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Job Insecurity and Employee Job Performance: A Moderated-Mediation Model of Job Stress and Supportive Leadership

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Abstract: This study examined how leadership support buffers the mediating process of job insecurity, job stress and job performance. Data were obtained from the faculty and their supervisors in the privately run colleges of District Vehari, Pakistan (N = 250). The procedures for data analysis were based on partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). This study's results stipulate that job insecurity indirectly influences job performance through job stress, and supportive leadership buffers this indirect effect. Hayes' index of moderated-mediation denoted the relationship between the mediating effect (as mentioned above) and supportive leadership. The examination of these moderated mediation mechanisms contributes to organizational literature by answering 'why' and 'how' job insecurity influences employee job performance. This study's findings imply that under insecure job situations, organizations should ensure leadership support if they need good performance from employees. This study also discussed its limitations, and suggested some possible avenues for further research.

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Keywords: *Job insecurity, Job performance, Job stress, Supportive leadership*

Introduction

Rapid change in economic and business conditions has forced organizations to redesign their work structures. Under these circumstances, employee perceptions of job insecurity have increased worldwide (Bui et al., 2024; Doden et al., 2024). Job insecurity (JI hereafter) refers to “individuals’ sense that they may not retain their current job position in the future” (Darvishmotevali et al., 2024, p. 1). Prior studies have examined the influence of JI on various employee outcomes such as turnover intentions and absenteeism (Staufenbiel and König, 2010), workplace injuries and accidents (Probst and Brubaker, 2001), employee health (Schreurs et al., 2010), somatic complaints and organizational commitment (Cheng et al., 2012), health and job satisfaction (Heaney et al., 1994; Sora et al., 2010), job embeddedness (Safavi and Karatepe, 2019), turnover intentions and organizational commitment (Sora et al., 2010), employee silence (Yu et al., 2023), and job performance (Nikolova et al., 2022).

Among various organizational and individual phenomena, employee job performance (JP hereafter) is an important outcome of JI because it plays a pivotal role in organizational performance and survival (Nikolova et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the researchers have paid less attention to examining the effect of JI on JP (Nikolova et al., 2022). Moreover, existing studies provide mixed findings on the relationship between JI and JP (Qian, et al., 2022). It requires researchers to conduct more research on this topic because more robust findings on the relationship between JI and JP would guide organizations to manage responses to stressful situations (Piccoli et al., 2021).

Advancement in theory and practice requires researchers to understand the mechanisms that explain relationships among variables (Windgassen et al., 2016). Previous research has examined various mechanisms through which JI influences employee JP (Darvishmotevali et al., 2020). However, research on the mediating role of job stress (JS hereafter) in JI-JP relationship is scarce. Owing to its negative effect on different employee outcomes (including JP), JS is an important managerial concern (Pradhan et al., 2023). JS refers to a person’s perception of her or his malfunctioning due to work conditions, and the perceived unpleasant psychophysical responses thereafter (Chen and Silverthorne, 2008).

Evidence from existing research suggests that insecure job situations are highly likely to create employee JS (Kim and Kim, 2020), which negatively influences JP (Jackson and Frame, 2018).

If JI leads to fear of dismissal that characterizes job stress (An et al., 2023), and job stress leads to poor performance, it can be stated that job stress may explain the JI-JP relationship. Unfortunately, prior studies examined JS's role as mediator between JI and JP. This study introduced JS as a mediator between JI and employee JP. This study introduced JS as a mediator between JI and employee JP. Given the importance of analyzing mediating mechanisms for progressing research 'toward a true science' (Mathieu et al., 2008, p. 203), it is valuable to study the mediating effect of JS in the relationship between JI and employee JP.

Hayes (2018) goes beyond apprehending the mediating mechanisms, and suggests to examine boundary conditions of indirect effects to enhance scientific inquiry into the effect processes. It advocates that examining boundaries of indirect or mediating relationships helps to determine the conditions for the existence of those effects (Hayes, 2018). As boundary conditions help in understanding the generalizability of a theory (Whetten, 1989), it seems interesting to examine boundaries of the process where JI indirectly influences JP through JS. However, existing literature lacks evidence on such phenomena.

A review of existing literature indicates that employees' perceptions of support from leadership may protect them from harmful effects of any potential stress (Patzelt et al., 2021). This study sought to examine supportive leadership's (SL hereafter) moderating effect on the mediation process that has been mentioned above (i.e. SL serves as a boundary condition). Supportive leaders interact with their employees with fairness and honesty, and help them in difficult situations (Elsaied, 2019). We believe that SL can buffer harmful effects of JI as it provides emotional support and coping against such phenomena (Madsen et al., 2014).

