

Job insecurity, Burnout and Intention to Quit

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of job insecurity on intention to quit among Syrian private banks employees. Moreover, the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit is investigated. A total sample of 172 employees is selected. The research findings indicate that there is a significant positive impact of job insecurity on both job burnout and intention to quit. Additionally, increased levels of burnout significantly affect intention to quit. Finally, the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit is fully mediated by burnout.

Keywords: Job insecurity, Job Burnout, Intention to Quit

Introduction

Intention to quit is a subjective estimation of an individual regarding the probability that he/she will be leaving the organization in the near future. Intentions are the most immediate determinants of actual behavior (McCarthy et al., 2007). Turnover intention is used instead of actual turnover in most researches because turnover intention leads towards actual turnover behavior [(Schyns et al., 2007); (Abrams et al., 1998); (Perryer et al., 2010)]. However, the reasons for these intentions are often unknown (Firth et al., 2004), and the phenomenon is far from being fully understood, especially because some of the psychological processes underlying the withdrawal from the organization are still unclear (Van Dick et al., 2004).

Job insecurity, as with any stressor, might induce a withdrawal response – a way to avoid the stress altogether (Ashford et al., 1989). In general, job insecurity is defined as ‘the discrepancy between the level of security a person experiences and the level he or she might prefer’ (Klandermans and Vuuren, 1999). The construct of job insecurity and its meaning has shifted from a “motivator” (job security) during the 1960s and 1970s to being defined as a stressor (job insecurity) in the 1980s [(Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984); (Sverke et al., 2002)]. The experience of job insecurity affects employees in a number of ways and is considered a work stressor in a large part of the literature. The experience of job insecurity as a stressor appears to be related to employees’ negative reactions (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2005).

Failure to cope with potential future unemployment or loss of job features may have significant consequences. Most existing research on job insecurity has focused on its negative

effects on individuals as on organizations [(Martinez et al., 2010); (Borg and Elizur, 2010); (Kuhnert and Palmer, 1991); (Roskies and Louis-Guerin, 1990)]. It has been found that job insecurity is to be associated with reduced level of job satisfaction [(Ashford et al., 1989); (Davy et al., 1997); (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2005)], decreased employee mental health and well-being (Larson et al., 1994), lower organizational commitment [(Apisakkul, 2000); (Ashford et al., 1989); (Davy et al., 1997); (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2005); (Adkins et al., 2001); (Chirumbolo and Hellgren, 2003)], reduced psychological well-being [(Catalano et al., 1986); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (Ferrie et al., 1998); (Joelson and Wahlquist, 1987); (Kuhnert et al., 1989)], decreased workplace safety motivation and compliance (Probst and Brubaker, 2001), distrust in management (Ashford et al., 1989), reduced work-related performance (De Witte, 2005), higher levels of burnout (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995), work withdrawal behavior (Probst, 2002) and intention to quit [(De Witte, 1999); (Davy et al., 1997); (De Cuyper et al., 2008)]

The concept of burnout was introduced in the psychosocial literature in the middle of the 1970s by Freudenberger and Maslach to describe the gradual depletion of energy and motivation felt among counselors and therapists (Maslach et al., 2001). The burnout concept described by Maslach as a job-related outcome that develops in response to chronic stressors. This definition has emerged as the most prominent in the literature. After its introduction to the literature, burnout has received the attention of the researchers and emerged as the “bad” end of employee attachment (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Since the mid-1970s, research has expanded rapidly, and the phenomenon of burnout has been studied worldwide and across multiple professions (Schaufeli et al., 2008).

