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# Using System Justification Theory to Explain the Support of Migrant Sponsorship in Gulf Countries (*kafala*)

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## Abstract

Millions of individuals work as temporary labor migrants, often in domestic roles, to escape unemployment and support their families through remittances. Labor migrants frequently face exploitation, yet many countries have been slow to reform employment systems for migrants, like the *kafala* (sponsorship) system common in the Gulf states. To better understand support for the *kafala* system, we applied System Justification Theory (SJT), a social and political psychology framework that explains why individuals defend the status quo, and surveyed 160 sponsors (*kafeels*) of housemaids (*khaddamahs*) in the United Arab Emirates. Our results revealed that justification of the *kafala* system was positively associated with sponsors' identification with other sponsors and with life satisfaction, but was unrelated to need for cognition or to the working conditions of their housemaids. These findings contribute to understanding support for controversial labor systems and expand the application of SJT to the context of labor migration.

**Keywords** Domestic workers · Kafala system · Temporary migration · System justification

Temporary labor migration is a widespread global phenomenon, with over 169 million international migrant workers estimated worldwide (International Labour

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Organization [ILO], 2021). These migrants typically engage in low-wage, highly gendered jobs (ILO, 2015), unlike permanent migrants who may eventually gain citizenship in their host countries. Ideally, temporary labor migration creates a mutually beneficial situation for both migrants and employers (Strabac et al., 2018). Migrants might escape a labor market where they cannot find a job and might earn so much that they can send remittances back home, and these remittances contribute pivotally to the economies of many developing countries (International Organization for Migration, 2021). In regions like the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, which have rapidly growing economies and many business opportunities, temporary labor migration effectively addresses labor shortages that the local workforce cannot meet (Strabac et al., 2018).

In a less-than-ideal world, win–win situations in temporary labor migration are less common than anticipated. When one side loses, it is typically the migrant who bears the greater burden due to their temporary status, which makes them particularly vulnerable. For instance, female domestic workers may endure physical and psychological exploitation but refrain from reporting abuse out of fear that their visas will be revoked (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Parreñas, 2021). Additionally, migrants are frequently the first to face layoffs and are rarely included in national social protection systems, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021). These vulnerabilities of temporary labor migrants, especially those with lower skills, have now been widely documented (e.g., Blaydes, 2023; Hargreaves et al., 2019; Kandilige et al., 2023). Unsurprisingly, human rights organizations often criticize many employment systems for migrant workers as exploitative and problematic (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This criticism has led to international pressure on governments to improve working conditions for temporary labor migrants, especially domestic workers. In particular, the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 189 advocates for decent work for domestic workers (ILO, 2011).

Despite widespread criticism, countries have been slow to change practices. The limited ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 by countries raises the question: *Why do such employment systems receive so much societal support?* Our research seeks to answer this question by applying System Justification Theory (SJT), a social and political psychology framework positing that individuals are motivated to defend, rationalize, and maintain existing societal systems, even when they are disadvantageous (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Although SJT has been used to explain many different phenomena ranging from attitudes towards colonialism (Rivera Pichardo et al., 2022) and rape victim blaming (Ståhl et al., 2010), it has not yet been applied to employer justification of controversial labor migration systems. If validated, these findings could inform interventions targeting stakeholders' psychological adherence to the status quo, such as addressing system-justifying narratives through education campaigns or highlighting inconsistencies between employers' self-interest and systemic exploitation. By linking SJT to labor migration, this research extends the theory's applicability and offers actionable pathways for reform.

## Study Background

In Gulf countries, migrant workers constitute a substantial portion of the workforce, with approximately one-third of all workers being migrants, nearly all of whom are employed on temporary visas (ILO, 2015). These migrant workers are mostly male (around 80%), with female migrant workers in Gulf countries working predominantly as domestic workers (more than 60%, ILO, 2015). Domestic workers represent a particularly vulnerable group because they typically work in isolation within private households, a vulnerability that the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated (ILO, 2021). The situation is particularly pronounced in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, where migrants make up around 90% of the total workforce (Malit & Tsourapas, 2021) and where domestic workers—primarily women—are estimated to account for 5% of the total population (Youssef, 2007).

To understand the intricacies of temporary labor migration in Gulf countries, it is essential to examine the *kafala* system, which is a legal framework that ties migrant workers' residency and employment to a sponsoring citizen or company (*kafeel*) (AlShehabi, 2021; Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023). The Arabic word *kafala* can be translated as "sponsorship", which implies that a local citizen or company (the sponsor or *kafeel*) sponsors a foreign worker (a *khaddamah* in the case of a housemaid). This means that the *kafeel* is legally and economically responsible for the migrant; it also means that the migrants' right to work and legal presence in a Gulf country depends on the *kafeel* (Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011). Thus, unless migrants find a new *kafeel*, quitting a job implies that a migrant has to leave the country, although some migrants find ways to overstay (a fairly widespread irregularity, see Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2019; Parreñas, 2021). Furthermore, it is not uncommon that the *kafeel* is only officially the sponsor, while the migrant illegally works for somebody else.

The modern *kafala* system in Gulf countries has historical roots shaped by various influences. These include the universal principle of surety, with evidence of its existence as early as Mesopotamian times (Morgan, 1927), Islamic legal traditions particularly concerning the care and guardianship of orphans (Jureidini & Hassan, 2019), the regional tradition of slavery (Hopper, 2015), and practices shaped during the British colonial era (AlShehabi, 2021). The universal principle of surety refers to a legal or social arrangement in which one party assumes responsibility for the actions, debts, or obligations of another, ensuring accountability and trust within a community or system (Morgan, 1927). In Islamic tradition, *kafala* originally refers to a formal agreement to provide care and support for an orphaned child, functioning as a form of legal guardianship without conferring inheritance rights, in contrast to adoption (Jureidini & Hassan, 2019). Beyond family law, Muslim jurists extended the concept of *kafala* to business and legal contexts, where it denotes a guarantee provided by one party to ensure another's obligations, such as financial liabilities (Jureidini & Hassan, 2019). However, the contemporary application of *kafala* in labor relations differs substantially from these traditional uses. Furthermore, the Gulf region has a long history of labor exploitation including slavery (Hopper, 2015). In this context,

the modern *kafala* system developed during a time when the Gulf region was an informal British colony, particularly from the 1920s to the 1970s (AlShehabi, 2021). British administrators introduced sponsorship requirements to manage labor migration, initially in the pearl industry and later in the emerging oil sector. The system served multiple purposes: it enabled economic control, facilitated population management, and aimed to ensure social stability. By delegating authority over foreign workers to citizen employers, Gulf states established a two-tiered system that preserved the privileged status of Arab citizens while meeting the labor demands of rapid economic development (Alnuaimi, 2022; AlShehabi, 2021). Thus, the evolution of the *kafala* system represents a complex interplay of traditional Islamic concepts, colonial-era policies, and the economic imperatives of modern oil-rich Gulf states.