This study sought to achieve two main objectives. First, it examined a mediation model where JI affected JP through JS. In light of Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory, the current study presumed that uncertain job situations consume individuals' valuable resources (i.e. time, focus and energy) (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018). Consequently, employees experience stress that reduces their JP. Second, SL was examined as a buffering variable or moderator of the abovementioned mediating effect. In light of Hobfoll et al. (2018) and McCarthy et al. (2016), Haider et al. (2020) delineated the insights from COR theory that individuals use the available buffer resources in their struggle to reduce adverse consequences of resource depletion. As mentioned earlier, SL can buffer the effect of stressful events (Masden et al., 2014). The idea here is to investigate the buffering role of SL in the resource

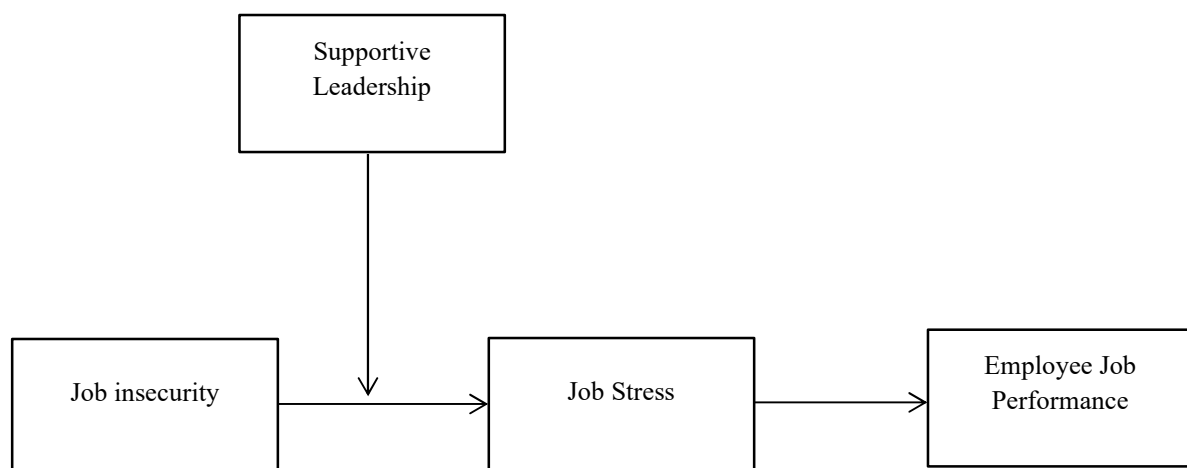
depleting influence of JI. Precisely, this study investigated a moderated-mediation phenomenon where SL affects employee JP by mitigating the effect of JI on JS.

This study is likely to make two main contributions to existing literature. First, it addresses the scarcity in literature by hypothesizing and examining an indirect relationship between JI and JP via JS. Second, it developed argument for and examined how SL moderates (or buffers) the abovementioned indirect relationship. It is valuable as ‘understanding the processes by which effects operate, and the boundary conditions of those effects, is one of the primary goals of science’ (Hayes, 2018, p. 4).

Theory and Hypotheses

As shown in Figure 1, the research model of this study indicates that JS is a mediating mechanism between JI and JP, and SL moderates this mediating mechanism. This study developed two hypotheses; mediation and moderated-mediation, and did not argue for other possible relationships in this model because previous seminal works have already examined the relationship between JI and JP (De Cuyper et al., 2020), JI and JS (Rangrez et al., 2022), and JS and JP (Siu, 2003).

Figure 1: Research Model



Mediating role of job stress

This study used Woodworth’s (1928) stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model, and Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory to develop mediation hypothesis. Insights from Baron and Kenny (1986)

suggest that the SOR model is a general form of a mediation hypothesis. This model delineates that a stimulus leads to a response through the intervention of an active organism. Consonant with SOR framework, previous scholarly work on the psychology of stress (Caplan, 1972) suggests that job stress “could occur as the product of confrontation with especially stressful events” (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 514) that anticipate a person’s response to these events (Hobfoll, 1989). This idea is consistent with COR theory which provides excellent foundations to describe how work related phenomena stimulate stress by depleting employees’ valuable resources, and how employees respond to work stress (Hobfoll, 2011).

In light of Hobfoll (1989), Haider et al. (2020) described valuable resources as the “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, time, or energies that are valued by an individual” (p. 3). Hobfoll’s theory postulates that human beings struggle for the retention, protection and accumulation of their resource portfolios, and any loss (actual or potential) of valuable resources makes them feel threatened. Resource loss develops stress among people (Tziner et al., 2015), which subsequently affects their work outcomes.

Insights from COR theory suggest that uncertain and ambiguous job situations stimulate stress as they develop employees’ perception of resource depletion (Zhang et al., 2022). Resource depletion reduces employees’ coping capacity (Chang et al., 2009), and generates negative responses such as turnover intentions and low JP (Siu, 2003). The stress provoking effect of JI also stems from the loss of employees’ other valuable resources such as mental and physical health (Cheng et al., 2005). As “ill-health is associated with substantial reductions in work performance” (Ford et al., 2011, p.185), a loss in mental and physical health is likely to produce employee response in the form of lower JP.