Schaufeli and Bakker defined burnout as "a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is primarily characterized by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Burnout results from the gap between the individuals' expectations to fulfill their professional roles and the structure in place within the organization (Leiter and Harvie, 1998). When the workplace does not support professional goals, exhaustion and cynicism increase and professional efficacy decreases. Burnout has three underlying dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism) and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). The exhaustion component relates to the basic individual stress aspect of burnout, referring to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources. Cynicism (also described as depersonalization or disengagement) refers to an employees' psychological detachment from their work. The cynicism or depersonalization component represents the interpersonal context dimension of burnout, referring to negative, callous, or excessively detached responses to various aspects of the job. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment (also described as reduced personal efficacy) refers to employees' feelings of incompetence. The reduced efficacy or accomplishment component is linked to the self-evaluation dimension of burnout, referring to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity at work. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are related to job stressors whereas lack of personal accomplishment is more strongly related to lack of adequate resources (Bakker et al., 2000).

Burnout has been associated with numerous important negative outcomes such as: increased psychological distress, psychosomatic complaints, and decreased personal accomplishment (De Witte et al., 2010), mental health [(Cheng and Chan, 2008); (Sverke et al., 2002)], anxiety [(Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (Landsbergis, 1988)], hostility (Schwab et

al., 1986), depression [(De Witte, 1999); (Hellgren et al., 1999); (Mak and Mueller, 2000); (Rothmann and Joubert, 2007)], lower productivity and effectiveness for those who stay at work, decreased job satisfaction and commitment and a "spill over" effect to colleagues and even into the employees' home life (Maslach et al., 2001).

Job insecurity and burnout have not yet received an important academic interest in Syrian context, especially in recognition of rapidly changing external environment, such as crises, that can create job loss threats for organization's members. Many private companies have been forced to undertake downsizing, laying-off and introducing short term employment contracts. These actions are perceived as threatening by the employees, creating insecurity and burnout and searching for other jobs (intention to quit).

The current study investigates the impact of job insecurity as a stressor (which assesses the threat of job loss) on intention to quit. Furthermore, this study investigates whether the burnout mediates the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit. Firstly, the relevant literature for job insecurity, burnout and intention to quit is introduced. Then, methodology and findings are discussed with their relation to the literature.

Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Job insecurity and intention to quit

Job insecurity is one of the most common stressors concerning the uncertainty experienced over the future of one's job [(Lee et al., 2006); (Capelli, 1999)]. The phenomenon of job insecurity has been considered as a perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). Sverke and Hellgren view job insecurity as a perceptual phenomenon, reflecting the fear of involuntary job loss, with job insecurity thus representing an individual's perception of the employment situation being more insecure than he or she would prefer (Sverke and Hellgren, 2001). Bartley and Ferrie distinguish between the concepts of 'job security' and 'employment security'. Job security represents the ability to remain in a particular job, while employment security represents the likelihood of being able to remain in paid employment. Job insecurity arising from the threat of losing a particular job may lead to loss of employment security if subsequent jobs prove hard to find (Bartley and Ferrie, 2001).

Two distinct perspectives on the definition of job insecurity are presented, namely the global and the multidimensional perspectives [(Ashford et al., 1989); (De Witte, 2005); (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984); (Sverke et al., 2002)]. Globally defined, job insecurity signifies the threat of job loss or the endangerment of job continuity. Generally, this definition has been applied in the context of organizational crisis or change, in which job insecurity is considered as a first phase of the process of job loss [(Ferrie, 1997); (Joelson and Wahlquist, 1987); (Bosman et al., 2006); (De Witte, 1999); (Johnson et al., 1984)]. From a multi-dimensional point of view, job insecurity refers not only to the amount of uncertainty an employee feels about his or her job continuity, but also to the (dis)continuity of certain dimensions of the job or of valued conditions of the particular employment, such as opportunities for promotion, or the possibility of being laid off and losing one's work-related social network (Mauno et al., 2005).

As a hindrance stressor, job insecurity should increase withdrawal behavior; i.e., result in higher absenteeism, turnover intention and turnover (Sverke et al., 2002). As an individual becomes more uncertain about retaining their current job, they are likely to look for alternate, more secure, employment opportunities (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). Supporting such a view, it was found that the higher the level of job insecurity, the higher the level of job search intensity, where job search intensity is the degree to which one engages in job search behavior,

and job search behavior is known to be positively associated with subsequent turnover (King, 2000).

