FAVOURITISM AS A FORM OF INJUSTICE IN CYPRUS: UBIQUITOUS AND ETERNAL?

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that Cyprus is a nation susceptible to unjust practices of favouritism, as reflected in undeserving appointments, promotions, privileged employment transfers, access to services, and so on. Despite these alarming observations, no previous empirical study illuminated the parameters of this problem in Cyprus or unravelled avenues of its prevention. With this important knowledge gap in mind, the present study set out to measure public opinion in an effort to evaluate the extent of the problem in Cyprus and identify mechanisms for rectifying it. To collect data, a telephone survey was used with a randomly selected sample of 150 Greek Cypriots (a response rate of 74 per cent). The results corroborate anecdotal evidence pinpointing the widespread nature of favouritism in Cyprus and suggest cultural, attitudinal, organisational, and legislative solutions. The findings are situated within a global context, and implications are derived for prevention, social work intervention, cross-national collaboration, and future research.

Cyprus is the third largest and easternmost island in the Mediterranean Sea. Human settlements in Cyprus can be traced as far back as 5800 BC, during the Neolithic Era or New Stone Age. Historically, being the victim of diversified occupations and the exotic destination of adventurous tourists, Cypriot culture had experienced influences from a string of civilisations including Mycenaean, Greek, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, Ottoman, and British. However, the Christian-Orthodox religion and Greek culture were the life-styles to prevail on the island.

From the establishment of Ottoman rule in the 1500s and destruction of the Venetian aristocracy, Cypriot society was free of vast disparities in socio-economic status and privilege. Nevertheless, the substantial economic growth evidenced within the last three decades (despite the devastating effects of the Turkish invasion in 1974) meant that by the beginning of the 1990s Cyprus had a highly visible class of the newly wealthy. The island's prosperity was widely shared, however. The average standard of living paralleled those of some other West European countries.

A welfare system reflecting Western European values and standards supported those individuals in need, and education became a primary means of upward social mobility (US Library of Congress, 2004).

Today, Cyprus is an independent sovereign Republic with a presidential system of government and officially joined the European Union in May, 2004. The Cyprus economy is predicated upon free market ideology, with the private sector being the backbone of economic activity and the government's role being confined to indicative planning (Republic of Cyprus, 1999). The population of Cyprus is estimated at 793,000, of whom 77 per cent are Greeks, 18 per cent are Turks and the remainder are predominantly Latins, Maronites, Armenians, and British (Census, 2001, cf: US Department of State, 2004). In 2003, the literacy rate (defined as the percentage of individuals age 15 and over who can read) in Cyprus was 97.6 per cent (The World Fact Book, 2004). The work force in 2003 totalled 316,000 people (58 per cent men and 42 per cent women). About 18 per cent of these individuals were employed in wholesale and retail trade and repairs, 11 per cent in manufacturing, 10 per cent in hotels and restaurants, 10 per cent in construction, 8 per cent in public administration and defence, 7 per cent in agriculture hunting and forestry, 7 per cent in transport, storage, and communication, 6 per cent in education, 5 per cent in real estate, renting, and business activities, 5 per cent in financial intermediation, and so on (Statistical Service of Cyprus [CYSTAT], 2003). Currently, the island's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 7.3 billion dollars and the unemployment rate about 5.3 per cent (CYSTAT, 2005). About half of the unemployed are high school graduates, one-fifth have tertiary education, another one-fifth have only primary education, and one-tenth have technical education (CYSTAT, 2003). The 2006 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) puts Cyprus' GDP per capita at nearly $23,000 a year (PPP) while the corresponding figure for Germany is $28,000. France and the UK have even higher GDP per capita (PPP).

Cultural Considerations

Unlike traditional Western societies and similar to Balkan and the Middle Eastern traditions, Greek culture is collectively minded (Georgas, 1993; Georgas, Berry, Shaw, Christakopoulou and Mylonas, 1996) placing particular emphasis not only on the needs, values and preferences of the individual and nuclear family but also those of the extended family and close friends (Georgas, Christakopoulou, Poortinga, Angleitner, Goodwin and Charalambous, 1997). The Greek emphasis on inter-connectedness functions in tandem with a strong work ethic, a high regard for academic achievement, and a relentless drive to succeed and be recognised as successful by one's community (Athanasiadou, 1997; Deliyanni-Kouintzi and Ziogou, 1995; Evergeti, 2006; Koutsouvanou, 1997, cf: Tamis-LeMonda, Wang, Koutsouvanou and Albright, 2002; Saloutos, 1964; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2002).