The basic tenets of COR theory suggest that employees receive contradictory influences from resource conservation and resource depletion. Resources help individuals to attain their goals, while resource loss or depletion is detrimental to their psychological health (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2002). It puts employees on disadvantage to perform their jobs effectively as they experience difficulty in maintaining focus, and remain unable to effectively manage their time and social connections (Reisel et al., 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that perceptions of resource loss emerging from JI induces negative attitudes and emotions that lead to work related mistakes and poor quality of work (Ashford et al., 1989; Sverke and Hellgren, 2001). Consequently, employees fail to perform effectively.

Since JI is more nerve-wracking than actual dismissal (Caroli and Goddard, 2016), it is highly likely to develop job stress in employees. According to COR theory, employees experiencing JI lose psychological resources (confidence, hope, positive emotions etc.) to cope with work demands. Their ability to gain, retain and protect their resources may reduce due to the depletion of psychological resources (Hobfoll, 1989), and they may experience psychological stress due to unknown future circumstance of their position within their organization. Similarly, increased threat about future job prospects resulting from JI (Lee and Hallak, 2020; Ng et al., 2020) puts employees in mental states like depression, anxiety, boredom that represent severe psychological stress (Brooks et al., 2020; Ozdin and Ozdin, 2020). Previous studies have found that fear of job loss can deteriorate psychological wellbeing of employees (Ganson et al., 2021).

Psychological stress demonstrates the depletion of psychological resources due to which employees may fail to achieve the required level of performance. Employees experiencing psychological stress become prone to errors and deliver poor quality outputs due to which they lose work engagement and productivity that result in lower level of performance. Empirical evidence also suggests that JS, resulting from job insecurity, reduces employee JP, job satisfaction, and psychological wellbeing (De Witte et al., 2016; Staufienbiel and Konig, 2010).

As JI depletes employees' self-regulatory capabilities (Lawrence and Kacmar, 2017), it is highly likely to develop employee stress. Consequently, employees fail to perform their job roles effectively. Job insecure employees may remain stressed and poor performers (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998). Stressed employees perceive themselves as overloaded in work, and perform poorly (Moore et al., 2004). Moreover, the stress resulting from JI may lower employee morale, and they may lack motivation to perform their jobs effectively. Overall, the above discussion suggests that JS explains why JI affects employee JP. Based on this discussion, we formulated hypothesis 1 (H-1).

H-1: The relationship between job insecurity and employee job performance is mediated by Job stress.

Moderating role of SL

In previous section, we integrated SOR model and COR theory, and developed argument for an indirect relationship between JI and JP through JS. However, without considering boundary conditions of indirect effects (or mediation processes), one cannot develop better understanding of such effects (Hayes, 2018). It draws our attention toward the forces (boundary conditions) that may strengthen or weaken an indirect effect. The notion that the response to a stimulus is

caused through an active organism (Baron and Kenny, 1986) needs further explanation by considering the fact that an organism remains under the effect of many opposing or contradictory forces (Etkin, 1967). These contradictory forces may influence the way a stimulus affects the organism, and the response that may emerge. It suggests that under the situations of resource loss people may look for contradictory forces or resources that may help them to counter the resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989).

Coping resources act as a contradictory force against stressful situations, and a stimulus' detrimental effect on an organism will be influenced by the degree to which people possess such resources (Haider et al., 2020). Studies have also indicated that "a high level of leader support can be regarded as a coping resource" (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, p. 1156), which may help reduce the effect of JI on JS, and subsequently abates its adverse effect on JP. It implies that job insecurity's (a stimulus) interaction with supportive leadership (a coping resource) when acts upon job stress (organism), can change the intensity of S-O-R link to the degree a person has access to such coping resources (Haider et al., 2020).

In this regard, the main argument of this study is that support from leaders may serve as a buffer resource to counter the resource loss resulting from insecure job situations. Precisely, we assume that SL moderates the effect of JI on JS, and eventually exerts a positive effect on employee JP. It reflects a situation of moderated-mediation where an organizational phenomenon moderates the indirect relationship between diverse organizational phenomena. Existing literature provides empirical insights into the moderating effect of leadership support on the indirect association between various variables in organizations. The findings from Sürücü et al. (2022) indicate that leadership support moderate the sequence of indirect relationship from TL (transformational leadership) to self-efficacy to job performance. Jansen et al. (2016) observed supportive leadership as moderator of the cohesion-ambidexterity and the team efficacy-ambidexterity relationships. Similarly, another study found boundary or moderating influence of SL on of the link between poor health risk and bullying (Blomberg and Rosander, 2022).