Job insecurity is interpreted as a psychosocial job stressor; the perception of job insecurity begins with a cognitive appraisal of the future situation, which triggers emotions based on the meaning connected to the potential job loss [(De Witte, 2005); (Sverke et al., 2002)]. Job insecurity results from a threat to one's job continuity, implying that job insecurity is an internal experience of the individual employee that is characterized by uncertainty in the face of job threats (Reisel and Banai, 2002). Perceived job insecurity is consistently found to be positively associated with employee's intentions to quit [(Williams, 2003); (Chirumbolo and Hellgren, 2003); (Berntson et al., 2010); (Cheng and Chan, 2008); (Sverke et al., 2002); (Ashford et al., 1989); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (Tivendell and Bourbonnais, 2000); (Barling and Kelloway, 1996)].

However, there is an evidence of positive relationships between job security and intentions to stay with an organization (Iverson and Roy, 1994). When served with a notification of possible retrenchment, employees are confronted with a stressful environment and they may struggle to cope with uncertainties surrounding the security of their job within the organization (De Witte, 2005). Simultaneously, they are expected to work productively in this unpredictable and uncertain working environment, amidst changes to organizational culture, organizational structures, work roles and responsibilities. An additional challenging path can also be postulated for both consequences. Frequently, absent employees might fear that they will be the first to be laid off because employers are aware of the costs produced by absent employees. In order not to jeopardize employment, employees should therefore reduce their absenteeism. Similarly, job insecurity might make turnover less likely because employees who fear being laid off might be afraid that changing jobs would be a negative life-event that exceeds their coping abilities (Thomas and Cornelius, 2010).

Hypothesis 1. There is a significant positive impact of perceived job insecurity on the intention to quit among employees in Syrian private banks.

2.2. Job insecurity and burnout

Job insecurity and burnout were found to be positively correlated in many studies [e.g., (Westman et al., 2001); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (William et al., 2010)]. Burnout is perceived to potentially develop after prolonged exposure to job insecurity (Maslach et al., 2001). Prolonged chronic exposure to job insecurity could lead to a wearing out of resources, feeling of exhaustion, and eventually draining them of energy" [(Landsbergis, 1988); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (Susan et al., 1989); (Humaira et al., 2013)]. In the context of job insecurity research, burnout has been found to be a consequence of long-term uncertainties associated with job insecurity [(William et al., 2010); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995)]. Insecure employment or shift-work factors were related to increased burnout levels (Kalimo, 2000) and when an individual becomes unable to cope with an enduring source of stress, burnout may appear (Stordeur et al., 2001).

Hypothesis 2. There is a significant positive impact of perceived job insecurity on job burnout among employees in Syrian private banks.

2.3. Job burnout and intention to quit

Burnout is viewed as a psychological syndrome that develops in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. Employees with high levels of burnout are more likely want to leave their organization (Maslach et al., 2001). Research found that burnout is related to heightened absenteeism, intention to leave the job and actual turnover [(Westman et al., 2001); (Ali et al., 2012); (Thomas and Cornelius, 2010); (Marjukka et al., 2009); (Faloye et al.,

2013); (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998); (Swider and Zimmerman, 2010); (Maslach et al., 2001); (Hasan et al., 2012)]. Swider and Zimmerman (2010) found turnover related to the facets of burnout; however, they found that depersonalization was the most proximal antecedent of turnover, while emotional exhaustion was the most proximal antecedent of absenteeism. They argue that employees with high levels of cynicism distance themselves from their work, and that this manifests behaviorally through turnover. In contrast, employees with high levels of emotional exhaustion are likely to find that temporary separation from work is a way in which they can recuperate their emotional resources, rather than taking the drastic measure of turnover.

Hypothesis 3. There is a significant positive impact of perceived job burnout on the intention to quit among employees in Syrian private banks.