While in the past the emphasis was mostly on interpersonal appreciation and spiritual rightness and growth, today materialism has been crowned as the nucleus of attention in both Greek and Greek-Cypriot society. Accordingly, today every Greek Cypriot feels that he/she is being judged by their fellow citizens on the basis of how much wealth he/she has accumulated, what he/she drives, what type of residence he/she resides in, what type of employment he/she performs, what he/she wears, what social connections he/she has, where he/she vacations, what clubs and other entertainment he/she visits, etc. This leaves Greek Cypriots to feel constantly under the societal microscope, and their assessment of how well they fare with societal expectations, often becomes a barometer for their own self-esteem and self-concept.

Unwarranted Favouritism and Social Injustice: The Social Work Connection

Favouritism is defined as "the disposition to favour and promote the interest of one person or family, or of one class of men, to the neglect of others having equal claims" (Webster Dictionary, 1913), or "an inclination to favour some person or group" (Wordreference.com, 2003). Reflections of favouritism can often be found in (a) the criteria chosen to measure merit, (b) the tests used to assess merit, and (c) the subjective evaluation of another's performance (e.g. Fraser and Kick, 2000). Meritocracy and equal opportunity are frequently portrayed in the literature as antonyms for favouritism. Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna (2002) define meritocracy as "a principle or ideal that prescribes that only the most deserving individuals are rewarded (p. 494). Moreover, according to Smith-Winkelman and Crosby (1994), meritocracy is not plausible within a context that arbitrarily discriminates against a certain section (s) of the population. In a similar vein, equal opportunity "... means that no-one should be debarred from seeking employment on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, religious belief, disability, or any other criterion irrelevant to the standard of performance demanded by the position sought" (Marinoff, 2000, p. 24).

Utterly, the form of favouritism examined herein is in direct antithesis with the term equal opportunity. This type of favouritism does not aim to ensure that oppressed groups are given equal chances for socio-economic rewards and upward social mobility. To the contrary, this sort of favouritism perpetuates disempowerment of the oppressed (these being individuals encountering multiple socio-economic deprivations in their daily lives) by persistently denying them opportunities for life enhancement. Such opportunities are instead discriminately given to 'favoured' individuals or groups, merely on the basis of the latter's social connections with powerful stakeholders in society (e.g. elected officials, political parties, political appointees, etc.) rather than on merit or susceptibility to discrimination.

Indisputably, this malignant form of favouritism is a severe foe to social justice. As Saleebey (1990) explains social justice involves a social mechanism of ensuring that "opportunities for personal social development are open to all with the understanding that those who have been unfairly hampered through no fault of their own will be appropriately compensated" (p. 7). Given that the social work profession's central mission concerns the promotion of human well-being and the elimination of social injustices (International Federation of Social Work, 2000; National Association of Social Workers, 2005), it becomes imperative that social workers are actively involved in crusades to eradicate malevolent forms of favouritism from society.

International Trends

The international literature is replete with examples of unjust favouritism permeating all domains of human life, socio-economic strata, cultures, and geographic locations. For example, in the context of family life, parental favouritism has been found to exert destructive effects on the psychological development of children in diverse cultural settings (e.g. Ching-Hua, Shih-Jen, Yu, Kuan-Hung, Chiu-Peng and Chen-Jee Hong, 2001; Rohde, Atzwanger, Butovskayad, Lampert, Mysterud, Sanchez-Andres and Sulloway, 2003). In the political arena, President Bush has been recently accused of using family connections to receive privileged treatment in the army during the Vietnam War (e.g. Hirschkorn, 2004). In sports, it has been found that Spanish and German Soccer referees are more likely to act in favour of the home team under social pressure (Garicano, Palacios and Prenderqast, 2001; Sutter and Kocher, 2002). In education, Rosenbloom and Way (2004) found that teachers preferred Asian American students than African American and Latino students on the basis of social stereotypes suggesting that Asians are more likely to succeed educationally and professionally than other racial groups (e.g. Rosenbloom and Way, 2004).