Sørengaard and Langvik (2022) found that supportive leaders not only help employees to diminish their overall stress, but also facilitate them to effectively manage the stressors that appear in daily work life. Under SL, employees may regulate negative effects of JI on JS because supportive leaders ensure an environment that enhances employee psychological

resources such as respect, confidence, collaboration, and emotional support (Gibson et al., 2000). Given that leadership support is negatively associated with employee job stress (Muyidi et al., 2023), it may serve as a buffer resource that helps employees to either regain the depleted resource or circumvent the resource depletion under uncertain and stressful work conditions. In this way, SL plays a role of resource loss neutralizer that helps conserve the resources that might have lost when employees faced with the stressful situations in its absence (Haider et al., 2020).

On the basis of above argument, we developed two hypotheses (H2-A and H2-B).

H-2A: The relationship between job insecurity and employee job stress is moderated by supportive leadership.

H-2B: Supportive leadership moderates the mediation process mentioned in H-1.

Methodology

This study used deductive approach where existing theories were used to develop and test hypotheses. Data were gathered in a cross-sectional survey. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to performed data analyses in SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2024).

Sample and procedures

Respondents were randomly selected faculty members and their principals (supervisors) in the colleges (private) working in Pakistan's Vehari district. We focused only on one district as collecting data from more than one districts might be costly, and there was no funding available for this purpose. These organizations are suitable for this research because the faculty of these colleges is facing JI after a wave of downsizing during and post Covid-19 era. At the time of survey, 1121 faculty members were working in the district's 36 private colleges. Cohen's (1988) table helped to determine the size of study sample. It guided to have a sample size of 176 responses at R^2 value of 0.10, and significance level of 0.01. A sample larger than the recommended was targeted because many respondents provide incomplete surveys, or even do not return responses.

Randomly selected 350 faculty members were provided questionnaires. A specific code was assigned to each respondent. Respective supervisors rated each employee's JP. Employees

rated their respective supervisors' SL behaviour. Employee self-ratings were obtained for *JI* and *JS*. After about two months, the authors received 263 supervisor-subordinate matched responses, out of which 250 were eligible for data analysis. Table 1 shows respondents' characteristics.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Description	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	162	64.8
	Female	88	35.2
Age	20-25	34	13.6
	26-30	72	28.8
	31-35	59	23.6
	36-40	59	23.6
	41-45	26	10.4
	46-50	10	4.0
Qualification	14 Year	90	36.0
	16 Year	133	53.2
	18 Year	27	10.8

Measures

Survey questionnaires were taken from previous studies. We measured *JI* by using a scale of eight-items (Pienaar et al., 2013). This measure was surveyed with a five point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cohen et al.'s (1983) stress scale was adapted to measure *JS*. This scale's survey was performed by using five Likert points [from 1 = never to 5 = very often]. *Employee JP* was measured by using Wright and Bonett's (1997) four-item technical performance scale. The following five-point scale was used for this measure: (1) Very poorly, (2) Not very well, (3) All right, (4) Very well, (5) Exceptionally well. *SL* was measured by adopting a three-item scale used in Hwang et al. (2015). Item ratings were based on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) not at all to (5) to a very great extent.

Results

The results were obtained by using PLS algorithm and bootstrapping procedures in SmartPLS 4. In a PLS path models, data validation and hypotheses testing are performed by using measurement and structural models, respectively.

Measurement Model Evaluation

In this evaluation process, the following reliability and validities are tested/established: internal consistency reliability (ICR), convergent validity (CV) and discriminant validity (DV). ICR means that all indicators of a construct equally load on that construct, and are equally reliable (Hair et al., 2014). Cronbach's Alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) values are used to determine ICR in a model. A construct's α and CR values greater than 0.70 indicate that ICR has been established. Table 2 exhibits that α and CR values meet the standard criteria of ICR.

CV indicates the degree of a measure's positive correlation with the alternative measures of the same construct (Hair et al., 2014). A construct's each indicator's outer/factor loadings (equal or greater than 0.708) and AVE (average variance extracted) value (0.50 or above) determine CV of that construct. Table 2 shows that our constructs meet CV quality criteria because AVE and outer loadings of almost all constructs are above the established threshold. The outer loadings of JS3, JS5, and JS12 were 0.584, 0.152, and 0.518, respectively. These items were deleted from their respective construct. The outer loadings of SL2 was slightly lower than 0.70. This item was retained with its respective construct.