The *kafala* system has been widely criticized for its role in perpetuating the vulnerable status of migrant workers in Gulf countries. Human rights organizations have documented numerous cases of exploitation, including physical abuse, wage theft, and excessive working hours that violate labor standards (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2014). While these organizations often focus on the most severe cases of abuse (Ewers et al., 2023; Parreñas, 2021), harsh working conditions are common across many sectors: Migrant workers frequently face excessive workloads that deprive them of adequate sleep, delayed or unpaid wages, and restricted mobility due to passport confiscation by sponsors (e.g., Blaydes, 2023; Kandilige et al., 2023). It has also been reported that sponsors often do not act in accordance with the labor law, retaining migrants' passports and restricting their communication efforts – even those sponsors who know their legal obligations (e.g., Abdulrahim et al., 2024). Additionally, non-domestic workers often live in overcrowded and unsafe housing conditions, further exacerbating their vulnerability (Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011).

The increasing international criticism of the *kafala* system has prompted some political responses from Gulf countries (Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011). For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE n.d.) changed its Domestic Worker Rights Bill in 2017, which gives migrant domestic workers substantially more rights, such as the guarantee of a weekly rest day and paid annual leave (although still within the *kafala* system; Malit & Tsourapas, 2021). Similarly, labor-sending countries like the Philippines have pushed for protective measures to safeguard domestic workers employed abroad (Ireland, 2018). However, no Gulf country has ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189, the convention that seeks to establish a minimum level of treatment for domestic workers (ILO, 2011). This lack of ratification underscores the continued political support for the existing employment systems in Gulf countries despite mounting international pressure for reform.

If the *kafala* employment system prevails despite being heavily criticized, the question arises as to why this is the case – why is there support for this system? SJT, developed mainly by John Jost (e.g., Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994), provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to SJT, individuals are motivated to rationalize, defend, and uphold existing social systems because they perceive them as legitimate, fair, and beneficial simply by virtue of their existence. This tendency persists even when the system disadvantages those who support it. This theory has been applied to a wide range of phenomena such

as dirty work (Kreiner et al., 2006) or layoffs (Richter & König, 2017). However, it has not yet been used to explore support for the *kafala* system. Applying SJT in this context could provide valuable insights into why stakeholders—such as employers in Gulf countries—continue to justify and sustain a labor system that has been widely criticized for its exploitative nature.

SJT posits that interindividual differences in system justification can be influenced by the motivation to reduce uncertainty (Jost, 2019), which is closely tied to cognitive tendencies such as the need for cognition. The need for cognition refers to the extent to which individuals enjoy and engage in effortful thinking and reasoning (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Those who score higher in this characteristic – who can likely cope better with uncertainty – should defend social systems less than people who score low in their need for cognition. This argument has been supported in previous research on the justification of broader economic systems. For example, studies have shown that individuals with lower need for cognition are more likely to endorse conservative and system-justifying beliefs because such beliefs reduce epistemic uncertainty (Hennes et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2017a, 2017b). Based on these findings, it is reasonable to hypothesize a similar negative relationship between need for cognition and the justification of the *kafala* system. In this context, individuals with higher need for cognition may be less inclined to perceive the *kafala* system as legitimate or fair, while those with lower need for cognition may rationalize its existence as a means of achieving psychological stability in an uncertain environment. More formally, we hypothesize:

H1: The higher the need for cognition of *kafeels*, the lower the justification of the *kafala* system.

According to Jost et al. (2017a, 2017b), system justification is closely tied to the identification with one's in-group. In particular, Jost et al. (2017a) argue that high-status group members are motivated to uphold their group's positive image and maintain the benefits they derive from the existing system. This is because people are generally driven to see the groups they belong to as good and legitimate, which reinforces their social reality and resists changes to attitudes or behaviors that might challenge this perception (Jost, 2019; Osborne et al., 2019). Further support comes Vargas-Salfate et al.'s (2018b) 19-country study, which showed that higher social status correlates positively with system-justifying beliefs. In the context of the *kafala* system, sponsors (*kafeels*) can be understood as a high-status group because of their privileged position within the employment hierarchy. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that *kafeels* who strongly identify with other *kafeels* are more likely to justify the *kafala* system. Their identification with their in-group reinforces their belief in the legitimacy of the system, as it aligns with their motivation to maintain a favorable social reality and continue benefiting from the status quo. Put more formally:

H2: The justification of the *kafala* system by *kafeels* positively correlates with the identification of employers with other *kafeels*.

Another central argument of SJT is that system justification serves a "palliative function" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Napier et al., 2020): When people consider the system they live in as fair and justified, this should yield psychological benefits such as increased life satisfaction. For instance, research has repeatedly shown that conservatives tend to experience greater happiness than liberals because they justify political and economic systems more strongly (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Napier et al., 2020). These findings have been observed across various countries (e.g., Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018a). Applying this argument to the *kafala* system suggests that sponsors (*kafeels*) who justify the system may experience greater life satisfaction because their beliefs align with a sense of legitimacy and fairness in the employment framework. Conversely, *kafeels* who struggle to justify the *kafala* system might experience emotional distress, stemming from the moral dissonance of benefiting from a system that exacerbates the difficult circumstances of migrant workers. This psychological tension highlights the palliative function of system justification as a mechanism for maintaining emotional well-being despite systemic inequalities. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: The higher the justification of the *kafala* system by *kafeels*, the higher their life satisfaction.

