

**Research Article**

Exploring the Nexus Among Job Insecurity, Emotional Exhaustion and Job Embeddedness During COVID-19: Empirical Evidence from Structural Equation Modelling

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has drastically affected educational institutes. The current study, based on the Conservation of Resources Theory examines the effect of COVID-19 on job insecurity and emotional exhaustion among the teaching staff of Pakistan. Moreover, moderating effect of job embeddedness has been investigated. A quantitative method was used to collect the data from 231 respondents by using an online questionnaire. Two statistical software SPSS and AMOS were used to check the data analysis and Structural Equation Modelling was applied to locate the direct, mediating, and moderating effect. Results indicated that fear of COVID-19 was positively associated with emotional exhaustion and job insecurity. The indirect effect of fear of COVID-19 on emotional exhaustion among the teaching staff was also found significant. The moderating role of job embeddedness on the positive relation of job insecurity and job embeddedness was not proved in this study. The implication from this study indicated that educational institutes should educate their employees on how they can use protective measures to reduce their risk to get through emotional breakdown and exhaustion during COVID-19.

Keywords: Fear of COVID-19, Job Insecurity, Emotional Exhaustion, Job Embeddedness.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak, among other diseases, is triggering worldwide fear and stress. The World Health Organization declared it a prime concern for the public health claustrophobe Wu and McGoogan (2020) due to the increasing number of cases. The fear of contracting this disease overthrew many other fears (Harper et al., 2020) which resulted in full lockdown worldwide. As every person is scared of getting this disease, fear has become the most common emotional response of people during this ongoing pandemic (Wang et al., 2020). An increase in COVID-19 anxiety leads to higher interpersonal instability, technological and functional attrition, and lower employee gratitude. In addition, recent studies have suggested a connection between COVID-19 and negative psychological health problems, such as stress, fatigue, burnout, and tension (Mo et al., 2020; Nemati et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Xing et al., 2020). The first two cases of COVID-19 in Pakistan were confirmed on February 26, 2020, in two major cities, Karachi and Islamabad. The virus spread across the country owing to rapid dissemination and a shortage of preventive measures, with at least one reported case registered in each area. In Pakistan, 946,227 COVID cases, including physicians, therapists, and paramedics, have been reported until June 17, 2021.

Job insecurity refers to a person's fear of losing his or her job and being unemployed (Witte, 1999). Earlier research established job insecurity as a source of workplace tension and related it to several negative workplace outcomes, including decreased employee psychological health, job satisfaction, commitment, and success. (Ashford et al., 1989; Cheng & Chan, 2008; Darvishmotevali et al., 2017), as well as increased physical fatigue and the need to leave (Akgunduz & Eryilmaz, 2018; Schumacher et al., 2016). In job insecurity expectations, reacting to events on internal and external behavior and negative sentiments are personality characteristics explained almost twice as much as business success and agreement style (Debus et al., 2014). Other characteristics connected to job insecurity are low self-confidence and a variety of demographic and experimental variables (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Låstad et al., 2014; Yang & Zheng, 2015). Job insecurity had a greater negative effect on morale and turnover intention among blue-collar and white-collar employees, professionals, and managers. According to Sverke et al. (2002): Work insecurity is also bad for health because it raises stress levels, long proposed by research on epidemiology, occupational psychology, and public health (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002).

An individual's ability to manage the available measures required to fulfil job requirements and meet objectives is known as emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Shirom, 2003). Constant feelings of psychological uneasiness and physical stress describe emotional exhaustion (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Emotional exhaustion, detachment, and decreased feelings of personal progress are the three components of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1982). This study focused on emotional exhaustion, a key characteristic of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). When a person feels exhausted and experiences emotional and physical pressure due to high work or self-requirements, emotional exhaustion occurs (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional fatigue has been associated with various negative workplace effects, including psychiatric and physical disorders (Tokunaga, 2011). According to analyses in the service industry, employee emotional stress will lead to lower quality of work life, efficiency, and work commitment, as well as an elevated burnout plan (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Rathi & Lee, 2016).