2.4. The mediating role of burnout in the relationship between job insecurity (as a stressor) and intention to quit

There is an underlying assumption in the literature that burnout plays an important mediating role between burnout antecedents and organizational outcomes, yet there is somewhat limited empirical evidence exploring this. In this research, Job insecurity has been considered as a stressor that employees and organizations have to deal with today. Preliminary research also indicates that burnout may play an important role in the link between burnout antecedents and the organizational outcome of turnover intentions. Leiter and Maslach (2009) explored whether cynicism and/or emotional exhaustion had a unique mediating effect between a lack of person-job and turnover intentions. Their results revealed that cynicism was the only burnout dimension that mediated the antecedent to turnover intentions relationship (Leiter and Maslach, 2009). Significant positive correlations were found between emotional exhaustion and cynicism and the outcome of turnover intentions. Finally, emotional exhaustion was found to be a mediator in the role-related antecedents and turnover intentions relationships. In particular, results revealed that role stress played a strong role in burnout, and through burnout were related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4. Job burnout mediates the impact of job insecurity on intention to quit.

Research methodology

4.1. Data collection and sample

Data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were collected through comprehensive literature review. The primary data were collected from private banks in Syria. A total sample of 172 employees was selected from banking sector. Questionnaire related to the study variables was the main tool of this study.

4.2. Measures

The questionnaire includes four sections: job insecurity, burnout, intention to quit and basic demographic information. Apart from basic demographic information, a 5-point Likert scale format was used, and the scores on the scale ranges from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree.

4.2.1. Job Insecurity Scale (JIS): Job insecurity is measured using four items taken from the study by De Witte (De Witte, 2000). The scale reported reliability for 0.820.

4.2.2. Job Burnout Scale (JBS): Burnout is measured with the Finnish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (Maslach and Jackson, 2014). The MBI-ES is a 22-item instrument. The instrument consists of three subscales to evaluate each domain of burnout, namely emotional exhaustion (EE, 9 items, reported reliability for 0.875), depersonalization (DP, 5 items, reported reliability for 0.793) and low personal

accomplishment (PA, 8 items, reported reliability for 0.728). Total scale reported reliability for 0.811.

4.2.3. *Intention to Quit Scale: Intention to Quit is measured using three items taken from the study by Sjöberg and Sverke (Sjöberg and Sverke, 2000). The scale reported reliability for 0.751.*

Findings

This study examines the impact of job insecurity and burnout on employees’ intention to quit. Furthermore, it investigates whether the burnout mediates the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit.

Table 1 shows the results of the regression analysis regarding the impact of job insecurity on the dependent variable (intention to quit). As presented in this table, model 1 is significant at the 5% level ($R^2 = .526$). Coefficients of job insecurity is significant and positive for intention to quit ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that when employees experience high job insecurity, they will be more likely to have a high intention to quit their jobs. Accordingly, the results support Hypothesis 1 which states that job insecurity significantly and positively impact employees’ intention to quit.

Table 1. Regression analysis results: the impact of job insecurity on employee’s intention to quit

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.725 ^a	.526	.523	.998	188.423	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Job insecurity

Coefficients^a

Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.157	.180		6.416	.000
1 Job insecurity	.747	.054	.725	13.027	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to quit

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis regarding the impact of job insecurity on burnout. As presented in this table, model 2 is significant at the 5% level ($R^2 = .159$). Coefficients of job insecurity is positive and significant for burnout ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that when employees experience high job insecurity, they will be more likely to experience high burnout at their jobs. Accordingly, the results support Hypothesis 2 which states that job insecurity significantly and positively impact burnout.

Table 2. Regression analysis results: the impact of job insecurity on burnout

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
2	.785 ^a	.616	.614	.643	273.250	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Job insecurity

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.984	.116		17.091	.000
2 Job insecurity	.579	.035	.785	16.530	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

Next, the direct effect of the mediator (burnout) on the dependent variable (intention to quit) is examined. Model 3 in table 3 is significant at the 5% level ($R^2 = .829$). Coefficients of burnout is positive and significant for intention to quit ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that when employees experience high burnout, they will be more likely to have a high intention to quit their jobs. Accordingly, the results support Hypothesis 3 which states that burnout significantly and positively impact employees' intention to quit.