SJT further predicts that the extent to which individuals justify a system influences their behavior, including whether they act in accordance with the system or protest against it (e.g., Jost et al., 2011; Osborne et al., 2019). In other words, system justification extends beyond perceptions and also shapes actions. In the context of the *kafala* system, sponsors (*kafeels*) who perceive the system as fair and justified are unlikely to see a need to improve working conditions for domestic migrant workers, as their system-supporting beliefs align with maintaining the status quo. Conversely, *kafeels* who are critical of the *kafala* system may be more inclined to offer better working conditions than required by law. For instance, they might provide additional free days or allow workers to sleep outside their employers' homes, demonstrating resistance to the restrictive norms imposed by the *kafala* framework. This behavioral distinction underscores SJT's relevance for understanding not only attitudes toward the *kafala* system but also the actions of those who support or challenge it. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H4: The less *kafeels* justify the *kafala* system, the better the working conditions they grant for domestic workers.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were Emirati employers (*kafeels*) of female domestic workers (*khaddamah*) whom we contacted through the personal network of MBA graduates of several UAE universities who were asked to forward the questionnaire

links to their acquaintances. Data were collected from October 2023 to February 2024. A power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that a sample of 129 participants is required to detect a medium effect of .3, assuming a Bonferroni corrected α of .0125 (because of four hypotheses) and 90% power (i.e., a β of .10). We planned to oversample by 20% to allow for incomplete data or the exclusion of outliers (i.e., 155 *kafeels*). Oversampling ensures that, even if a portion of the data had to be excluded due to nonresponse, missing values, or extreme responses, we would still retain a sufficient sample size to achieve adequate statistical power. In total, 162 *kafeels* participated. Of these, two were excluded following pre-specified exclusion criteria that cases that lie above or below + 2.24 *SD* units and/or that can be visually identified as outliers in scatter plots (following the advice of Aguinis et al., 2013) should be excluded. The ± 2.24 *SD* threshold corresponds to the top and bottom 2.5% of a normal distribution (α = .05, two-tailed), and thus identifies values that are unlikely to result from substantive reasons under typical data assumptions. Hence, the final sample consisted of 160 *kafeels*.

The sample consisted of 102 women and 58 men. Most were between 36 and 45 years old ($n = 76$), followed by those being 26 to 35 years old ($n = 53$). Only a few participants were between 18 to 25 ($n = 15$) or older than 45 years ($n = 16$). Most participants reported having a bachelor's degree ($n = 79$) or a master's degree ($n = 45$), with some having only upper secondary education ($n = 33$), and only three reporting to have a PhD. Of the participants, 124 indicated to be the official sponsor for their *khaddamah* and 36 indicated that they were not the official sponsor. It should be noted that hiring *khaddamahs* in the UAE generally requires a stable and well-paying occupation, given that the monthly cost is typically no less than USD 2,000.

Regarding the demographics of their *khaddamahs*, participants indicated that these were mostly aged between 23 to 28 years ($n = 70$), with some being 18 to 22 years ($n = 27$) or 29 to 35 years old ($n = 38$). Only 25 of the *khaddamahs* were reported to be older than 35 years. The participants reported that most of their *khaddamahs* had primary education ($n = 85$) followed by upper secondary education ($n = 38$) and early childhood education ($n = 35$). Only two *khaddamahs* were reported to have a Bachelor's degree. Most *khaddamahs* had been in the UAE for 1 to 5 years ($n = 135$), some for 6 to 10 years ($n = 20$), and only five were in the UAE for more than 10 years. Regarding the mastery of Arabic, the overall rating indicated a good mastery ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.93$) with some housemaids having weak ($n = 15$) or acceptable ($n = 29$) Arabic proficiency, most speaking good ($n = 75$) or very good ($n = 38$) Arabic and only three speaking excellent Arabic. Table 1 gives an overview of the *khaddamahs'* countries of origin and typical work tasks.

The dataset is available on the Open Science Framework Repository at https://osf.io/ch6xr/?view_only=c2656c667d09466db30862ffdfb2d5e3. Participants gaven consent to the use of the data for research purposes. Ethical approval was received from the ethics board of Saarland University (#21–05) in accordance with regulations of the German Research Foundation (clinical trail number: not applicable).

**Table 1** Countries of origin and typical work tasks

| Country of Origin | Frequency | Typical Work Tasks | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ethiopia | 67 | Cleaning | 42 |
| Philippines | 32 | Cooking and Cleaning | 40 |
| Indonesia | 28 | All housework | 19 |
| Uganda | 16 | Cooking, Cleaning, and Washing | 13 |
| Bangladesh | 7 | Cleaning, Childcare | 8 |
| Nepal | 6 | Home Business | 7 |
| Sri Lanka | 2 | Childcare | 7 |
| Myanmar | 1 | Cleaning, Washing, Ironing | 5 |

For typical work tasks only those that were mentioned at least five times are included in the table. The remaining tasks were similar and differed only in the combination of tasks (e.g., only cooking or cleaning, ironing, and childcare)

## Questionnaire

Most of the scales were already available in validated Arabic versions, for which reliability and validity had been established in previous research. Scales that required translations were translated from English into Arabic using a collaborative translation process, as recommended in the literature (Chidlow et al., 2014). This involved independent forward translations by two bilingual researchers, a reconciliation meeting to resolve discrepancies, and a review by a native speaker familiar with the research context. This approach helps ensure both conceptual equivalence and linguistic clarity, thereby supporting the validity and reliability of the translated measures.

### System Justification

To measure the justification of the *kafala* system, we adapted the original scale from Kay and Jost (2003, for an Arabic version, see Bou Zeineddine & Qumseya, 2021) to the *kafala* system, using the items "In general, I find the *kafala* system to be fair," "In general, the *kafala* system operates as it should," "The policies of the *kafala* system serve the greater good," and "The *kafala* system is set up so that people usually get what they deserve." Four items that were not adaptable to the *kafala* context were omitted. The scale used a 9-point response scale ranging from 1 ("completely disagree") to 9 ("completely agree"). The scale exhibited excellent reliability, McDonald's $\omega = .98$ (for arguments why McDonald's ω is a better reliability estimate than Cronbach's α see, e.g., Dunn et al., 2014).

