



RESEARCH PAPER

Qualitative Job Insecurity and its Impact on Innovative Work Performance and Subjective Well-being: A Serial Mediation Model

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of qualitative job insecurity on employee innovative work performance and the mediating role of subjective well-being and psychological contract breach in this relationship. The study used the positivist paradigm, cross-sectional research design, and a self-administered structured questionnaire to collect the data from 282-IT professionals working in different software houses of Pakistan. Analysis through the structural equation modeling technique revealed a positive and significant relationship between qualitative job insecurity and employee innovative work performance. Furthermore, the analysis also proved that qualitative job insecurity not only directly affects the innovative work performance, but the sequential-mediation mechanism also exists. The study adds value to the existing literature on job insecurity by considering the ignored causal link between qualitative job insecurity and employee innovative work performance by incorporating the psychological contract breach and subjective well-being as explanatory mechanisms. The study also provides empirical contributions for employers of the IT sector of Pakistan by studying the qualitative aspect of job insecurity, which is more prevalent, and to devise their job security practices.

Introduction

Globalization and competition have changed the nature of the work environment and made jobs more insecure (Shin & Hur, 2019). Considering its importance, job insecurity is the most widely researched area (Richter & Näswall, 2019) and the most substantial work stressor that affects the work performance of

service sector employees (Sora, Höge, Caballer, & Peiró, 2019). According to Bouzari and Karatepe (2018), 53.2% of service sector employees in Iran are suffering from this chronic disease, 80% of Cyprus (Darvishmotevali, Arasli, & Kilic, 2017), 42% of Turkish employees (Etehadli & Karatepe, 2019), 41.9% from Serbia and 57% Korean service sector employees (Shin & Hur, 2019).

Likewise, in other sectors, the information technology sector is the most dynamic and requires a highly fluid and diversified workforce. The level of work insecurity for an IT professional is comparatively higher than the employees working in other sectors of the economy (Rudland, Golding, & Wilkinson, 2020).

An extensive literature on job insecurity was commenced in the 1980s and is still evolving (Nauman, Zheng, & Naseer, 2020). The perceived loss of job refers to *quantitative* job insecurity and the threat of loss of job features as *qualitative* job insecurity (Hellgren & Sverke, 2003), i.e., inadequate salary development, flexible work schedules, fewer bonuses, lack of career opportunities, and worsening of work conditions.

As a universal work stressor, job insecurity has negative outcomes for both organizations and employees. The effects of qualitative job insecurity are as severe as quantitative job insecurity (Niesen, Van Hootegeem, Vander Elst, Battistelli, & De Witte, 2018). An augmented emphasis is made on quantitative job insecurity in the organizational psychology literature (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018), while qualitative job insecurity is less frequently studied, even though its consequences can be just as severe (Blotenberg & Richter, 2020).

Previous researches have shown that job insecurity not only affects the well-being of employees but also hinders organizational development by hindering the employee's innovative work performance. Innovative work performance (IWP) can be described as: "*an execution of processes, generation of new ideas and implementing those ideas by the employees at the workplace.*" Innovative work performance (IWP) and innovative work behavior (IWB) are used interchangeably (Swaroop, 2017).

The available research on qualitative job insecurity showed that the concept could be better understood by adding "psychological contract" as a supplementary variable in this mechanism (Gallie, Felstead, Green, & Inanc, 2016). However, the researchers also believed that such a stressor works as a result of the breach of this contract termed as a psychological contract breach (PCB). The negative effects of job insecurity can be mitigated by putting a stop to this contract breach (Lee, Huang, & Ashford, 2018). The concepts of psychological contract breach (PCB) and work performance (WP) are theoretically explained by social exchange theory (Richard M & Emerson, 1976). Under PCB circumstances, they cannot find out an appropriate course of action to cope with the giant of job insecurity, which in turn affects their well-being and performance at large (Selenko, Mäkikangas, & Stride, 2017). Here, QJI being the stressor may influence the employee's subjective well-being, and as a negative attribute, it will influence employee ability of innovation (Nellestijn, 2019).