Mitchell et al. (2001) initially described job embeddedness as concentrating specifically on people sticking to their company based on the cultural idea of embeddedness. They described job embeddedness as the sum of all factors that hold workers in their current jobs. Job embeddedness comprises a diverse set of emotional, communal, and fiscal factors that affect employee retention. This is referred to as the degree to which they are entangled or rooted within, linked, or bound to their specific employment, preventing them from leaving (Mitchell et al., 2001; Yao et al., 2004). These effects can be found both on and off the job, and are often compared to strings in "internet" or "network" where an individual can be "trapped" (Mitchell et al., 2001) through a variety of constraints including ties, finances, and psychological and emotional evaluation, the more the restraints and embeddedness are on an individual, the less are the chances of quitting the firms willingly (Sekiguchi et al., 2008). Those individuals become more entangled in the network with more strings and have a harder time quitting employment. Because of this fear, employees feel insecure about their positions, as the thought of being thrown out is disturbing them all the time. These thoughts will automatically lead them to emotional exhaustion, where they will no longer feel attached to their organizations, and their emotional attachment to the organization is affected. Job insecurity, which also leads to emotional exhaustion, can be controlled by including job embeddedness in the model. Job embeddedness involves creating an adaptable environment and opportunities for employees.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of COVID-19 on job insecurity and emotional exhaustion among teaching staff in Pakistan. Moreover, the moderating effect of job embeddedness has been

investigated, which helps to understand how fear of covid-19 triggers perceptions of job insecurity due to the potential risk of contagion and an uncertain future economic outlook that might lead to furlough or layoff. Due to this job insecurity employees may also experience adverse psychological, behavioral, and emotional feelings which, as a result, will intensify their emotional exhaustion. This research may help to study the behavior of employees during this uncertainty, how job embeddedness can help them control their job, and how to remove employees' concerns about losing their jobs due to job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Emotional tiredness occurs when a person feels exhausted, anxious, and morbidly depressed due to high work or personal obligations. (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Emotional tiredness has been associated with various negative workplace consequences, including physical and psychological ailments (Tokunaga, 2011). The Conservation of Resources (COR) hypothesis may help explain the link between COVID-19 dread and emotional weariness among staff members. The core idea behind COR theory is that people try to obtain, maintain, and preserve what they value while reducing the possibility of resource loss. During this pandemic, employees may face the threat of losing their resources owing to the changing conditions of workplaces and businesses. Items, personal attributes, situations, or forces that an individual desires or that potentially allow them to obtain these items are referred to as resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees need to use both physical and mental resources; however, because of the fear of covid-19 employees are in a state of constant fear and anxiety, which restricts them from using these resources effectively or completely in extreme conditions, leading to emotional exhaustion. This exhaustion can lead the individual to quit his job as his level of job satisfaction and positive feelings towards the job are reduced, and he starts thinking about leaving the job (Abdullah et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2023; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Rathi & Lee, 2016; Vo-Thanh et al., 2021). According to COR theory, insecurity is one of the negative factors of any workplace that consumes energy from an employee (Hobfoll, 2001).