### Need for Cognition

We used five items from the short form (Coelho et al., 2020) of the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, for its Arabic version see Al-Hamouri & Abu

Mokh, 2011). It consists of items such as "I would prefer complex to simple problems" and "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems." It uses a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree"). The scale was found to be reliable with McDonald's ω = .87.

### Identification with Other *Kafala* Employers

To measure identification with other employers, we used the Multicomponent In-Group Identification scale (MIIS, Leach et al., 2008). The MIIS assesses five identification components (in-group solidarity, in-group satisfaction, in-group centrality, individual self-stereotyping, and in-group homogeneity). Although the MIIS was previously been translated into Arabic (Thomas et al., 2017), no copy of this translation seems to exist anymore, and we thus translated it again, using the aforementioned collaborative approach. As the original scale does not specify the in-group (see the Appendix of Leach et al., 2008), we adapted it to the group of *kafeels* (i.e., other *kafala* employers). The MIIS uses a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 ("completely disagree") to 5 ("completely agree"). The items are "I feel a bond with other *kafeels*," "I feel solidarity with other *kafeels*," "I feel committed to other *kafeels*" (solidarity component), "I am glad to be a *kafeel*," "I think that *kafeels* have a lot to be proud of," "It is pleasant to be a *kafeel*," "Being a *kafeel* gives me a good feeling" (satisfaction component), "I often think about the fact that I am a *kafeel*," "The fact that I am a *kafeel* is an important part of my identity" (centrality component [for language reasons, one additional centrality item was omitted]), "I have a lot in common with the average *kafeel*," "I am similar to the average *kafeel*" (self-stereotyping component), "*Kafeels* have a lot in common with each other," and "*Kafeels* people are very similar to each other" (in-group homogeneity component). The scale showed good reliability for the overall score, McDonald's ω = .98, and also for all five components as evidenced by McDonald's ω = .94 for the solidarity component, McDonald's ω = .96 for the satisfaction component, and Spearman-Brown coefficients ranging from .85 to .94 for the other three components (for arguments why Spearman-Brown coefficients should be used for two-item measures see Eisinga et al., 2013).

### Life Satisfaction

Following the (SJT-based) example of Vargas-Salfate et al. (2018a), we used the Personal Well-being Index (adult version, PWI-A; Lau et al., 2005), which is available in Arabic (http://www.acqol.com.au/uploads/pwi-a/pwi-a-arabic.pdf). The unabridged version of the PWI-A consists of seven items asking for participants' satisfaction with seven life domains: living standard, personal health, achievement in life, personal relationships, personal safety, community connectivity, and future security. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = "very dissatisfied," 5 = "very satisfied"). The reliability of the scale was very good, McDonald's ω = .97.

### Working Conditions

Table 2 describes the working condition index we created based on several resources (e.g., UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, n.d.; Zaki, 2019). Higher sum scores indicated better working conditions. As this is an index (see Streiner, 2003), we report Spearman's rank-order correlations with this variable.

### Statistical Analyses

After establishing the reliabilities of constructs, we tested our (correlational) hypotheses by examining correlations. Following recent best-practice recommendations (Becker et al., 2016; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016), we did not include control variables in our analyses. This decision was based on the absence of theory-based reasons to expect confounding influences among the variables under study. While the inclusion of control variables is sometimes thought to enhance robustness, methodological research suggests that including controls without strong justification can introduce bias and reduce interpretability. Thus, our results reflect the direct relationships among our focal constructs. We acknowledge that this approach may not account for all possible sources of spurious association; however, we believe it provides the most accurate test of our theory-driven hypotheses given the current state of knowledge. All analyses were conducted in R Studio (Posit team, 2025) using R version 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025) and the packages apaTables v. 2.0.8 (Stanley, 2021), car v. 3.1.3 (Fox & Weisberg, 2019), dplyr v. 1.1.4 (Wickham et al., 2023), ggplot2 v. 3.5.2 (Wickham, 2016), lavaan v. 0.6.19 (Rosseel, 2012), psych v. 2.5.6 (Revelle, 2025), readxl v.1.4.5 (Wickham & Bryan, 2025), splithafr v. 3.0.0 (Pronk, 2025; Pronk et al., 2022), and stats v. 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025).

## Results

### Descriptive Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all examined variables can be found in Table 3. In the Appendix (Tables 4 and 5), we report correlation tables examining point-biserial correlations between the focal variables and the items forming the working conditions index.

### Hypotheses Testing

To test whether a higher need for cognition among *kafeels* goes along with a lower justification of the *kafala* system (H1), we examined the correlation between both variables and found that descriptively a higher need for cognition

**Table 2** Working condition index

| Items | Answers | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Does your *khaddamah* have to work on public holidays? | No (1) – Yes (0) | No: 29, Yes: 131 |
| How many hours does *khaddamah* work on a typical day? | 0 > 10 h<br>1 = 5 – 10 h<br>2 < 5 h | 14<br>120<br>26 |
| Does your *khaddamah* have a day off per week? | No (0) – Yes (1) | No: 51, Yes: 109 |
| Does your *khaddamah* have to work less during Ramadan? | No (0) – Yes (1) | No: 78, Yes: 82 |
| Can the *khaddamah*…<br>… go out to visit friends on occasion?<br>… go shopping on occasion?<br>… sleep away from their employers' houses on occasion? | No (0)—Yes (1)<br>No (0)—Yes (1)<br>No (0)—Yes (1) | No: 28, Yes: 132<br>No: 10, Yes: 150<br>No: 120, Yes: 30 |
| Does the *khaddamah* have a room for her own? | No (0)—Yes (1) | No: 3, Yes: 157 |
| Does the *khaddamah* sleep in her own bed? | No (0)—Yes (1) | No: 1, Yes: 159 |
| Do you keep the passport of the *khaddamah* in custody? | No (1) – Yes (0) | No: 21, Yes: 139 |
| Do you pay your *khaddamah* regularly or irregularly? | Irregularly (0) – Regularly (1) | Irregularly: 0<br>Regularly: 160 |
| What do you pay your *khaddamah* in UAE dirham per month? | Below—Above median split | $M = 1441.51$<br>($SD = 784.36$),<br>Median: 1200 |
| Can the *khaddamah* communicate with her family …<br>… through mobile phones?<br>… through household phones?<br>… through a computer? | 0 = No<br>1 = Yes, through at least one medium | No: 0, Yes: 160 |