These are only a few examples of unjust favouritism. Additional cases of counterproductive favouritism include (and are not limited to) favouritism towards persons who are not inflicted by disability (e.g. Premeaux, 2001) or a disfigured facial appearance (e.g. Stevenage and McKay, 1999), favouritism based on social connections (e.g. Lomnitz, Sheinbaum and Unam, 2003), national favouritism (e.g. Koomen and Bähler, 1996; Slabbert, 2001; Rulison, 2004), favouritism in hiring (e.g. Rudman and Glick, 1999), employee evaluation (e.g. Sackett and DuBois, 1991), and promotion (e.g. Landau, 1995; Linehan, 2000), favouritism in police (e.g. Correll, Park and Judd, 2002) judicial (e.g. Azar and Benjet, 1994; Meeker, Jesilow and Aranda, 1992), medical (e.g. Furnham, Hassomal and McClelland, 2002; Hatala and Case, 2000), social service (e.g. Jones, 2002; Ryan and Schuerman, 2004), and military decisions (e.g. Roberts and Skinner, 1996; Siskind and Kearns, 1997), and so on.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Favouritism

Favouritism, as examined herein, originates from political corruption and poor governance. Wikipedia (2007) defines political corruption as,

> "the misuse by government officials of their governmental powers for illegitimate, usually secret, private gain. Misuse of government power for other purposes, like repression of political opponents and general police brutality, is not considered political corruption. Illegal acts by private persons or corporations not directly involved with the government is not considered political corruption either."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2002 expressly linked the realisation of human rights with improvements in national governance. According to this organisation, governance is,

> "the process whereby public institutions can conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realisation of human rights. Good governance accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law. The true test of good governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights."

According to the 2006 survey by the Transparency International Organisation, Finland, Iceland, and New Zealand are perceived to be the world's least corrupt countries, and Haiti is perceived to be the most corrupt. The index defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain and measures the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among a country's public officials and politicians. It is a composite index, drawing on twelve polls and surveys from nine independent institutions, which gathered the opinions of businesspeople and country analysts. The scores range from ten (squeaky clean) to zero (highly corrupt). A score of 5.0 is the number Transparency International considers the borderline figure distinguishing countries that do and do not have a serious corruption problem. Cyprus ranks in 37th place with a very close to borderline score of 5.6 (Infoplease, 2007).

Italian sociologist Etzioni-Halevy (1999) uses the term ultramodern society to describe today's Western society as one that paradoxically reflects both expansion and undue reversal of modern accomplishments. A defining characteristic of ultramodern society is globalisation, which tends to create "a growing polarisation in life chances between the over-endowed and the unemployed or the underemployed (ibid., p. 240).

For Etzioni-Halevy (1999), ultramodern society reinforces inequality and impresses the silence of the highly oppressed. Evidence substantiating her claim include (and are not limited to): (a) in the last thirty years the salary gap between upper and lower classes has risen excessively in countries like USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK; (b) unemployment rates have risen in European nations such as Spain, Italy, Belgium, France, and Germany (ranging from 19 per cent to 11.2 per cent); and (c) in continental Europe about one-fifth of all workers live only on the earnings from a part-time job (ibid., 1999). Cleary, favouritism is executed by those with power and gives preferentiality to the privileged of a society at the expense of the disenfranchised. As such, Etzioni-Halevy's theory seems to imply that favouritism is a natural by-product of ultramodern society, and that to eliminate it would necessitate uprooting of the socio-structural make-up of contemporary society.

Another theory that relates to our critical scrutiny of favouritism is distributive justice theory, which essentially claims that an individual's relative outcomes (e.g. hiring) should be given in proportion to his or her relative inputs (e.g. employment qualifications) (Cohen, 1987; Deutsch, 1975). Along these lines, equity theory suggests that evaluations of unequal distributions are expected to induce negative emotions, which, in turn, motivate individuals to alter their behaviour or distort the cognitions associated with perceptions of unfairness (e.g. Adams, 1965). Likewise, attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) purports that if the perceived fairness of the selection system can be questioned, external attributions are more likely and the outcome of a selection decision will not have a great impact on applicants' self-esteem.

In addition, life chances theory maintains that individuals are motivated to engage in productive roles profiting society when they perceive opportunities for upward social mobility in their social environment. However, when such opportunities are depleted, individuals tend to gravitate towards a path of self-destruction (e.g. Auslander, Slonim-Nevo, Elze and Sherraden, 1998; Dahrendorf, 1979). Taken together, these theories shed light on the harmful psychological effects that favouritism could have on an individual, and bear substantive social work implications for counteracting it. These theories connote that an unjust form of favouritism can be a high risk factor for maladjustment especially for those lacking sufficient social supports and psychological resiliency. Thus, a social worker's ethical responsibility cannot be merely limited to seeking mechanisms of preventing malignant forms of favouritism but extends to empowering individuals to both proactively and reactively enhance their social support systems and psychological stamina against the ill-effects resulting from undue favouritism.