Table 2. Assessment of measurement model

Constructs	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Job Performance	JP1	0.802	0.877	0.897	0.730
	JP2	0.814			
	JP3	0.914			
	JP4	0.882			
Job Stress	JS1	0.702	0.939	0.948	0.623
	JS10	0.829			
	JS11	0.790			
	JS13	0.750			
	JS14	0.809			
	JS2	0.735			
	JS4	0.771			
	JS6	0.718			

	JS7	0.913			
	JS8	0.739			
	JS9	0.899			
Job Insecurity	JI1	0.704	0.913	0.929	0.623
	JI2	0.718			
	JI3	0.710			
	JI4	0.822			
	JI5	0.864			
	JI6	0.824			
	JI7	0.830			
	JI8	0.823			
Supportive Leadership	SL1	0.844	0.744	0.822	0.655
	SL2	0.690			
	SL3	0.881			

The DV of a research model's variable/constructs is determined when the items or indicator of any these constructs are not correlated with the items of other constructs. Recent PLS researchers use Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) to establish DV in their research model. It is considered more sensitive than the previously used Fornell and Larker's (1981) criterion and cross-loadings of constructs. Under this criterion, the conservative approach suggests that HTMT ratio (between two latent variables) 0.85 or low establishes DV in a model. Table 3 shows that our constructs fulfill the DV criterion under HTMT approach.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Job Performance	Job Stress	Job insecurity	Supportive Leadership
Job Performance				
Job Stress	0.575			
Job insecurity	0.533	0.609		
Supportive Leadership	0.206	0.282	0.741	

Structural Model Evaluation

A greater reliability in a research model's results requires testing collinearity among its predicting variables because it reduces bias in path coefficients of hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2014). Usually, VIF or variance inflation factor is used for collinearity test. VIF comprises of a latent variable's variance unexplained by other construct (Jabbar et al., 2023; Shakoor et al., 2023). If VIF is less than 5, it stipulates that the data are free from collinearity

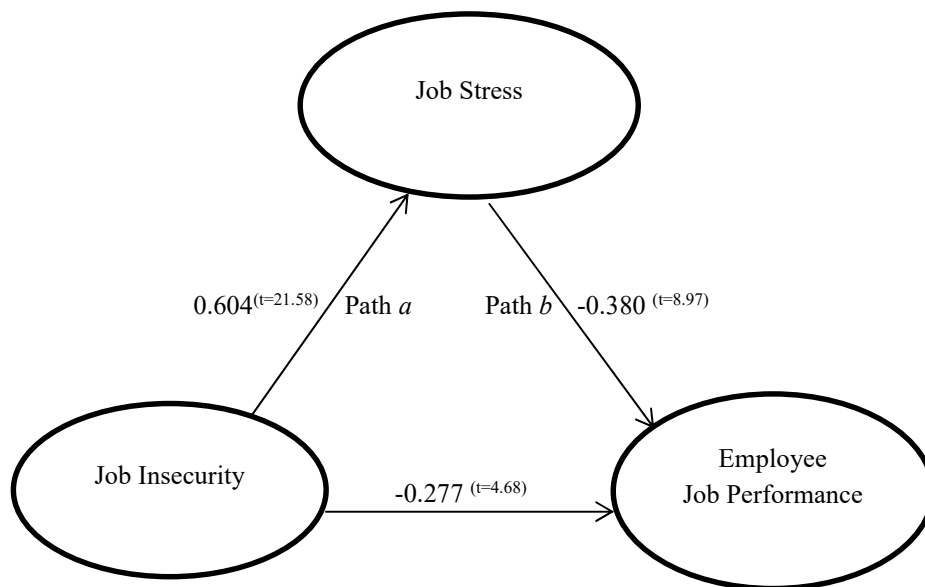
issues. Table 4 shows that the VIF values are below 5, which indicates that collinearity is not an issue in our data.

Table 4. Collinearity Assessment (inner VIF values)

Latent Variables	Job Performance	Job Stress	Job insecurity	Supportive Leadership
Job Performance				
Job Stress	1.570			
Job insecurity	1.570	1.896		
Supportive Leadership		1.601		

The structural model relationships are examined after performing the collinearity test (Hair et al., 2014). Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the estimated mediation and moderated-mediation models, respectively. The values of path coefficients and T-value, obtained from PLS-algorithm and bootstrapping, were used to test the magnitude and significance of direct and indirect effect in these models.

Figure 2. Analysed mediation model



Mediation test

The mediation model of this study was tested by applying two procedural steps explained in Nitzl et al. (2016) and Zhao et al. (2010). Under this approach, the first step is to test the significance of indirect effect. If the indirect effect is insignificant, no mediating effect can be claimed. The size of indirect effect is obtained when the coefficients of path *a* and path *b* (as shown in Figure 2) are multiplied. The size of indirect effect is -0.230 [0.604×-0.380]. An