Influential (Bandura, 1997) and fiscal (Kim & Feldman, 2000) are part of the chain that an employee requires as resources. An employee feels uncomfortable when they are suspicious that their job is in danger. If a person loses his job, it means that his monetary resources are in danger, his household will also be disturbed due to uncertainty, and this disturbing work life will also affect his family peace. Unemployment affects the hold a person had on his job and also destroys his occupation, and the help he was getting from work diminishes with his social circle. As a result, they lose inspiration and feel insecure, which also affects their ability and production (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Fried et al., 2008). Employees' fear of COVID-19 was strongly tied to their work insecurity, which coincides with the current study results that COVID-19 has triggered employees' sentiments of work insecurity, such as worry about terminating their work, receiving lower compensation, or not receiving advancement on time. This is addressed by the psychological contract hypothesis, which states that the psychological empowerment made among workers and employers can give workers a sense of work stability by giving them power (Choi et al., 2014; Smithson & Lewis, 2000) and that between periods of uncertainty, such as a significant unemployment rate, workers may face authority, resulting in job insecurity (Choi et al., 2014; Debus et al., 2012). Similarly, the COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in a significant jobless rate across the country, and the convoluted scenario contributes to future uncertainty. As a result, fear of COVID-19 causes a rise in job insecurity (Chen & Eyoun, 2021).

The significant relationship between the terror of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion may be explained by the COR model, which states that people might acquire emotional tiredness when they suffer a genuine loss of resources and believe that they do not have enough resources to deal with strain (Hobfoll, 1989; Rathi & Lee, 2016). The impact of COVID-19 anxiety on emotional exhaustion through job insecurity can also be addressed by the COR hypothesis, which states that people are emotionally exhausted when they sense a threat of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Fear of COVID-19 may lead to anxieties about the pandemic's unclear economic situation and fear of unemployment due to the disease's possible transmission, resulting in a greater sense of job insecurity. According to a prior study, work instability may put employees' resources at risk, leading to increased emotional exhaustion. Researchers have found a link between job instability and employees' emotional weariness and burnout (Ismail, 2015). Based on the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), researchers anticipate that job embeddedness, which is the set of factors that prevent a person from quitting their work (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001), indicates the value of the organization's valuable resources (Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman, 2015), employees with an increased degree of job embeddedness seem comfortable and connected with their co-workers, which leads to heightened degrees of commitment to the company (Eberly, 2009). While work embeddedness provides heightened degrees of commitment to the company, it also produces an inherent amount of reliance on the organization in terms of job insecurity (Eberly,

2009). An increased level of embeddedness in an individual leads to a pleasant and well-matched feeling in an organization (Holtom et al., 2008) thus reducing the chances of emotional exhaustion.

2.1 Fear of COVID-19 and Emotional Exhaustion

Fear and anxiety can arise because of crises and protective precautions. Fear is an intense nervous condition caused by a sense of uncertainty (de Hoog et al., 2008). The covid-19 phobia can impair one's ability to imagine clearly (Pakpour & Griffiths, 2020), and may result in neurological and psychological problems, including stress and anxiety (Soraci et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic, has significantly disturbed the practices and functions of all sectors (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). The downturn affects not only the material well-being of entities but also the job and emotional health of their workers (Hamouche, 2020). Individuals facing mental exhaustion are less willing to join work and believe that they have no power or authority for things happening at work (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). The present state can have troubling effects, such as rising growth in the incidence of mental conditions including psychosis, as well as rising homicide numbers (Haw et al., 2015; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020). Extreme panic, according to the results of this study as well as the latest previous research, could have a negative impact on psychological well-being, provoke anxiety, and negatively affect job performance (e.g., turnover intention, job performance, job satisfaction).

H1: Fear of covid-19 positively and significantly influence emotional exhaustion.

2.2 Fear of COVID-19 and Job Insecurity

Changes in institutions are unavoidable because of healthcare, cultural, and economic issues, and the consequences may be dangerous to workers (Meyer et al., 2018). If tension is constant, an employee's reserves are depleted, and this loss can result in a low degree of commitment. Similarly, Covid-19 is causing societal, monetary, and individual risks (Gössling et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020) as well as clinical confusion at the current count, and there is no appropriate cure or antidote for the disease, which can result in negative employee attitudes such as panic, depression, or tension. Covid-19, in other words, maybe a major threat to one of their own or loved ones' safety. These assumptions might contribute to poorer success when it comes to completing job tasks, so it is presumed that insecurity about the job's long-term survival, when heightened by special circumstances (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), can be reduced through internal interaction (Verčič et al., 2012).