Favouritism and Greek-Cypriot Society

In the nineteenth century, the Greek Government lacked comprehensive strategic planning and merely employed peasants who had left the countryside in search for employment in urban settings (Mouzelis, 1978). This was accomplished through political affiliations and using a practice commonly known as rousfeti. This is a word of Arab origin which means personal favour to supporters and differs from bribery (Broome, 1996). Rousfeti often serves to outshine bureaucratic formalities and serves to favour individuals who have social connections with clout over the sought out outcomes. Heavily impacted by Greece, Cyprus began to imitate Greek patterns of rousfeti once it gained its independence in 1960. While today staffing in the public sector is strictly limited to objective types of entry procedures, personal relations are still important in dealing with the State while political affiliations influence staffing decisions for higher positions (Papalexandris, 1999).

Public protests against favouritism in Cyprus began in the 1960s, namely a few years after Cyprus' liberation from British colonisation and its declaration of Independence (1960). In his historical account of The Rise and Fall of the Cyprus Republic, Markides (1977) notes about this time period

> "The discrepancy between the overall level of development of the island and the availability of individuals with university degrees was explosive for the government. Unavoidably, as the number of university graduates increased, some would begin turning against the status quo, exposing what they would consider corruption, inefficiency, and favouritism in the civil service" (p. 108).

Upon his election in 2003, the current President of Cyprus, Tassos Papadopoulos, pledged a country of equality, without discrimination and without prejudice, and a society that observes meritocracy (People's Daily Newspaper, 17 February 2003). President Papadopoulos' political emphasis on meritocracy (at the exclusion of other key social justice indicators, e.g. freedom of expression) seems to signal public apprehension about the prevalence of unjust forms of favouritism in Cyprus.

In compliance with the President's assurance, and in response to recent accusations regarding favouritism in the Police, current Minister of Justice and Public Order, Theodorou recently stated that "favours", "favouritism", and "party spirit", would not rule any more and that only the best candidates would be appointed in the Police. Theodorou also talked about the previous system of appointment in the police, describing it as a corrupt regime that treated the competent candidates unfairly. In particular, Theodorou stated that the examination papers revealed cases of cheating in the entrance examinations to the Police Force in 2001 (Philelefttheros Newspaper, 5 September 2003).

However, more recently, the deputy of DISY, the major opposition party in Cyprus, Ionas Nicolaou, insisted on his allegations of favouritism in the Police, on the occasion of recent evaluations and promotions in the Force. On the other hand, Deputy Police Chief and Head of the Evaluation Council Charalambos Koulentis admitted mistakes and failures in the procedure, but did not ascribe any dark motives to the Evaluation Committee (Simerini Newspaper, 7 September 2004).

Clearly, favouritism is not confined to the government sector in Cyprus. Recently, a notorious scandal implicated key members of the Greek-Orthodox Church Administration in a gross enactment of unjust favouritism. According to the allegations, the accused – these being people with strong clout and important inside connections to pivotal administrators in the church – attempted financial exploitation of the church by buying significant amounts of the Church's land at very low cost for personal profit. (This incident is currently under investigation and the findings are therefore pending).

Public Law on Favouritism

In 2001, the Cyprus House of Representatives passed a law (P.L. N. 27(1)/2001), which aims at cleansing public life, eliminating counterproductive mentalities of the past and promoting meritocracy. This new law criminalises acts of favouritism within government in areas such as hiring, promotion, employment transfer, and disciplinary action. A person who contacts a government employee for the purpose of receiving favouritism for himself or herself or another person and a governmental employee who is contacted by such a person for the purpose of receiving favouritism and fails to report this to the Police within three days can both be subject to up to twelve months imprisonment and a fine of up to 1000 CY pounds [i.e. about 2000 USD] (President Glafkos Clerides, 2001). Irrespective of the seemingly good intent of this new law, its effectiveness level remains largely unknown.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Anecdotal evidence, popular beliefs, and political and historical events reviewed herein coupled with the logic that Cyprus is a geographically small nation, (and therefore, social connections may become more vital for upward social mobility) seem to suggest that Cyprus could be highly at risk for social injustices pertaining to unjust favouritism. Unfortunately, no previous scientific inquiry concerned itself with the problem of favouritism in Cyprus. Therefore, this study aims at filling up this significant knowledge gap by investigating the question: How does the public assess the nature, extent, and feasible solutions to the problem of unjust favouritism in Cyprus?