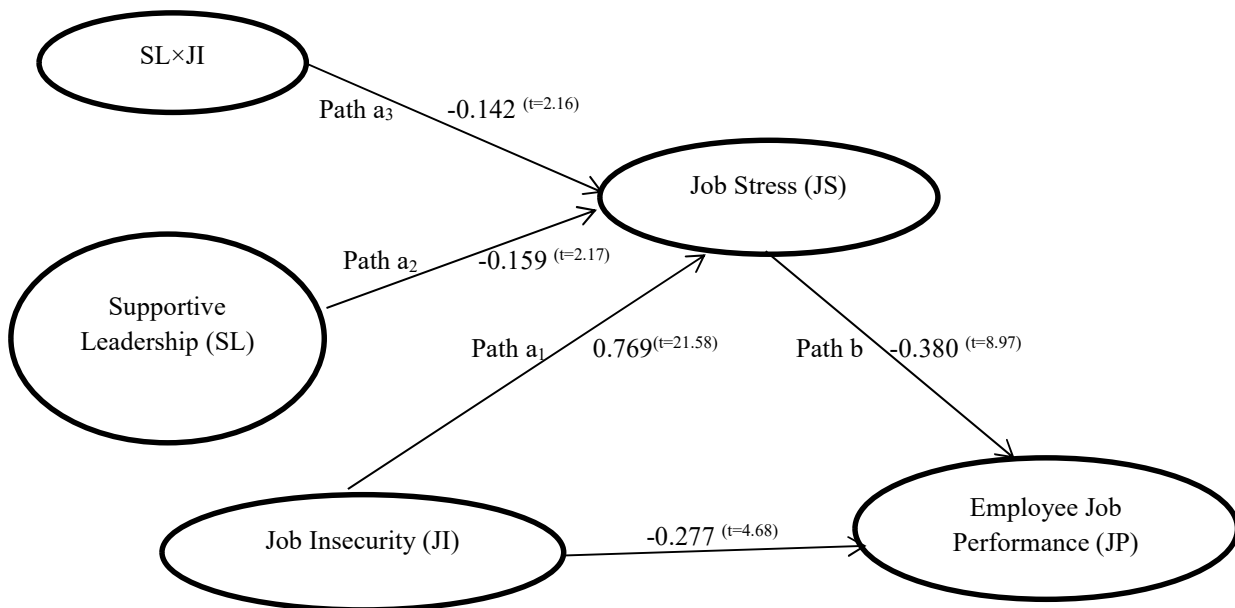
indirect effect's significance is determined by its t-value (or p-value) obtained from bootstrapping process. This study performed bootstrapping under bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval method, which produces a t-value of 8.07. It manifests that the indirect effect [JI $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ JP] is significant [$\beta = -0.230$, T-value = 8.07, $p < 0$].

Step 2 involves estimating predictor's direct effect on criterion. In this study, the direct effect of JI on JP is significant [$\beta = -0.277$, T-value = 4.68, $p < 0.00$]. These results stipulate a complementary partial mediation of job stress between job insecurity and job performance because both the direct and indirect effects are significant (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, this study proclaims that JS is a partial mediator of JI-JP relationship. It supports our Hypothesis 1 (H-1). As suggested by Rucker et al. (2011), our results affirm that JS has been established as a mediator between JI and JP, and other mediators of this relationship are quite possible.

Moderated-mediation test

While estimating moderated-mediation models, a test of moderation between predictor and mediator is a tradition among researchers. Therefore, we tested first the effect of interaction of JI and SL ($JU \times SL$) on JS. Path a_3 in Figure 3 shows the significance and magnitude of this interaction effect ($\beta = -0.142$, T-value = 2.16, $p < 0.05$). It reveals that SL moderates the relationship between JI and JS (H2-A supported).

Figure 3. Analyzed moderated-mediation model



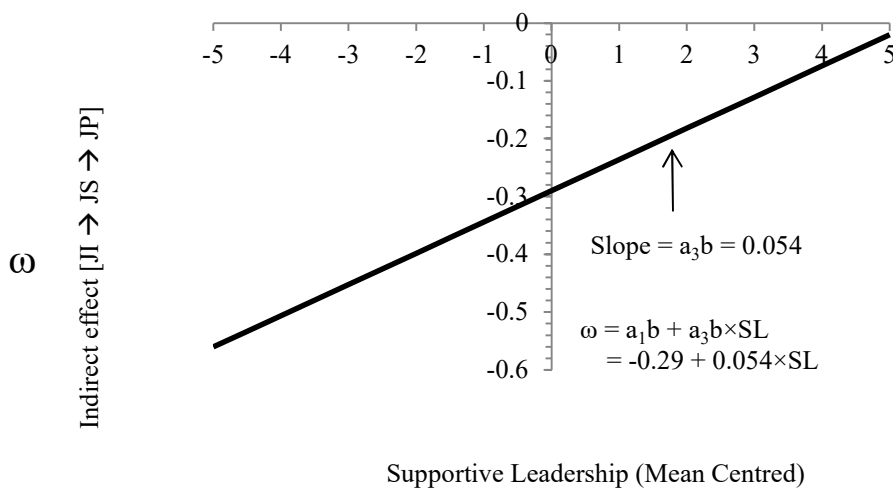
However, an isolated moderation (as shown in Path a_3) does not, but the moderation of whole mediation process determine moderated mediation in a model (Hayes, 2015). Insights from Hayes (2015) suggest that moderated-mediation happens when indirect effect of the interaction of JI and JS (i.e. independent variable and moderator) on JP (dependent variable) through JS (mediator), controlling for JI (predictor) is significant. In this study's analysis, the said indirect effect $[(JI \times SL) \rightarrow JS \rightarrow JP]$ is significant ($\beta = -0.142 \times -0.38 = 0.054$, T-value = 2.071, $p < 0.05$). It indicates the situation where indirect effect depends on moderator (leadership support). It supports our Hypothesis 2B. The moderation of whole indirect effect is known as index of moderated-mediation (Hayes, 2015), and can be put down as the equations that follow.