H2: Fear of covid-19 positively and significantly influence employee's job insecurities.

2.3 Job insecurity and emotional exhaustion

According to Giorgi et al. (2020), mental disorder cases attributed to psychopathological disorders have increased during this global recession. Research has found that workplace insecurity has a significant effect on workers' emotional stability. Employees' emotional well-being is harmed by job insecurity (Inoue et al., 2018; Nella et al., 2015), and enthusiasm is weakened (Ünsar, 2011). Employees who believe their career is jeopardy have a poor quality of life and other emotional and mental problems. Job insecurity has been linked to several adverse effects at the personal level, including depression and an elevated degree of emotional exhaustion (Cheng & Chan, 2008). Since they spend fewer hours and resources on existing work, they are less devoted to the institution's ambitions. Presti and Nonnis (2012) proposed that higher job insecurity reduces psychological motivation, leaving it inconsistent. Shin and Hur (2020) found that workplace insecurity saps workers' physical, social, and emotional resources, adversely affecting their fitness and well-being, and as a result, lowering their commitment.

H3: Job insecurity positively associates emotional exhaustion.

2.4 Mediating Role of Job Insecurity

Job instability has been linked to poor job results, work satisfaction, emotional health, and attrition (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Staufienbiel & König, 2010). Individuals can experience emotional fatigue when they anticipate the danger of lost productivity and do not even have enough skill benefit, according to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Frontline employees' feelings of work insecurity during the pandemic can function as a possible danger to their loss of resources and worsen their emotional exhaustion (Kessler et al., 1988). Earlier studies have shown that work insecurity can result in the loss of resources, fatigue, turnover intentions, and a decrease in worker health (Ismail, 2015). Employees who are on the brink of losing their employees have greater levels of adverse feelings, such as depression and exhaustion, than those who are not in this situation (Kerse et al., 2018; Smit et al., 2016). People in an epidemic, such as Covid-19,

are worried about their financial potential in addition to the unpredictable future economic situation. Employees could be concerned with Covid-19 and many that contract it are unable to return to work, which may lead to financial uncertainty and unemployment, worsening their sense of job insecurity throughout a crisis (Chen & Eyoun, 2021).

H4: Job insecurity mediates the positive relationship between the fear of covid-19 and emotional exhaustion.

2.5 Moderating Role of Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness, According to researchers (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001), job embeddedness improves workers' ability to remain in certain employment. Workers who think their beliefs and job goals align with the corporate community and culture, or who develop positive formal or casual relationships with others in the company or community, are less likely to leave, as employee turnover will result in a loss of benefits from both the institution and the community (Mitchell et al., 2001). This is because these workers are heavily engaged with a variety of tasks, match quite well with work and corporate culture, and are aware that leaving the company will cost them a variety of rewards and incentives (Sekiguchi et al., 2008; Xuecheng et al., 2022). Swider et al. (2011) discovered a poor moderating function for job embeddedness in a study of 895 university faculty workers. Holtom and Inderrieden (2006) attempted to incorporate the phenomenon of shocks—unexpected incidents that cause ideas of quitting—into career embeddedness-based turnover forecasting. Both on- and off-work embeddedness increased the impact of job success and organizational commitment, and decreased the influence of truancy on intention to leave the organization, according to Lee et al. (2004). Biggane et al. (2017) found that employee embeddedness absorbed the impact of workers' expectations of procedural justice and interactions on risk analysis during business change, reducing voluntary employee removal and intention to quit (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Karatepe & Shahriari, 2014; Robinson et al., 2014; Tanova & Holtom, 2008) by lowering insecurity and exhaustion.

H5: Job embeddedness moderates the positive relationship between job insecurities and emotional exhaustion.