Another aim of the study is to evaluate the effects of age, gender, and education on public perceptions and feelings about unjust favouritism in Cyprus. These specific predictor effects are scrutinised herein because they could produce knowledge for tailoring interventions to the unique needs of diverse subpopulations in Cyprus, as distinguished by gender, age and education.

It is hoped that the knowledge generated from this study could impact policy makers concerned with issues of favouritism in Cyprus and the effectiveness of the new law. The findings could also help sensitise other key players in Cypriot society and other parts of the world, such as employers, administrators, educators, and other individuals in leadership roles about the detrimental effects of unwarranted favouritism and potential mechanisms of combating it.

Helping resolve unjust issues of favouritism within a society is clearly a humanistic crusade with clear-cut psychological and economic benefits for its citizenry (e.g. Lomnitz, Sheinbaum and Unam, 2003). People tend to be much more productive and innovative within contexts where they feel fairly treated. Such benevolent psychological effects often translate into economic advantages not only for the citizens themselves but also for their families, organisations and communities. Such linkages between dignified societal treatment and personal and economic growth persist in diverse cultures and geographic locations (e.g. Connell, 1999; Connerley, Arvey, Gilliland, Mael, Paetzold and Sackett, 2002; Creegan, Colgan and Charlesworth, 2003; Hays-Thomas, 2004; Nettle, 2003).

Method

Sample

The telephone directory for Nicosia, Cyprus' capital was used to identify prospective respondents; this lists citizens' phone numbers alphabetically by last name. Specifically, all the pages in the directory were numbered and then the table of random digits was consulted to indiscriminately choose a page. For each page randomly selected, all the names were numbered and the participant was chosen at random, again after reviewing the table of random digits. In total 204 Greek Cypriots were called to reach the targeted number of 150 respondents (this number ensured >.8 conventional statistical power at a .05 significance level, Cohen, 1988). The ensuing response rate of the study was therefore .74. This response rate is a little higher than that reported by other survey studies on social issues in Cyprus (e.g. Georgiades, 2003; Georgiades and Potocky-Tripodi, 2000).

From the 150 final respondents, 101 were women (67 per cent) and 49 (33 per cent) were men. Previous research has concluded comparable rates of participation in regards to gender, suggesting that Cypriot women are twice more likely to

respond to surveys than men (e.g. Georgiades and Potocky-Tripodi, 2000). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 86 years (mean= 43 yrs; SD=15.83 yrs). Respondents' education varied from 4 to 16 years (mean=12 yrs; SD=3.19). Women were on average 44 years old (SD=14.77 yrs; range=18-86 yrs) and had an average of about 12 years of formal education (SD=3.43 yrs; range=4-16 yrs). Men were on average 41 years old (SD= 17.85 yrs; range=18-76 yrs) and had an average of about 13 years of formal education (SD=2.56 yrs; range=6-16 yrs).

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were called between the times of 6.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. and had to be at least 18 years of age to be eligible to participate. In cases where the call was placed at an inconvenient time, the researcher followed up with a call back at another scheduled time of convenience to the participant. The researcher presented himself as an Assistant Professor of Social Work at a North American University and explained: (a) that the research was concerned with the problem of favouritism in Cyprus; (b) that the survey included eight questions that would take approximately five minutes to complete; (c) that they had the right to discontinue participation at any time during the survey; (d) that they were allowed to refuse response to any question of the survey if they felt the need to do so; (e) that the researcher would later attempt to publish the results in a professional journal in the hope of improving public policy in the area; and (f) that their anonymity regarding the information revealed in this survey would be fully protected.