The numbers in brackets refer to the coding for the index building: Values indicating good working conditions were coded with 1 and those indicating no good working conditions were coded with 0. For working hours, three categories were examined: Working more than 10 h, working 5 to 10 h, and working less than 5 h. For communication, all participants indicated that their *khaddamah* was allowed to communicate at least using a mobile phone; hence all participants received a 1 for this question

**Table 3** Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals ($N = 160$)

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3a | 3b | 3c | 3d | 3e | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. System justification | 3.53 | 1.09 | *.98* | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Need for cognition | 2.89 | 0.64 | .12 | *.87* | | | | | | | |
| | | | [-.04, .27] | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Identification | 2.86 | 0.98 | .47** | .36** | *.98* | | | | | | |
| | | | [.34, .58] | [.22, .49] | | | | | | | |
| 3a. Solidarity[a] | 3.01 | 1.05 | .46** | .34** | .90** | *.94* | | | | | |
| | | | [.32, .57] | [.20, .47] | [.87, .93] | | | | | | |
| 3b. Satisfaction[a] | 2.91 | 1.06 | .52** | .36** | .97** | .84** | *.96* | | | | |
| | | | [.40, .62] | [.22, .49] | [.96, .98] | [.79, .88] | | | | | |
| 3c. Centrality[a] | 2.70 | 1.12 | .39** | .32** | .92** | .75** | .87** | *.87*[b] | | | |
| | | | [.25, .51] | [.17, .45] | [.89, .94] | [.68, .81] | [.83, .91] | | | | |
| 3d. Stereotyping[a] | 2.85 | 1.05 | .39** | .37** | .92** | .75** | .88** | .84** | *.94*[b] | | |
| | | | [.25, .52] | [.23, .50] | [.89, .94] | [.68, .81] | [.84, .91] | [.78, .88] | | | |
| 3e. Homogeneity[a] | 2.74 | 1.02 | .33** | .27** | .87** | .73** | .79** | .79** | .78** | *.85*[b] | |
| | | | [.19, .46] | [.12, .41] | [.83, .91] | [.65, .80] | [.72, .84] | [.72, .84] | [.71, .83] | | |
| 4. Life satisfaction | 3.78 | 0.83 | .45** | .44** | .52** | .49** | .57** | .45** | .48** | .34** | *.97* |
| | | | [.32, .57] | [.30, .55] | [.40, .63] | [.36, .60] | [.45, .67] | [.32, .57] | [.35, .59] | [.20, .47] | |
| 5. Working conditions[c] | 9.04 | 1.46 | .10 | .15 | .24** | .26** | .21** | .19* | .23** | .18* | .16* |

System justification was rated on a scale from 1 = completely disagree to 9 = completely agree. Need for cognition and identification were rated on a scale from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree. Life satisfaction was rated on a scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. The index of working conditions was calculated by summing the responses to questions on days off, working less on Ramadan, being able to visit friends, go shopping, sleeping away, having an own room, having an own bed, receiving pay regularly, working on public holidays, having their passport, and pay. Higher values indicate better working conditions. Values in the diagonal refer to reliabilities (McDonald's ω)

[a]Refers to the five components of social identification according to Leach et al. (2008)

[b]For these scales, Spearman-Brown coefficients are reported

[c]Correlations with working conditions are Spearman's rank-order correlations as the working conditions measure is an ordinal-scaled index

*indicates $p < .05$, ** indicates $p < .01$

went along with more rather than less system justification, $r = .12$, $p = .14$. The correlation was above the Bonferroni-corrected threshold of .0125 and hence not significant. Hypothesis 1 was therfore not supported.

To answer Hypothesis 2, that the justification of the *kafala* system positively correlates with the identification of employers with other *kafeels*, we calculated the correlation between system justification and the overall score of identification and found support for the hypothesis: System justification was positively correlated with identification, $r = .47$, $p < .001$. This result indicates that the justification of the *kafala* system is positively associated with a higher identification with other *kafeels*.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, we examined the correlation between system justification and life satisfaction to test whether this relation was positive. We found support for the assumed positive correlation, $r = .45$, $p < .001$. Hence, those justifying the *kafala* system also reported higher life satisfaction.

Finally, we calculated Spearman's rank order correlation to test whether a lower justification of the *kafala* system goes along with better working conditions (H4). System justification was not significantly related to working conditions, Spearman's $\rho = .10$, $p = .22$, hence lending no support for H4. Looking at it from a descriptive perspective, the correlation was even in the opposite direction, indicating that those who justify the *kafala* system tend to offer better working conditions.

### Exploratory Results

Next, to examine the correlation between the overall score of identification and justification of the *kafala* system, we calculated the correlations between the five components of identification and system justification (see also Table 3). We found support for the hypothesis that the justification of the *kafala* system positively correlates with the identification of employers with other *kafeels*: System justification was positively correlated with in-group solidarity, $r = .46$, $p < .001$, in-group satisfaction, $r = .52$, $p < .001$, in-group centrality, $r = .39$, $p < .001$, self-stereotyping, $r = .39$, $p < .001$, and in-group homogeneity, $r = .33$, $p < .001$. These results thus also indicate that the justification of the *kafala* system is positively related to an identification with other *kafeels*.

Exploratory correlational results that warrant mentioning are the positive association between the need for cognition and life satisfaction, $r = .44$, $p < .001$, and the positive association between the need for cognition and working conditions, Spearman's $\rho = .15$, $p = .051$. These correlations indicate that participants with a higher need for cognition are more satisfied with their lives in general and offer better working conditions for their *khaddamahs*.