Table 3. Regression analysis results: the impact of burnout on employees' intention to quit

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
3	.910 ^a	.829	.828	.600	823.174	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Burnout

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
3	(Constant)	-1.335	.171		-7.792	.000
	Burnout	1.272	.044	.910	28.691	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to quit

This study follows Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure to analyze whether burnout plays a mediating role in the relationship between job insecurity and the intention to quit (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The first step is to examine the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. As model 1 in Table 1 shows, job insecurity significantly impact employees' intention to quit. The second step is to examine the impact of the independent variable on the mediating variable (burnout). As model 2 in Table 2 shows, job insecurity significantly impact burnout. The third step is to examine the effect of the mediator (burnout) on the dependent variable (intention to quit). The results of model 3 in Table 3 indicate that, burnout factor has significant effect on intention to quit. The fourth step is to include the mediator (burnout) in the model to examine whether it reduces the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable to non-significance. As model 4 in Table 4 shows, burnout significantly reduces the effects of job insecurity on the intention to quit, to non-significance. Thus, burnout fully mediates the relationship between job insecurity and

employees' intention to quit supporting the mediation effect in Hypothesis 4.

Table 4. Regression analysis results: the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
4	.911 ^a	.829	.827	.601	409.956	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Burnout, Job insecurity

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
4	(Constant)	-1.308	.179		-7.308	.000
	Job insecurity	.028	.053	.027	.520	.604
	Burnout	1.242	.072	.889	17.322	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to quit

Conclusion

The results show that job insecurity significantly affects intention to quit the organization. This result is consistent with previous research that found that job insecurity is able to predict intention to quit [e.g., (Sverke et al., 2002); (Williams, 2003); (Chirumbolo and Hellgren, 2003); (Berntson et al., 2010); (Cheng and Chan, 2008); (Ashford et al., 1989); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (Tivendell and Bourbonnais, 2000); (Barling and Kelloway, 1996)]. Those employees who perceived job insecurity reported higher levels of intention to quit the organization. Moreover, burnout was found to be a mediating variable in the relationship between job insecurity and intention to quit. As job insecurity increases, burnout increases [(Westman et al., 2001); (Dekker and Schaufeli, 1995); (William et al., 2010), (Stordeur et al., 2001)]; the increase in job burnout then results in increased intentions to seek alternate job [(Maslach et al., 2001); (Ali et al., 2012); (Westman et al., 2001); (Thomas and Cornelius, 2010); (Marjukka et al., 2009); (Faloye et al., 2013); (Hasan et al., 2012)]. These findings thus provide additional evidence for the conclusions of previous studies.

Given the recent crisis, it stands to reason that the employees may be less confident about their jobs. Managers need to focus on the antecedents of turnover intention. If job insecurity and burnout can be identified as antecedents of intention to quit, appropriate HRM practices may reduce intention to quit of high quality employees, thereby saving organizations the considerable financial cost and effort involved in the recruitment, induction and training of replacement staff.

This study has important practical implications because it warns organizations against intentionally increasing job insecurity among their employees. Realistic communication, human relations, enhancing mutual trust, establishing mentoring relationships with supervisors, organizational support, information sharing, input to decision-making, workshops for discussions, effective feedback, flexible work arrangements, career counselors, perceived fairness, relaxation, time management, awareness of work-related, etc., can help employees cope with the insecurity and reduce burnout. Moreover, managers should convey clear messages to employees that the organization feels responsible for, and values, its

employees.

Coping with job insecurity and burnout should be further investigated in order to help employees as well as organizations deal with these issues. Further research can examine organizational practices that can help decrease employees' perceptions of job insecurity and burnout, which in turn decrease intention to quit.

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