2.6 Research Framework

Figure 1 shows the framework of the relationships between all variables. Fear of covid directly affects emotional exhaustion and job insecurity. It also indirectly affected emotional exhaustion through the mediating role of job insecurity. Job embeddedness moderated the relationship between job insecurity and job embeddedness.

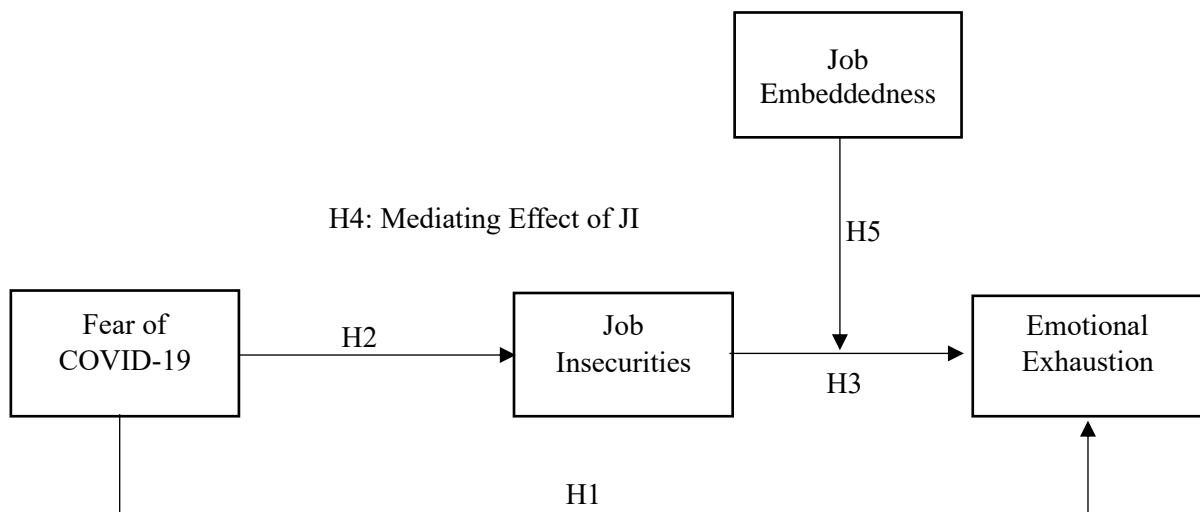


Figure 1. Research Model

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and data collection

Pakistan's education sector was the target population for this study. Non-probability sampling was used to collect data from the respondents. The sample size of the study was selected according to the Kline (2015) rule, according to which the minimum size required by the researcher for structural equation Modelling (SEM) must be 10 times the number of research questions, excluding demographic questions. Therefore, following this guideline, the minimum sample size was 280 (28 × 10), and only 231 questionnaires were completed. Many problems were encountered during the collection of data, including lockdown due to coronavirus, social distancing, and lack of interest.

The main issue was that the institutions were closed due to the increasing cases of covid-19 which forced the researcher to take online responses. The questionnaire was split into different sections according to the requirements. The initial section included demographic questions, and the other section included questions related to research variables e.g., Covid-19, job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, and job embeddedness. No personal questions were included in the questionnaire, to ensure that the respondents were completely anonymous. A self-report online survey was prepared in Google form and shared with the respondents through different social media sources.