Thus, QJI and PCB both serve as important organizational and personal factors that may influence employee subjective well-being and innovative work performance.

The majority of research on JI has been conducted in developed countries (Bui, Leo, & Adalakun, 2019) but little is known about its impact on the employees of developing country like Pakistan particularly the IT professionals as they are more prone to perceived job insecurity as their job nature requires creativity and innovation related to specific job demands. Paradoxically, the industry showed enormous growth and produced increased business value, but the effects of this flux have dampened employee performance and have heightened the feelings of job insecurity among IT professionals (Poonam, 2020).

Although several studies have been conducted to test the impact of job insecurity on employee work performance, less is known about the mechanism through which this impact transmits via subjective well-being (Qian, Yuan, Niu, & Liu, 2019). For instance, when employees perceive QJI placed by IT firms, they believe that their psychological contract is violated and have negative feelings about the organization. QJI may positively affect the PCB of an employee, thus creating a negative state of SWB (Callea, Lo Presti, Mauno, & Urbini, 2019). Conceivably, QJI, PCB, SWB, in turn, will affect the employee's IWP.

Consequently, we draw our deductive model of QJI and its impact on IWP through PCB and SWB on the basis of Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and Transactional Stress Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). These theories assist in relating QJI to its behavioral (SWB) and work-related outcomes (IWP). Based on these theories, this study entails the investigation of the sequential effects of two mediators, namely PCB and SWB between the relationship of QJI and employee IWP in the IT sector of Pakistan as few studies in the field of information technology has investigated the same.

Based on these premises, we assume that the current research contributes to the literature of job insecurity in many ways. The foremost is interrogating the link between QJI and IWP, which is neglected in past studies and particularly in the information technology sector. It also provides insights into the literature by investigating the PCB as an outcome and mediating mechanism of QJI. Moreover, it provides preliminary evidence of testing the sequential mediation mechanism of PCB and SWB in association of QJI and IWP. Yet another contribution of this study is, it offers empirical evidence from a developing country, i.e., Pakistan, which is often neglected, and limited empirical evidence is available of developing countries (Islam, Ahmed, Ali, & Ahmer, 2019).

Theoretical Underpinnings and Hypotheses Development

Qualitative Job Insecurity and Innovative Work Performance

Perceived qualitative job insecurity has been considered as an area of increased interest in service literature (Tu, Long, Wang, & Jiang, 2020). Employees with perceived qualitative job insecurity are not much scared of getting fired but are scared of the devaluation of their working conditions (Symeonaki, Parsanoglou, & Stamatopoulou, 2019). Organizational psychology asserts that job work stress is the main predictor of reduced performance. It is considered a combination of demands and individuals' response to such demands. High job demands serve as a negative predictor of work strain and may reduce the work abilities of employees (Hwang & Han, 2019). Job insecurity is considered as job demand and results in reduced work performance. Generally, it is evident that job insecurity works as a hindrance stressor and results in negative individual, team, and organizational outcomes (Blomqvist, Xu, Persitera, Låstad, & Hanson, 2020).

While looking at the consequences of QJI, past studies primarily focused on work-related organizational and behavioral outcomes, e.g., job performance, job motivation (Shin, Hur, Moon, & Lee, 2019), organizational commitment (Furåker & Berglund, 2014), deviant workplace behavior (Khan & Ghufraan, 2018), turnover and extra-role work behaviors. Based on the past literature, we assume the impact of QJI on IWP of an IT professional is the area which is under-examined. On account of lack of researches on the association between QJI and IWP, we do rely on the studies that have generally analyzed the link between job insecurity and work performance.

Past studies have found inclusive results of the association between job insecurity and work performance. Others found this relationship as curvilinear while producing mixed results (Mäder & Niessen, 2017). The proposal of mixed findings is persisted in the analytic evidence conducted by Shoss (2017) and Lee et al. (2018).

Based on the literary and theoretical premises, we postulate that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Perceived QJI is significantly related to IWP of IT professionals.