The item-level results for the working conditions index are reported in the Appendix. Several of these also warrant mentioning. First, participants with a higher need for cognition reported rather not to keep the passport of their housemaids ($r = .23$), letting their housemaids work less during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for Muslims ($r = .20$), but allowing fewer days off ($r = -.21$). The same correlational pattern was found for those being more satisfied and those identifying more with other *kafeels*. They also let their housemaid work less during Ramadan ($r$ ranging from

.23 to .42) as well as on public holidays (*r* ranging from .23 to .28) but allowed fewer days off (*r* ranging from -.23 to -.28). Second, those justifying the *kafala* system to a greater extent tend to allow a day off ($r = .24$). Third, regarding only the working conditions themselves, working less during Ramadan often goes along with fewer days off ($r = -.43$), those not working on public holidays tend to receive more pay ($r = .21$), and those allowed to visit friends are also allowed to go shopping ($r = .49$), have a day off ($r = .32$), but work on public holidays ($r = -.21$). The housemaids who are allowed to sleep away also have a day off ($r = .21$) and work fewer hours ($r = .26$). Finally, if the *kafeel* keeps the passport of the housemaid, housemaids often do not have a day off ($r = -.41$) and are not allowed to work less during Ramadan ($r = .34$).

## Discussion

This study aimed to contribute to understanding why the *kafala* employment system, despite widespread criticism, continues to prevail, drawing on core SJT assumptions (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). The *kafala* system affects millions of migrants (ILO, 2021), making it crucial to examine the factors driving its support, particularly given the well-documented vulnerabilities of these temporary labor migrants (e.g., Hargreaves et al., 2019; Parreñas, 2021). Our study findings indicate that *kafeels* (i.e., sponsors) who justify the *kafala* system report greater life satisfaction and stronger identification with other *kafeels*, aligning with key tenets of SJT. However, contrary to our expectations and SJT's predictions, there was no significant relationship between *kafeels'* justification of the *kafala* system and their need for cognition or offering better working conditions for their *khaddamahs*.

SJT posits that system justification has a "palliative function" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Napier et al., 2020) whereby perceiving the system one resides in as justified leads to psychological benefits such as increased life satisfaction. Our study findings align with this proposition, as we observed a positive correlation between higher levels of system-justifying beliefs and greater life satisfaction among *kafeels*, supporting our third hypothesis. Conversely, *kafeels* who do not justify the *kafala* system reported lower overall life satisfaction. This may stem from emotional distress caused by the moral dissonance of benefiting from a system that exploits migrant workers' challenging circumstances. These findings reinforce the tenets of SJT, demonstrating how system justification fulfills existential, epistemic, and relational needs, even in contexts involving controversial systems like the *kafala* framework.

Building on the "palliative function" of system justification, our findings also align with the notion that *kafeels* are high-status group members within the *kafala* system who benefit from its structure. Previous research has demonstrated that high-status group members often exhibit a positive association between identification with their group and system justification (e.g., Osborne et al., 2019). Our study corroborates this relationship, supporting our hypothesis. We observed positive correlations between system justification and all five components of identification, as well as the overall identification score: *Kafeels* who identified more strongly with other *kafeels* were more likely to justify the *kafala* system. This supports prior findings suggesting that valuing one's in-group helps individuals resist changes to their

attitudes or behavior, as altering these perceptions would challenge their social reality (Jost, 2019). Furthermore, our results are consistent with cross-cultural research showing a positive relationship between high social status and system justification across multiple countries (Vargas-Salfate et al., 2018a).

Our results did not support two additional hypotheses derived from SJT (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). First, we hypothesized a negative relationship between the justification of the *kafala* system and the need for cognition, but no significant link was found. This contrasts with previous findings that individuals with a lower need for cognition were more likely to justify broader economic systems (Hennes et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2017b). It is possible that the need for cognition operates differently across various domains. While it may influence attitudes toward general economic or political systems, its impact on specific labor practices like the *kafala* system might be weaker, as these practices are more likely shaped by cultural norms or immediate economic considerations. Second, we hypothesized that *kafeels* who justify the *kafala* system less would offer better working conditions to their *khaddamahs* to alleviate distress from profiting off an unjustified system. However, no significant correlation was observed between system justification and working conditions. This finding is surprising given the variability in working conditions reported by participants, with 139 out of 160 *kafeels* admitting to retaining their *khaddamah's* passports—an indicator of control and restriction consistent with previous findings (e.g., Abdulrahim et al., 2024; Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2019; el-Mumin, 2020). *Kafeels* might justify the *kafala* system in principle but still provide better working conditions due to practical considerations, social and legal pressure, or personal relationships with their employees. Additionally, economic efficiency might take precedence over ideological consistency, as offering improved working conditions could be viewed as a strategy to enhance productivity or retain workers regardless of one's justification of the system.

Our exploratory analyses revealed notable patterns in the working conditions of *khaddamahs*. While most *khaddamahs* were required to work on public holidays, the majority did receive a weekly day off, which occurred more frequently than reported for the Lebanon (Abdulrahim et al., 2024). However, only half of the *khaddamahs* were able to work reduced hours during Ramadan, and just a minority were permitted to sleep away from their employers' homes. On a more positive note, most *khaddamahs* were allowed to go shopping or visit friends, and nearly all had their own room and bed. These exploratory findings highlight the potential importance of variables derived from SJT in shaping employer behavior, providing further support for SJT's relevance in understanding the dynamics of the *kafala* system and its implications for migrant workers' experiences.

Overall, this study demonstrates the value of integrating psychological theories to comprehend temporary migration phenomena. Specifically, we utilized SJT (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994), a prominent social and political psychology theory, to elucidate support for the *kafala* system for the first time. Whereas two of the four hypotheses derived from SJT were empirically validated, two were not supported by our data. Additionally, exploratory analyses emphasized the relevance of SJT variables, which we interpret as encouraging. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that factors beyond those derived from SJT likely influence the persistence of the *kafala* system. For example, political and economic interests play a significant role in

sustaining this employment structure (e.g., Diop et al., 2015). Furthermore, SJT itself has has received its share of criticism (e.g., Vesper et al., 2022). Therefore, applying a theory like SJT to a context such as the *kafala* system may necessitate adaptation and contextualization. Such efforts not only enhance our understanding of the specific context but also contribute to refining the generalizability and boundaries of the SJT.