$$\omega = (a_1 + a_3SL) b \quad (1)$$

$$\omega = a_1b + a_3bSL \quad (2)$$

In equation (2), a_1b is intercept, which represents the indirect effect $[JI \rightarrow JS \rightarrow JP]$, and a_3b is slope which is the abovementioned Hayes' index of moderated mediation $[(JI \times SL) \rightarrow JS \rightarrow JP]$. A non-zero value of Hayes' index specifies that the moderating variable (SL) affects the mediation process i.e. the indirect effect. The model in Figure 3 shows a non-zero index (i.e. $a_3b = -0.142 \times -0.38 = 0.054$), which specifies the existence of moderated-mediation in this model. The association between this study's indirect effect $[JI \rightarrow JS \rightarrow JP]$ and SL has been shown with the graph of Equation (2) in Figure 4. This graph was drawn by using SL's arbitrary values from -5 to 5. Positive slope indicates that the abovementioned indirect effect is an increasing function of SL. It suggests that SL increases employee JP by undermining JI's effect on JS. That is to say that SL buffers the indirect effect $[JI \rightarrow JS \rightarrow JP]$.

Figure 4. The Graph of Equation (2)



Discussion

The present study commenced with the purpose of examining buffering role of SL on the mediation process or indirect effect [JI $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ JP]. In light of SOR model and COR theory, two main hypotheses (mediation and moderated-mediation) were developed to achieve this study's objectives. Based on data from college faculty, the mediation and moderated-mediation hypotheses were tested in a sequence of two steps, respectively. The results from these models supported our hypotheses. There was a significant indirect relationship between JI and JP through JS, and SL buffered this indirect effect.

The results of our mediation and moderated mediation hypotheses confirm the connection with both the theories (SOR model and COR Theory) based on which we established hypotheses. In respect of SOR model, the findings indicate that job insecurity (as a stimulus) positively affects employee job stress (the organism), which negatively influences job performance (the response). Regarding COR Theory, the results show that job insecurity acts as a resource depleting phenomenon that produces job stress, and subsequently reduces employee job performance. However, supportive leadership acts as a protective barrier (buffer resource) that diminishes JI's adverse influence on JP through JS.

Though we did not hypothesize direct effects, the effect of job insecurity on employee job performance was negative and significant in both the mediation and moderated mediation models. The negative relationship between job insecurity and job performance has received weak to moderate support in existing literature (De Cuyper et al., 2020). This negative effect can be compared with the findings of existing research. For example, Wang, Lu, and Siu (2015) found that JI and JP were negatively associated, but conditioned this relationship with employee perceptions of low levels of organizational justice. They found no effect of JI on JP when employee perceptions of organizational justice were high. Similarly, an insignificant effect of job JI on JP was found in Sverke et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis. However, Cheng and Chan's (2008) meta-analysis found a significant effect. Staufienbiel and König (2010) concluded that "the effects of job insecurity on performance are neither purely negative nor purely positive" (p. 113). The contradictory findings are mainly based on hindrance or challenge argument (Piccoli et al., 2021), and provide space for further investigation into the effect of job insecurity on job performance.

Our study is an addition to the literature related to hindrance effect of job insecurity as we found an indirect effect of job insecurity on job performance through job stress. The findings of our mediation analysis are consistent with Darvishmotevali et al. (2024) who found negative effect of qualitative and quantitative job insecurity on task performance through mental health. Overall, this study's outcomes are consonant with that stream of research which considered negative psychological states such as psychological strain (Darvishmotevali et al., 2017), negative affect and negative work reflections (Mäder and Niessen, 2017), and a decreased subjective wellbeing (Darvishmotevali and Ali, 2020) as mediating mechanisms of the link between JI and JP. However, our study directly measured job stress as a mediator of this relationship.