Qualitative Job Insecurity and Psychological Contract Breach

The psychological contract refers to a promise between an employer and employee, the violation of which results in a psychological contract breach (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018). As discussed earlier, QJI as a stressor may influence the psychological contract of an employee (Hootegem and Witte, 2019). Employees with perceived QJI believe that their organizations neither value them nor take interest in building the long-term relationships (Liu et al., 2017), which further results in PCB and will affect SWB. Past studies have not linked QJI and PCB but rather considered them independent variables (Ma, Liu, Lasseben, & Ma, 2019). One of the few studies, Costa and Neves (2017), focused on the impact of JI on PCB of employee-supervisor dyads. However, no study caught sight of the sample comprising of IT

professionals. Thus, we presume that perceived QJI of IT professionals will positively influence their PCB.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): QJI positively influences the PCB.

Qualitative Job Insecurity and Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being (SWB) is observed as a global construct and ranges from depression to happiness. Many scholars have worked on this construct and its various components (Ali, Ali, Albort-Morant, & Leal-Rodríguez, 2020; Giunchi, Vontrhon, & Ghislieri, 2019). SWB refers to positive state of mind and overall life satisfaction (Vásquez, Otto, & Garrido-Vásquez, 2020). Diener, Oishi, and Tay (2018). According to Chatterjee et al. (2019) if an employee is satisfied at his workplace, it will positively affect his positive emotions, and these positive emotions will increase his SWB. Beholding this, if a person has a threat of QJI, he or she will perceive it as stress, and his SWB will be reduced (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). This association can be assumed in line with the theory of transactional stress. Charkhabi (2019) examined the association between JI and employee well-being (WB), and they commented that increased job insecurity results in well-being related strains. Kim, Kramer, and Pak (2020) also rated job insecurity as a chronic stressor and its major impact on workers' WB. On the basis of above discussion and literary pieces of evidence, we may postulate that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): QJI is negatively associated with the SWB of employees.

Psychological Contract Breach and Employee Subjective Well-Being

Furthermore, we assume that the psychological contract breach negatively influences the subjective well-being and innovative work performance of IT professionals. While looking at the past literature on JI, it brings into sight that the proposed link has not been considered, and inadequate evidence are available. empirical evidence indicated that JI serves as a threat and is negatively correlated with employee SWB (Callea, Urbini, & Chirumbolo, 2016). Darvishmotevali et al. (2017) also highlighted that an employee's job insecurity first breaches the contract and then affects the employee's WB.

Previous studies revealed that PCB negatively affects the well-being (Keeton, 2016). The study of Hu, Jiang, Probst, and Liu (2018) also provided the same results in which they proved that employees at a higher level of PCB are at a lower level of SWB.

Although differential negative effects of JI had been studied in past researches, the psychological effects of JI and particularly the role of the psychological contracts as explanatory variables of employee SWB have not received sufficient attention (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020). Therefore, the current study intends to explain this association and postulates:

Hypothesis 4: PCB negatively influences the perceived SWB.

Psychological Contract Breach and Innovative Work Performance

Adams (1965) emphasized that individuals compare their inputs and outputs to find out any injustice by the organization. They particularly compare their input/output ratio with their colleagues and if they found it unequal they may perceive it as a PCB. As a result, gradually they will put fewer efforts and will withdraw innovative work performance. Similarly, the norm of reciprocity indicates that employees tend to engage in reduced work outcomes with the perception that their organization have violated the psychological contract (Bouzari & Karatepe, 2018). Generally, employees with positive norm of reciprocity try hard to reward an organization to secure their employment. However, this norm of reciprocity can also has a darker side, which means that individuals will negatively reciprocate and will intentionally try to do less hard and creative work (Raeder et al., 2019).

Moreover, psychological detachment motivates employees to dispraise the organization, and thus their work performance is reduced (Ma et al., 2019). Inanc (2018) highlighted that the psychological contract breach negatively influences creative work outcomes. This negative association is further confirmed by Shen, Schaubroeck, Zhao, and Wu (2019). Thus, based on the previous literature and theoretical arguments, the following hypothesis can be predicted as:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): PCB influences employee IWP negatively.