For pilot purposes ten respondents were initially contacted and presented with the questionnaire (see appendix, p. 125). Once these pilot respondents completed the study, they were asked to provide feedback on how they experienced the introductory statement of the research and the interview itself. Overall, these respondents found the entire process unambiguous, smooth sailing, and expeditious and suggested that the public should not have experienced undue inconvenience in responding to this survey. However, seven pilot respondents resisted inclusion of a question asking about the respondent's type of employment. The argument was that some people (particularly public sector employees) could have been discouraged to either participate in the study or share honestly information about favouritism when faced with this question because of likely suspicions that their revelations could have repercussions for their employment. With this warning in mind, the employment question was eliminated. For practical reasons, data received from the pilot respondents were used in the final analyses of the study since they did not seem to present potential threats to the validity of the results. Impressively, in the actual study, none of the respondents evaded any of the questions or opted out of the survey prior to its completion.

Data Analysis

Numeric data for questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6a, 7, and 8 (see appendix, p. 125) were entered into an SPSS file and entries were rechecked twice for accuracy until all errors were corrected. Subsequently means, standard deviations (SDs), and ranges were computed, and multiple-regression analyses were run as needed.

Questions 5 and 6b elicited qualitative data, which were subject to content analysis. Specifically, the researcher wrote verbatim all qualitative responses during the interview and later compiled them into separate word processing files for each question. The researcher then searched the data for emerging themes that would accurately represent the data set. A Greek-Cypriot volunteer looked at both data sets and fully agreed on the emerging themes. The researcher then computed frequencies for each theme and repeated these calculations to ensure accuracy.

Results

Table 1 (p. 126) displays the results for reported prevalence and personal frustration with favouritism, degree of unfairness of Greek-Cypriot society, number of known cases of favouritism, and degree of belief in prevention of favouritism. As can be seen, reported prevalence of favouritism fell within the a lot present and extremely present range leaning more towards the latter end; personal frustration with favouritism fell within the a lot and extremely range leaning more towards the former end; degree of fairness of Greek-Cypriot society fell within the somewhat unfair and a lot unfair range leaning more towards the former end. Finally, respondents on average knew about forty-three cases of favouritism in Cyprus.

Table 2 (p. 126) demonstrates the results of multiple regression analyses. The regression model consisting of gender, age, and education predicted small amounts of reported prevalence (4.9 per cent), degree of unfairness of Greek-Cypriot society (4.0 per cent), and public belief in prevention of favouritism (4.3 per cent). Gender was not a significant predictor for perceived prevalence of favouritism while age and education were not significant predictors for degree of unfairness of Greek-Cypriot society or belief in prevention. Being younger and less educated were both associated with perception of higher prevalence of favouritism. Being male was associated with perceiving the Greek-Cypriot society to be more unfair. Finally, being female related to a stronger belief in prevention of favouritism.

Table 3 (p. 127) summarises the content analyses for reported locations of favouritism and prevention methods. Approximately nine out of ten respondents thought that favouritism in hiring, promotion, privileged employment transfer, and access to services is present within government/public sectors; about six out of ten respondents suggested that favouritism existed everywhere, in all aspects of life;

about five out of ten indicated that favouritism was traceable within the semi-public sector; and about one-quarter of respondents accused banks of favouritism. In terms of prevention, seven out of ten respondents believed that favouritism was unavoidable. For the very few who believed in the promise of prevention, seven out of ten recommended that the public mentality be changed; about half emphasised strict enforcement of merit requirements and better training of administrators; and about one-third conceptualised legislative change as an effectual solution to favouritism.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong support to previous anecdotal evidence suggesting that favouritism (as reflected in hiring, promotion, privileged employment transfers, and access to services) is highly present in Cyprus (for example, like Russia, e.g. Clarke, 1999; Yakubovich and Kozina, 2000), particularly within the government, the semi-public sector (including public television, electricity, and telephone companies, etc.), and banks.

The study also suggests that the citizens of Cyprus are very frustrated with favouritism on the island, yet very pessimistic about its prevention potential. Ironically, despite the bleak picture that public assessment of favouritism paints in Cyprus, the Cyprus public does not seem to judge Greek-Cypriot society at large as extremely, or even very unjust. The latter observation could be insinuating mitigating strengths within Cypriot communities (such as perhaps cultural characteristics, e.g. collectivity) that could partially dismantle the negative impacts of favouritism and lead its citizenry to assess society more favourably than expected. Another explanation of the latter finding could be cultural denial. Greeks tend to be very fervent about their ethnic identity. They may, therefore, deliberately refuse to accept injustice labels for their society due to the negative connotations that such admission could bear on their sense of ethnic pride.