3.2 Measures of Variables and Questionnaire Design

Measurement for Covid-19 was adapted from Ahorsu et al. (2020) consist of 6 item scale including a sample item “I am most afraid of COVID-19.” De Witte (2000) adopted a scale for job insecurity based on seven items, including a sample item “I feel insecure when I think about the chances of being affected by organizational changes and downsizing. A measurement scale of emotional exhaustion was adopted from Maslach and Jackson (1981) where an item like “I feel frustrated by my job” was included among the 9 item scale. For job embeddedness, the scale was adapted from Crossley et al. (2007) consist of 6 item scale that includes a sample item like “I feel attached to this organization.” An instrument is the sort of scale that is used for questionnaires is the “Five-point Likert Scale” including commentators like “1st Strongly Disagree, 2nd Disagree, 3rd Neutral, 4th Agree Strongly, and 5th Agree.” Respondents responded to the point at which they were satisfied with the items. The collected data were carefully analyzed using SPSS and Amos software. Structural equation Modelling (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used to locate the direct, mediating, and moderating effects of the variables.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to examine the scale’s fundamental factor structure. A detailed analysis of the proposed hypothesis and model assessment was performed through structural equation modeling using AMOS 24. The present research investigated a total of 231 questionnaires completed by the respondent after completing the screening process. No missing values were identified, and no questionnaire was deleted. In the current study, 66 questionnaires were filled by males and 165 were filled by female staff. The male contribution in this survey was only 28.6% of the actual responses and that of females was 71.4%. The reason for the greater number of females was that most of the responses were taken from the staff of female educational institutes.

4.1 Reliability Analysis and Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation

One of the key factors in any research is measuring the instrument’s reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha value should be above 0.7. The Cronbach’s alpha value of COVID19, job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, and job embeddedness is .863, .881, .910 and .857 respectively, which shows the reliability of the variables is good and reliable. Table 1 shows the convergent validity values. For convergent validity, the CR value should be greater than .70, and the AVE value should be greater than .50. In current study the value of CR of all the variables including COVID19, job insecurity, emotional exhaustion and job embeddedness are greater than .70. In case of values of AVE, the value of COVID19, job insecurity and emotional exhaustion are 0.628, 0.532 and 0.552 respectively, which are acceptable values in case of job embeddedness the value is 0.498 which is very close to 0.5 so this value is also acceptable. Three items, including JI2 and JI3, and one item, JE5, of job embeddedness were removed before the final analysis because their factor loading values were less than .50. Table 1 also shows that COVID19 had a positive relationship with job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, and job embeddedness. Furthermore, it represents the skewness of all variables included in this study. If the skewness value is negative or positive, its mean can be higher or lower than the median. The skewness value should be between +1 and -1. The table below explains the values that indicate the normality of the data, as the values lie between the required limit, that is, +1 and -1.

Table 1. Correlations, Reliability, Mean, Standard Deviation and Convergent Validity (n=231)

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items	CR	AVE	Mean	SD	Skewness
Covid19	.863	6	0.887	0.628	3.19	0.82	-.254
JI	.881	5	0.909	0.532	2.84	0.94	.270
EE	.910	9	0.859	0.552	2.96	0.84	.192
JE	.857	5	0.856	0.498	3.51	0.75	-.579

Notes: Covid19= Fear of Covid19, JI=Job Insecurity EE=Emotional Exhaustion, and JE=Job Embeddedness.

4.2 Discriminant Validity

It examines the limits to which the variables differ from one another. For discriminant validity, the correlation value of another variable was compared with the square root of Average Variance Extracted. The square root of the AVE should be greater than the values of the correlation of other variables. The values in table 3.2 shows that all variables are discriminant from each other. The highlighted values are the highest, and the preceding values are lower than the aforementioned values. C had the highest value (0.729), followed by JI (0.729), EE (0.743), and JE (0.706).

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (n=231)

Constructs	Covid19	JI	EE	JE
Covid19	0.792			
JI	0.607	0.729		
EE	0.170	0.168	0.743	
JE	0.471	0.529	0.131	0.706

Notes: Covid19= Fear of Covid19, JI=Job Insecurity EE=Emotional Exhaustion, and JE=Job Embeddedness.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is a multivariate statistical method used to assess whether measured variables properly reflect the degree of concepts. With the exception of common errors, the CFA results revealed that most attributes were within acceptable ranges. In the current study, the observed values were different from the required values; therefore, some modifications were made, after which values fell within the limit of the threshold range and showed a significant relationship between variables, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (n=231)