Subjective Well-Being and Innovative Work Performance

While observing the link between SWB and IWP of an employee, it is noted that subjective SWB has a direct influence on employee IWP. For example, Hu et al. (2018) revealed that employees at a higher level of perceived JI are at a higher level of depression and a lower level of happiness. Darvishmotevali et al. (2017) also highlighted that JI results in reduced work performance through stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (WB indicators). A meta-analysis by Knight and Eisenkraft (2015) indicated that well-being could be computed on the total aggregates of a person on the performance scale. According to them, positive well-being contributes to effective work performance. The study of Soriano, W. Kozusznik, Peiró, and Mateo (2020), proved that SWB is positively related to employee work performance. According to them, happy workers perform better than unhappy workers.

Based on these premises, it is assumed that if both JI and PCB are positive and negatively influence the SWB, which further reduces the employees' innovativeness. Thus the following relationship can be postulated:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): SWB of IT professionals positively influences their IWP.

Psychological Contract Breach and Subjective Well-Being as Mediators

Darvishmotevali and Ali (2020), highlighted that some variables could serve as explanatory variables in the association of JI and WP. Tuzovic and Kabadayi (2020) also focused on mediating mechanism of PCB and its significant impact on WB of employees. If such attitude doubles due to the spiral of any stressor, it may influence the performance of employees at large. Naeem, Weng, Ali, and Hameed (2020) highlighted that a PCB influences the well-being, and thus suffered employees are less productive. This relationship can also be supported by the transactional stress theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1987), which considers the negative impact of the stressor on employee behavioral and work outcomes.

Previous researches indicated that feelings of uncertainty and lack of control among employees occur when obligations are not met by the employers (Duran, Bishopp, & Woodhams, 2019). Employees are more productive when they are compensated through rewards in the shape of job security, salary, promotions, work-life balance, and career growth opportunities (Garcia, Bordia, Restubog, & Caines, 2018). Although past researches have focused on the link between JI and PCB and WP (Piccoli et al., 2017), between JI and WB (Choi, Heo, Cho, & Lee, 2020), among JI, PCB and WP (Niesen, Van Hootegem, Handaja, Batistelli, & De Witte, 2018), there is a lack of shreds of evidence positing the serial relationships among JI, PCB, SWB, and IWP. This iterative process can be occurred at the inter-individual level or over the various domains (Naeem et al., 2020). These effects can either be negative or positive.

Thus, building on TST, the current study proposes a link between QJI and IWP through the mediating roles of PCB and SWB. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model, and the final hypothesis is postulated as:

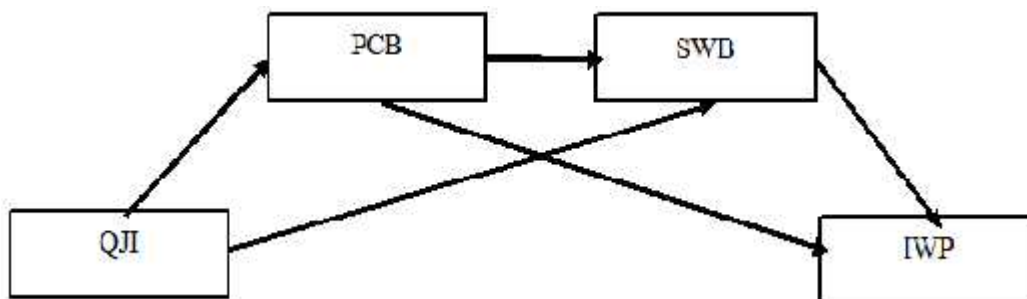


Fig 1 Conceptual Model

Hypothesis 7. QJI will positively influence the PCB but negatively the SWB such that both PCB and SWB act as sequential mediators in the relationship between QJI and employee IWP.

