks and social consequences in shaping behaviour:

When I first joined the public service, I noticed that decisions were often made based on personal connections rather than merit. At first, I tried to resist this approach, but I quickly realised that those who challenged the status quo faced social isolation and even professional repercussions. Over time, I found it increasingly difficult to maintain my ethical stance while also wanting to fit in with my peers (RP10, Oral interview, 21 January 2026)

This account illustrates how organisational pressure may gradually erode individual ethical resistance, reinforcing conformity to established but questionable practices.

Other respondents reinforced this perception, suggesting that such dynamics contribute to the normalisation of unethical conduct. RP2 observed that peer influence can entrench corruption as an accepted behavioural standard:

This peer pressure can lead to a cycle where unethical behaviour becomes the norm, making it challenging for anyone to advocate for transparency and accountability (RP2, Oral interview, 22 January 2026)

In addition, several participants emphasised that the interaction between organisational culture and peer pressure creates a persistent ethical dilemma for public servants. One respondent summarised this collectively held view as follows:

The combination of organisational culture and peer pressure plays a crucial role in shaping how we navigate ethical dilemmas related to corruption and nepotism in our work (RP4, Oral interview, 22 January 2026)

Further corroboration from RP9 and other respondents also aligned with this perspective, reinforcing the view that informal workplace norms significantly influence decision-making behaviour across the local government system (RP9, Oral interview, 21 January 2026; RP3, Oral interview, 22 January 2026).

In all, the findings suggest a shared understanding among respondents that ethical decision-making is heavily constrained by institutional culture and peer expectations. Rather than operating in isolation, these forces interact to shape workplace behaviour, often making it difficult for individuals to maintain principled positions without experiencing social or professional consequences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study establishes that ethical decision-making in service delivery within Idemili North Local Government Area is shaped by a complex interplay of organizational culture and peer pressure. While a significant acknowledgement that institutional norms and colleagues' behaviour influence ethical choices, particularly in relation to corruption and nepotism, there remains a notable level of disagreement and uncertainty among public servants. Further evidence confirms that both organizational culture and peer pressure significantly relate to ethical decision-making, with organizational culture generally promoting ethical conduct, whereas peer pressure exerts a dual effect that can either reinforce or undermine such behaviour. Thus, the findings suggest that ethical outcomes in the local government are not determined by a single factor but by interacting institutional and social forces that vary in consistency and strength across different situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, it is recommended that public institutions, particularly the local government should strengthen and institutionalise a robust ethical culture grounded in transparency, accountability, and integrity, supported by clearly articulated and consistently enforced codes of conduct to guide the behaviour of public servants. There is also, a need to establish a transparent reward system that recognises and promotes ethical behaviour among public servants. Furthermore, there is a need for continuous and comprehensive training programmes on ethical behaviour and conduct to equip officials with the requisite skills to navigate ethical dilemmas while reinforcing professional standards. In addition, the establishment of

secure and confidential reporting mechanisms is essential to encourage whistleblowing and ensure adequate protection for individuals who expose unethical practices, thereby enhancing institutional credibility and service delivery outcomes.

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