Moreover, the current research investigated SL's role as a boundary condition (or buffering variable) for the indirect effect [JI $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ JP]. Specifically, the results indicated that supportive leadership moderated the effect of job insecurity on job stress (Hypothesis 2-A), and the entire mediation process (Hypothesis 2-B). The results of our Hypothesis 2-A are consistent with Kim and Kim (2020) who examined the moderating effect of leadership on the relationship between job insecurity and job stress in a sequential mediation model of job insecurity, job stress, organizational commitment and organizational performance. However, they examined ethical leadership rather than supportive leadership as a moderator of job insecurity-job stress relationship. Our study's moderator is consistent with the findings of previous research which has reported the stress buffering effect of supportive leadership (Britt et al., 2004; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000; Lyons and Schneider, 2009). The results of our Hypothesis 2-B are idiosyncratic in a sense that no previous study has investigated SL as moderator of the job insecurity's indirect effect on employee job performance through job stress. This study is a good addition to literature with respect to its moderated mediation analysis.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers three important theoretical implications. First, it integrated SOR model and COR theory as a theoretical lens to test a framework to better explain how perceptions of JI induce job-related stress among employees to determine their JP. Hence, our theorization of JI perceptions as an inhibitor of JP due to its influence on stress aligns with the COR theory, which states that the individuals failing to develop, retain, and protect their resources may experience actual or potential loss of valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Our findings also

support this view of COR theory such that JI drains employees' psychological resources (confidence, hope, positive emotions, perceived organizational support, and others), and leaves them unable to cope with the stress induced by job demands. Consequently, they experience a decline in JP. Our findings also extend Chang et al.'s (2009) and Huang et al.'s (2003) work that investigated inhibiting role of emotional employee responses such as JS and job burnout on job insecurity's outcomes, specifically, employee job performance. In this direction of inquiry, our study goes beyond existing studies by explaining the inhibiting role of JS as an emotional response to the perceptions of JI in a very important and organizationally desired employee behaviour that is JP.

Second, based on COR theory, this study explained how JI perceptions enhance JS for which employees experience a depletion of personal resources to satisfy performance requirements. It supports the argument that employee performance is not solely an endogenous phenomenon relying on the regulation of individuals' internal psychological resources, rather some exogenous factors (such as JI) also influence performance indirectly by reducing the individual capacity of regulating their internal psychological resources as advocated by resource depletion perspective of COR Theory. This finding indicates that individual performance is a mechanism based on internal resource regulatory mechanisms triggered by external environmental factors. Some existing studies (Cullen et al., 2014; Lian, et al., 2022) investigated the influence of various types of uncertainty (job uncertainty and environmental uncertainty) on some internal regulatory processes that individuals use for regulating their psychological resources for managing different performance outcomes. Contributing to such investigations, this study suggests that JI may inhibit performance behaviours by stimulating internal resource depleting psychological frameworks. The findings of this study may enhance a more distinct understanding about employee performance, its internal and external stimuli, and underlying reasons.

Finally, this study extended COR theory by identifying SL as a mitigating asset or resource that may reduce the effect of JI on JS. It complies with the existing literature (Gray et al., 2023) that used COR theory as a theoretical lens to advocate the utility of leader support as a resource for employees, contingent to its role in reducing their stress. Given the significant moderating role of SL between JI and JS, this study suggests that future studies should be mindful of nine themes (autonomy, communication, changes, personal resources, safety, time, tone, work equipment, and workload) identified by Gray et al. (2023) before conceiving positive role of leader support in reducing JS under insecure job conditions. Future researchers may obtain an

advantage of re-analysing such findings to explain the conditions of high uncertainty determining the effectiveness of SL in regulating employee JS.

Practical Implications

This study's results indicate that employee performance loss can be avoided if organizations take appropriate measures to reduce employee stress under the situations of job insecurity. On this point, our research provides doable insights into the ways of maintaining JP or minimizing performance loss by underscoring the importance of SL. It suggests that leadership support must be available to employees if organizations want them to perform normally under insecure job situations. This study guides organizations that they can reduce the disadvantages of JI by implementing SL style in their teams. It draws organizations' attention toward hiring and training supportive leaders.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this research has a few limitations. The first limitation of this study is that the respondents were from privately managed colleges of district Vehari. It limits the external validity of our results. Future researchers may extend the scope of this study by considering the contexts different from those of this study. Second, the cross sectional nature of study data limits the examination of true causal relationships developed in the research model. Experimental and longitudinal research designs may help future researchers to draw even more robust results from such studies. Finally, this study did not analyze the research model's alternative illustrations. For example, employees with high feelings of JS may have high perceptions of JI.

Despite its limitations, this study's contribution to organizational literature is significant as it examined the 'why and how' perspective of JI's influence on JP. Particularly, it corroborated how SL weakens the relationship between JI and JS, and afterward topples the performance loss.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that JI's effect on employee JP is transferred via JS, and the relationship between JI and JS is influenced by SL, which influences the whole indirect process. It suggests that the transfer of JI's effect on JP can be mitigated or even eliminated if leadership support is available. It will help to reduce employee JS even in the situation of JI.

Consequently, employee JP can be maintained or its losses may be minimized. It draws organizations' attention toward recruiting or training supportive leaders.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest either among authors or with any third party.

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