Material and Methods

Following the positivist paradigm and through deductive approach, data were collected from IT professionals working in different software houses of Punjab,

Pakistan. Using the simple random sampling technique, the IT professionals of two big cities were selected as sample. The cities included Lahore and Islamabad, as 41% of companies are operating in Lahore with 13,984 employees, and 14% in Islamabad with 4,397 employees. Three hundred thirty questionnaires were distributed, and 290 were received (Response Rate=88%), out of which eight were found redundant and were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the final sample consisted of 282 IT professionals. Data were collected after the informed consent and prior approval from the management of IT firms. 5-points Likert's scale was used to measure the all variables of the study. QJI was measured by a 14-items scale of De Witte (2010), SWB through a 5-items scale of Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), PCB through, 5-items scale of Robinson & Morrison (1995), and IWP was measured through a 10-items scale of IWB by Scott & Bruce (1994).

Results and Discussion

The respondents and company's demographical characteristics indicate that 85% of respondents were male (n=240) and 15 % were females (n=42). The majority of the respondents belong to software houses with 50-99 employees and the age group of 25-34. Approximately 61.7% of IT professionals are working on a contractual basis.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the constructs' reliability and validity before testing the hypotheses. Results indicated the Goodness of fit by statistical analysis as chi-square 383.25, $p < .001$; GFI=.956; CF = .965, TLI = .942, NFI= .947; RMSEA is .049. The values of CFI and TLI closer to 0.9 are generally considered acceptable (Hair et al. 2010). So all the values of fit indices are in accordance with the thresholds. Harman's single factor test was deployed to extract the variance in the data set as data were self-reported and collected at a single point of time. Results indicated that 32% of the variance was explained by a single factor that is < 50% (threshold).

The summarized results of descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity analysis presented in Table 1 indicate that the mean scores fall between the range of 2.67 to 4.95 and standard deviation ranging from 0.34 to 1.50. Additionally, reliability of the scales was established through the values of Cronbach's Alpha and found no problem with the values as all the values were found >.7. Furthermore, convergent reliability (CR) was also established for all the constructs. All the values are found above the threshold >.7 (Du, Kou, & Coghill, 2008). We also examined the validity of scales through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity analysis. Results indicated that the values of AVE are above the threshold >.5, so convergent validity was established. Results also confirmed the discriminant validity as all the values of the square root of the AVE are >0.7 correlational values.

Table 1
Descriptive, Reliability, and Validity Results

Constructs	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE	QJI	PCB	SWB	IWP
QJI	3.65	0.84	0.842	0.75	0.56	0.78			
PCB	3.96	0.91	0.816	0.79	0.63	0.69	0.83		
SWB	3.79	0.98	0.834	0.71	0.51	0.57	0.72	0.91	
IWP	3.85	0.96	0.83	0.78	0.55	0.62	0.59	0.72	0.9

Prior testing the hypotheses, correlation analysis was also conducted to check the level of correlation among research variables. Results indicated that QJI was significantly related to PCBSWB and IWP at p -value $<.01$), and PCB were significantly related to SWB and IWP at p -value $<.01$). In contrast, SWB was not significantly correlated with employee IWP ($\beta=.32$, p -value ns).

Table 2
Correlation Analysis

Variable	QJI	PCB	SWB	IWP
QJI	1			
PCB	.456**	1		
SWB	-.472**	-.382**	1	
IWP	-.316**	.138**	0.032	1

Direct structural models were developed and analyzed through AMOS to test the study hypotheses (1-6). Results summarized in Table 3 indicated that all the hypotheses are accepted except H5 (PCB \rightarrow IWP). Results are evident that QJI significantly and negatively influences the IWP and SWB ($-.216$, $p<.001$) but positively influences the PCB ($p<.001$), thus supporting the hypotheses 1 to 3. Additionally, PCB negatively influences SWB ($-.328$, $p<.01$); thus, hypothesis 4 is also supported. A negative but weak association was found between PCB and IWP ($-.01$, ps), not significantly supporting hypothesis 5. Results also indicated that SWB was significantly positively associated with IWP ($.418$, $p<.001$); thus, hypothesis 6 is also supported.