The very few study respondents (29 per cent) who acclaimed the potential of favouritism prevention in Cyprus, saw light at the end of the tunnel in the form of public mentality change (70 per cent), stricter enforcement of merit requirements and better training of administrators to circumvent situations of favouritism (53 per cent), legislative change (30 per cent) and public protest against favouritism (5 per cent). Clearly, this evidence suggests that the public in Cyprus is cognizant of the coincidence between favouritism and cultural and historical leanings. This observation is congruent with findings claiming that informal hiring practices inherited from the past persevere because the personal networks in which they are embedded sabotage abrupt changes in the social order (Grabher and Stark, 1997). Similarly, Huo, Huang, and Napier (2002) demonstrate that personnel selection criteria are driven by each country's prevalent cultural values.

Like every study, the present research is not free from limitations. For example, despite the effectiveness of a brief telephone survey to ensure high response, it also limits one's ability to investigate in an in-depth, qualitative fashion the social issue of concern. Another caveat of the present study is its holistic reliance on public opinion to draw conclusions on the defining parameters of favouritism in Cyprus. Inescapably, such opinions are subjective in nature, often exaggerated or underreported depending on the contextual dynamics of the research process.

Implications for Prevention and Social Work Intervention

Unjust favouritism is often a phenomenon reinforced by history and perpetuated by culture. Through the passage of time, favouritism becomes ingrained in people's psyches, solidifies itself as a cultural norm, and generates widespread citizen frustration and pessimism about its elimination. The uprooting of unjust favouritism requires structural and psychological interventions that are time-consuming (and perhaps costly), yet essential for success. Education about the harmful effects of favouritism is at the core of prevention. However, education alone, in the absence of supportive legislative change, may not be able to withstand the strong pressures exerted by predisposing cultural, social, political, geographic, and historical factors.

Small geographic contexts (such as Cyprus) may be more susceptible to favouritism by virtue of the fact that social connections are more easily made in such restricted environments. Social nets in these milieus could possibly catalyse upward social mobility processes and become automatic substitutes for merit requirements in areas such as hiring, promotion, access to services, and so on. Citizens in such highly networked societies may feel highly oppressed when their zealous endeavours for upward social mobility fail categorically. Due to perpetuating socio-cultural, political, and historical factors, citizens' collapsing efforts for socio-economic advancement in these environments may be perceived as fatal and inescapable. Such explanations concur with life chances theory and have powerful implications for prevention, the thrust of which is that preventive crusades could not simply reduce themselves to legislative innovation. They need to extend to attesting to the public that their future efforts for fiscal progress and dignified survival in society will be rewarded rather than undermined by society, thereby substantiating the logo that actions speak louder than words. Quick fix solutions are not likely to effectively tackle favouritism in such small contexts, as in the latter favouritism becomes a deeply rooted phenomenon ingrained in the citizenry's psyche (rather than being a periodic symptom resulting from a precipitating social event).

As with other social injustices, public compliance serves as a gigantic fertiliser for the perpetuation of favouritism in society. Activism and community organisation efforts could therefore become vital in the process of eradicating favouritism. Social workers and other human service professionals have an ethical responsibility to

empower citizens to objectively evaluate the origins of their oppression and to train them for social and political action to counteract it. These professionals are unlikely to be successful in such a crusade if they themselves model behaviours that are pessimistic, cynical, and/or compliant in nature, thereby reinforcing the status quo. Cypriot social workers and other social service providers are therefore clearly charged with the ethical responsibility of becoming themselves actively involved in community efforts to annihilate favouritism, either as initiators, supporters of existing initiatives, or both. They also have the moral obligation of encouraging and preparing their clientele, as well as the general public, for involvement in anti-favouritism campaigns. Strengthening the psychological stamina and resiliencies of those adversely impacted or who will likely be victims of unjust favouritism is an additional ethical obligation of social workers. Without such protective factors, the latter individuals could be highly at risk as attribution and life chances theories suggest. Group interventions may be particularly productive and cost-effective in this venture. Groups can simultaneously provide socio-emotional support and be the springboard for social action campaigns, both of which are highly conducive to client empowerment (e.g. Johnson and Johnson, 2003).