## Limitations, Future Research, and Policy Implications

This study is not without limitations, as we faced several methodological challenges. First, the reliance on established Arabic scales and questionnaires constrained the range of constructs that could be examined. Second, to encourage participants from the UAE to complete the survey without prematurely terminating it, we kept the questionnaire concise by limiting the number of constructs. As a result, only central SJT hypotheses were tested, leaving other aspects of SJT unexplored. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts the study to correlational findings, preventing causal inferences about relationships between system justification and other variables. Fourth, we cannot rule out the possibility that our participants engaged in socially desirable responding, meaning they may have chosen answers that were perceived as socially acceptable rather than those that genuinely reflected their thoughts (Grimm, 2010). This is particularly relevant given the sensitive nature of the topic: As *kafeels*, participants may have felt compelled to present their attitudes toward the *kafala* system in a more favorable light, potentially underreporting critical views or justifying the system to align with perceived norms. Fifth, a further limitation concerns our sampling strategy, which relied on MBA student networks for participant recruitment. Although this approach was the most feasible given practical constraints, it may limit the generalizability of our findings.

While our study allowed us to test central tenets of the SJT and extended its applicability to the context of the *kafala* system, we encourage future research to explore the findings in greater depth. Specifically, further investigation is needed to understand the absence of a significant relationship between system justification and need for cognition, as well as the nuanced connection between system justification and life satisfaction. Longitudinal designs would provide a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships over time, offering insights into causal dynamics and changes in attitudes. In addition, quantitative approaches should be complemented by qualitative inquiries that explore the underlying motivations, perceptions, and mechanisms shaping the practices and experiences within the *kafala* system. In addition, future research should investigate the recipient end of the system, specifically focusing on migrant domestic workers ' perceptions of the kafala system, as well as their sense of social belonging and mental well-being (see Wambi et al., 2025). More broadly, we hope this study inspires greater collaboration between migration researchers and psychologists. Such interdisciplinary approaches hold potential for advancing our understanding of complex systems like *kafala* and improving outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

Overall, SJT has proven at least partially useful in the UAE context, as the relationships between system justification and identification, as well as life satisfaction, were found as hypothesized. These findings also carry important policy implications. First, *khaddamahs* arriving in the Gulf region should be informed about the challenges posed by the *kafala* system, particularly the likelihood that *kafeels* may justify its structure and practices. Second, policymakers in Gulf countries should consider implementing educational programs for *kafeels* that emphasize the benefits of fair labor practices, even though they personally benefit from the current employment system. Finally, policymakers should recognize that changing employment laws—especially under international pressure—may face resistance from *kafeels*, who are likely to defend the status quo due to their identification with the system and perceived benefits.

## Conclusion

With this study, we aimed to understand why employers support a questionable employment system such as the *kafala* system. Our findings revealed that justification of the *kafala* system was associated with higher identification with other *kafeels* and greater life satisfaction, while there was no association with lower need for cognition. Additionally, system justification was not significantly related to working conditions. These results suggest that *kafeels*, as employers, justify this advantageous employment system, potentially due to psychological mechanisms as explained by SJT (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994). To our knowledge, this study is the first to apply SJT to the *kafala* system; nevertheless, our findings generally align with broader research on system justification in other socio-political contexts (e.g., Jost, 2019). Unlike some prior work showing that system justification relates to cognitive traits like need for cognition, we found no such association here, which may reflect the unique cultural and socio-economic context of the UAE and the *kafala* system. Future research should further explore these differences to deepen understanding of how psychological mechanisms operate in varied migration settings. Nonetheless, it is essential to consider the broader context in which migration and the *kafala* system operate. The conditions under which migration takes place to Gulf countries are multifaceted, influenced by economic, social, and legal factors (Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023). Migrant workers often migrate due to a lack of job opportunities in their home country but frequently encounter significant wage disparities based on their nationality, skill level, and type of work, which can exacerbate inequalities and vulnerabilities. Moreover, the legal and policy framework governing migration and labor practices plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of migrant workers (Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023). To foster meaningful change, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach that combines policy reforms with interventions that address both the structural advantages for employers and their underlying attitudes toward the *kafala* system.

# Appendix

**Table 4** Means, standard deviations, and point-biserial correlations with confidence intervals ($N = 160$) for the items forming the working conditions index

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Pay | 1441.51 | 784.36 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Passport self-kept | 0.13 | 0.34 | -.02 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | [-.18,.13] | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Own Bed | 0.99 | 0.08 | -.01 | -.20** | | | | | | | | |
| | | | [-.16,.15] | [-.35, -.05] | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Own Room | 0.98 | 0.14 | .07 | .05 | -.01 | | | | | | | |
| | | | [-.09,.22] | [-.10,.21] | [-.17,.14] | | | | | | | |
| 5. Sleep away | 0.25 | 0.43 | -.00 | -.05 | -.14 | .08 | | | | | | |
| | | | [-.16,.15] | [-.21,.10] | [-.29,.02] | [-.08,.23] | | | | | | |
| 6. Shopping | 0.94 | 0.24 | .08 | .02 | -.02 | .35** | .15 | | | | | |
| | | | [-.08,.23] | [-.13,.18] | [-.18,.14] | [.20,.47] | [-.01,.30] | | | | | |
| 7. Friends | 0.82 | 0.38 | .14 | -.16 | -.04 | .18 | .19 | .49** | | | | |
| | | | [-.01,.29] | [-.31, -.01] | [-.19,.12] | [.02,.33] | [.04,.34] | [.37,.60] | | | | |
| 8. Working less on Ramadan | 0.51 | 0.50 | -.08 | .34** | -.08 | -.13 | .13 | .01 | -.19 | | | |
| | | | [-.23,.08] | [.20,.47] | [-.23,.08] | [-.28,.02] | [-.03,.28] | [-.15,.16] | [-.33, -.03] | | | |
| 9. Day off | 0.68 | 0.47 | -.07 | -.41** | -.05 | .20 | .21** | .16 | .32** | -.43** | | |
| | | | [-.22,.09] | [-.53, -.27] | [-.21,.10] | [.05,.35] | [.06,.35] | [.00,.30] | [.17,.45] | [-.54, -.29] | | |