Table 3
Direct Path Analysis

Hypotheses	Paths Specified	B	SE	p -value	LLCI	ULCI	Result
H1	QJI IWP	-.347***	0.018	0.001	0.294	0.373	Supported
H2	QJI PCB	.447***	0.02	0	0.323	0.42	Supported
H3	QJI SWB	-.216***	0.062	0.001	0.403	0.325	Supported
H4	PCB SWB	-.328**	0.014	0.002	0.313	0.385	Supported
H5	PCB IWP	-0.01	0.022	0.71	0.381	0.491	Not Supported
H6	SWB IWP	.418***	0.411	0.001	0.392	0.461	Supported

To support hypothesis 7, the serial mediation indirect effect was analyzed through mediation estimands of SEM. Table 4 confirmed the presence of serial mediation. It is evident that QJI negatively influences IWP if it transmits through a

high level of PCB and low level of SWB. Thus the hypothesis 7 of the study is fully supported.

Table 4
Serial Mediation Analysis

Path	Effects	β	SE	UUCI	ULCI	<i>p</i> -value	Result
H7 QJI→PCB→SWB→IWP	Indirect	-0.163	.0067	-0.23	-0.1	0.0009	Supported

Theoretical and managerial Implications

This study adds value to job insecurity literature by explaining the link between QJI and employee IWP through the serial-mediation mechanism. The said link has not been tested in past studies. This study also contributes to the literature by considering PCB and SWB as explanatory variables based on the transactional stress theory and social exchange theory. Moreover, this study adds value to the literature by considering QJI in the mechanism of behavioral (PCB, SWB) and work outcomes (IWP). Past studies have largely ignored this mechanism. Additionally, this study offers a novel contribution by incorporating the serial mediation of PCB and SWB in the relationship of QJI to employee IWP through theoretical triangulation. Increased competition drives innovation in the information technology sector and requires a highly fluid and creative workforce. It has become imperative for IT professionals not only to perform their duties but also to produce new ideas. Thus, innovation holds an augmented value for IT professionals in the information technology sector. While looking at the value of creativity and innovative work behaviors, it is suggested that IT professionals should be given secured work employment to booster their innovative skills. Thus, this study focused on the impact of qualitative job insecurity on employee innovative work performance. This study also provides a novel explanation to the management of IT firms that they should focus on their employees' psychological and subjective well-being by preserving the secured job features. Thus, this study purely focused on the impact of qualitative job insecurity on employee subjective well-being. As the central agenda, JI is the top-rated tool to boost up the employee innovation level and capture the attention of management bodies to invest in QJI, which will further enhance their SWB and utterly their innovative and creative work performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

Besides the novel explanations and contributions of this study, there are still certain limitations that can be covered in the line of inquiry. First rated, the current study used the cross-sectional research design, which has some limitations; a future line of inquiries can evolve time-lag or longitudinal designs to determine the patterns over time.

Moreover, the study sample was IT professionals it is suggested that the model of QJI can be tested in other sectors of the service industry. This study entails the mediational effects of PCB and employee SWB; future researches can subsume

the moderating effects of different constructs, i.e., self-esteem, locus of control, and primary-secondary appraisals. This study used the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) estimands, and future researchers can incorporate the various data analysis techniques, i.e., PROCESS macros, PLS, SPLS, etc.

Conclusion

In the realm of increased competition, QJI among IT professionals have become evident. In Pakistan's IT sector, the concept is also emerging and gained much importance. But how this mechanism affects the employee's SWB and IWP is still unexplored. The current study offers a novel explanation of QJI and IWP of IT professionals, entailing advancement for managers and theorists in concern of the information technology sector. It provides a mechanism through which employee IWP is affected by QJI through PCB and subjective ill-being. This study highlights that PCB and SWB could be two predictors of employee IWP. The findings of the current study stand tall with past studies. The data collected from IT professionals proved that they suffered more from QJI, and they responded that QJI significantly affects their SWB. They respond that the presence of QJI, their IWP is much influenced. Moreover, it is not only the supremacy of QJI that affects employee IWP, but perceived PCB also strengthens this negative relationship. Thus brings of the study is the mechanism through which QJI may affect the IWP of an IT professional in the realm of extensive competition.

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