Future Research and Cross-National Collaboration

More research is needed in Cyprus, as well as globally, to answer what exactly are the psychological effects of unjust practices of favouritism. For example, an important question that needs to be addressed is whether victimisation by favouritism is a contributing factor for mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation, and suicide. This inquiry is particularly formidable when one considers that researchers in Europe and elsewhere report that extended unemployment (which often is an offspring of the absence of meritocratic practices in society) is a high risk factor for behavioural and health problems (Kieselbach, 1988; Winefield, Tiggemann, Winefield and Goldney, 1993). The psychological effects of favouritism will also need to be discerned along important socio-demographic dimensions such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, culture, etc. For example, it would be laudable to evaluate whether the propensity of: (a) younger and less educated individuals to estimate higher levels of unjust favouritism; (b) males to assess their society more unjust than females; (c) and females to be more optimistic about prevention (findings substantiated herein) persist across different cultures, ethnicities, and geographic locations.

Cross-cultural comparisons on the origins, experiences, and effects of unjust favouritism can also enhance our awareness of its universal threads and resiliency mechanisms for coping with its adverse consequences. Cross-cultural assessments of favouritism are particularly significant in our ultramodern society (Etzioni-Halevy, 1999), which seeks to silence the oppressed while magnifying the welfare of the oppressors. Therefore, our improved understanding of the

oppressions of other cultures, in areas such as favouritism, could mobilise us to reach out to other cultures/nations and find common grounds for collective campaigns to institute universal protective measures against global injustices perpetuated by malignant forms of favouritism.

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Appendix

The following questionnaire was used to elicit data:

1. To what extent do you believe there is favouritism in Cyprus today?

   Not at All A Little Some A Lot or Extremely?

2. To what extent would you say you feel frustrated with the issue of favouritism in Cypriot society?

   Not at All A Little Some A Lot or Extremely?

3. How fair do you assess Cypriot society to be?

   Not at All A Little Some A Lot or Extremely?

4. How many persons do you know in Cyprus that have been appointed to a position, or received a promotion based on favouritism?

5. To what areas of life in Cyprus do you feel favouritism is used today?

6. a) Do you believe that the problem of favouritism in Cyprus can be prevented?

   b) If so, what ideas do you have for containing this problem?

7. What is your age?

8. How many years of formal education have you completed so far?

* Rousfetti or Meso were the exact Greek words used for favouritism during the interview. If people didn't know the first word (which is a considered a little formal in nature), they were definitely aware of the second word (a very common Greek slang word).

Table 1: Respondents' Assessment of Favouritism in Cyprus (CY)

Favouritism/Social Injustice Indicators	Mean	SD	Range	N
Prevalence of Favouritism in CY	3.65 [a]	.56	2-4	150
Personal Frustration w/Favouritism	3.13 [b]	1.16	1-4	150
Degree of Unfairness of Greek-Cypriot Society	2.41 [c]	1.06	1-4	150
Number of Known Favouritism Cases in CY	43.34	53.96	2-200	150
Belief in Prevention of Favouritism	.29 [d]	.45	0-1	150

[a] 0= favouritism is not at all present in CY; 4=favouritism is extremely present in CY society;

[b] 0= feel not at all frustrated with favouritism; 4=feel extremely frustrated with favouritism;

[c] 0=CY society is not at all unfair; 4=CY society is extremely unfair;

[d] 0=favouritism in CY cannot be prevented; 1=favouritism is CY can be prevented.

Table 2: Regression Analyses

	B			
Favouritism Descriptors	Gender[a]	Age	Education	Adjusted R^2
Prevalence	-.09	-.24*	-.19*	.049*
Personal Frustration	-.12	-.02	-.96	.003
Social Unfairness	.22*	-.07	.02	.040*
Number of Known Cases	.08	.12	-.07	.011
Prevention	-.21*	-.05	-.13	.043*

[a] 0=female; 1=male; *p<.05.

Table 3: Content Analyses:
Locations of Favouritism and Prevention Methods

Theme	N	(%)
Locations of Favouritism*		
Government/Public Sector	134	89%
Everywhere	86	57%
Semi-Public Sector	81	54%
Banks	39	26%
Private Sector	25	17%
Hospitals	16	11%
Code Enforcement/ Property Appraisal Office	13	7%
Education	8	5%
Military	7	5%
Police	5	3%
Legal/Criminal Justice System	4	3%
Prevention Methods		
Public Mentality Change	30	70%
Strict Enforcement of "Merit" Requirements/ Better Training of Administration	23	53%
Legislative Change	13	30%
Public Protest	2	5%

* Addresses areas such as hiring, promotion, privileged employment transfer, and service provision/access.