**Table 4** (continued)

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Working hours per day (reverse coded) | 1.07 | 0.50 | .13 | .02 | .01 | .11 | .26** | -.01 | .20 | .12 | -.06 | |
| | | | [-.02,.28] | [-.14,.17] | [-.14,.17] | [-.04,.26] | [.11,.40] | [-.17,.14] | [.05,.35] | [-.03,.27] | [-.21,.10] | |
| 11. Not working on public holidays | 0.18 | 0.39 | .21** | .11 | .04 | .07 | -.12 | -.08 | -.21** | .13 | .01 | -.01 |
| | | | [.06,.36] | [-.05,.26] | [-.12,.19] | [-.09,.22] | [-.27,.03] | [-.23,.08] | [-.35, -.06] | [-.02,.28] | [-.15,.16] | [-.16,.15] |

Pay was assessed per month in UAE dirham. Passport self-kept was coded with 1 = no, the *kafeel* does not keep the passport (i.e., self-kept) and 0 = yes, the *kafeel* keeps the passport. Own bed, own room, sleep away, shopping, friends, working less on Ramadan, and day off were coded with 0 = no and 1 = yes. Working hours per day were coded with 0 = more than 10 h, 1 = 5 to 10 h, and 2 = less than 5 h. Not working on public holidays was coded with 0 = yes, has to work on public holidays, and 1 = no. Communication is not included in this table because it had no variance

** indicates $p < .01$

**Table 5** Point-biserial correlations with confidence intervals ($N = 160$) for the items forming the working conditions index and the focal variables

| Variable | System Justification | Need for Cognition | Life Satisfaction | Identifi-cation | Solidarity | Satis-faction | Centrality | Stereo-typing | Homogeneity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pay | -.05 | -.17 | -.01 | .17* | .12 | .15 | .19 | .19 | .18 |
| | [-.21,.10] | [-.32, -.02] | [-.17,.14] | [.02,.32] | [-.03,.27] | [-.01,.30] | [.03,.33] | [.03,.33] | [.03,.33] |
| Passport self-kept | -.06 | .23** | .20 | .17* | .20 | .16 | .15 | .13 | .14 |
| | [-.21,.09] | [.08,.37] | [.05,.34] | [.02,.32] | [.04,.34] | [.01,.31] | [-.00,.30] | [-.03,.28] | [-.02,.29] |
| Own Bed | .19 | .04 | .08 | .13 | .10 | .12 | .12 | .14 | .14 |
| | [.03,.33] | [-.12,.19] | [-.08,.23] | [-.02,.28] | [-.05,.25] | [-.03,.27] | [-.04,.27] | [-.01,.29] | [-.02,.28] |
| Own Room | .15 | -.02 | .10 | .05 | .09 | .07 | .04 | .00 | -.04 |
| | [-.00,.30] | [-.18,.13] | [-.06,.25] | [-.11,.20] | [-.07,.24] | [-.08,.23] | [-.11,.20] | [-.15,.16] | [-.19,.12] |
| Sleep away | .17 | .16 | .09 | .11 | .14 | .08 | .07 | .09 | .12 |
| | [.02,.32] | [.00,.30] | [-.06,.25] | [-.05,.26] | [-.02,.29] | [-.08,.23] | [-.08,.23] | [-.07,.24] | [-.03,.27] |
| Shopping | .09 | -.01 | .13 | -.02 | .04 | -.03 | -.04 | -.05 | -.02 |
| | [-.07,.24] | [-.17,.14] | [-.02,.28] | [-.17,.14] | [-.12,.19] | [-.19,.12] | [-.19,.12] | [-.20,.11] | [-.17,.14] |
| Friends | -.05 | -.12 | -.13 | -.09 | -.12 | -.12 | -.08 | -.03 | -.03 |
| | [-.21,.10] | [-.27,.03] | [-.28,.02] | [-.25,.06] | [-.27,.04] | [-.27,.04] | [-.23,.08] | [-.19,.12] | [-.18,.13] |
| Working less on Ramadan | -.02 | .29** | .38** | .36** | .42** | .36** | .23** | .32** | .25** |
| | [-.18,.13] | [.15,.43] | [.24,.50] | [.22,.49] | [.28,.54] | [.22,.49] | [.08,.37] | [.17,.45] | [.10,.39] |
| Day off | .24** | -.21** | -.26** | -.28** | -.25** | -.27** | -.24** | -.23** | -.28** |
| | [.09,.38] | [-.36, -.06] | [-.40, -.11] | [-.42, -.13] | [-.39, -.10] | [-.41, -.12] | [-.39, -.09] | [-.37, -.07] | [-.42, -.13] |
| Working hours per day (reverse coded) | -.05 | -.02 | -.16 | .11 | .08 | .09 | .11 | .08 | .17* |
| | [-.21,.10] | [-.17,.14] | [-.31, -.01] | [-.05,.26] | [-.07,.23] | [-.07,.24] | [-.05,.26] | [-.07,.23] | [.02,.32] |

**Table 5** (continued)

| Variable | System Justification | Need for Cognition | Life Satisfaction | Identifi-cation | Solidarity | Satis-faction | Centrality | Stereo-typing | Homogeneity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not working on public holidays | .15 | .20** | .25** | .27** | .25** | .28** | .23** | .23** | .26** |
| | [-.00,.30] | [.05,.35] | [.10,.39] | [.12,.41] | [.10,.39] | [.13,.42] | [.08,.37] | [.08,.37] | [.11,.40] |

Pay was assessed per month in UAE dirham. Passport self-kept was coded with 1 = no, the *kafeel* does not keep the passport (i.e., self-kept) and 0 = yes, the *kafeel* keeps the passport. Own bed, own room, sleep away, shopping, friends, working less on Ramadan, and day off were coded with 0 = no and 1 = yes. Working hours per day were coded with 0 = more than 10 h, 1 = 5 to 10 h, and 2 = less than 5 h. Not working on public holidays was coded with 0 = yes, has to work on public holidays, and 1 = no

** indicates $p < .01$

**Authors Contributions** All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation was performed by Cornelius König, Zafar Husain, and Denise Vesper, data collection was done by Zafar Husain, and data analysis was performed by Denise Vesper. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Cornelius König (polished with the help of ChatGPT and Perplexity.ai) and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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**Data Availability** The dataset is available on the Open Science Framework Repository at https://osf.io/ch6xr/?view_only=c2656c667d09466db30862ffdfb2d5e3.

## Declarations

**Ethical Approval** Ethical approval from the ethics board of Saarland University (#21–05).

**Conflict of interest** The authors have no potential conflict of interest to disclose.



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