Indicators	Threshold Range	Before Observed Value	After Modification
CMIN/DF	Less than 3	2.563	2.035
GFI	≤.80	.808	.853
IFI	≤.90	.881	.923
CFI	≤.90	.880	.922
RMSEA	≥.08	.082	.067

4.4 Structural Equation Modelling

Multivariate statistical analysis was used to analyse the structural association between the latent variables and measured constructs. This includes factor and multiple regression analyses. Table 4 shows the standardized regression weights for each variable with one another. In the mediation analysis, all the regression weights were significant at the level 0.01 showing a direct positive relationship between variables. Job insecurity has a positive and significant relationship with COVID, which is .522. Emotional exhaustion and cognition had significant and positive relationships by 25.9 percent. Job insecurity and emotional exhaustion had positive and significant relationships (46.6 %). This indicates that the first three hypotheses were accepted.

Table 4. SEM Analysis

	Relationship	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
Direct	EE ← Covid19	.259	.059	4.583	***	Sig
	JI ← Covid19	.522	.065	8.735	***	Sig
	EE ← JI	.466	.052	8.217	***	Sig
Indirect	EE ← JI ← Covid19	.244	.043	---	**	Sig
Moderation	EE ← JE x JI	.131	.048	2.575	**	Sig

Notes: Covid19= Fear of Covid19, JI=Job Insecurity EE=Emotional Exhaustion, and JE=Job Embeddedness.

Table 4 also shows the positive and significant indirect relationship of covid with emotional exhaustion, which is .244, so our fourth hypothesis of the current study is also accepted under SEM analysis. Figure 3.1 shows the standardized values of the structural path model. In the moderation analysis, the interaction effect of JI with JE on emotional exhaustion is significant at .131, which means that our fifth hypothesis is accepted.

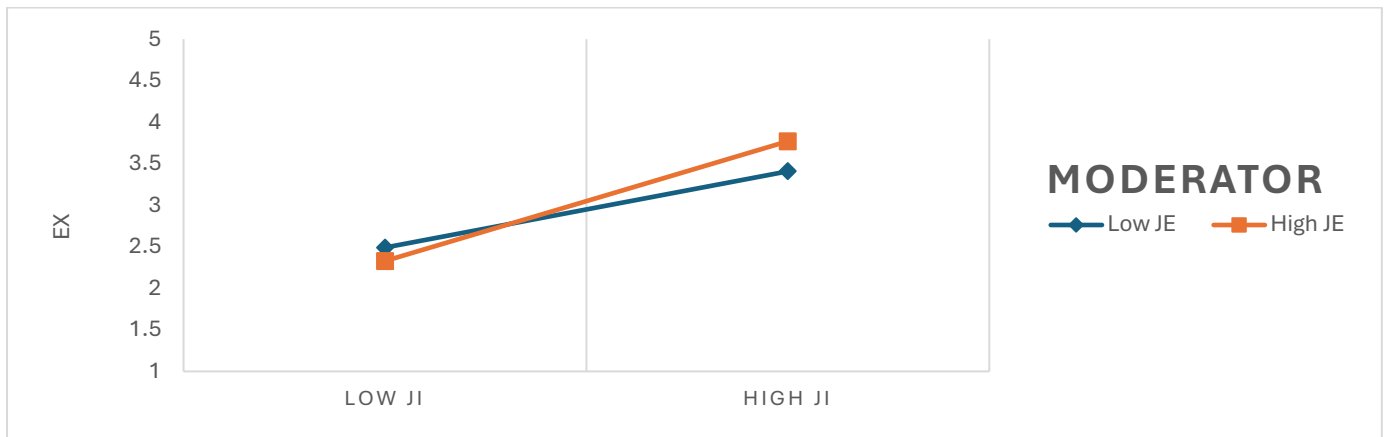


Figure 2. Moderating effect of Job Embeddedness

The figure above shows the moderating effect of job embeddedness on the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion when job embeddedness is low versus high. The regression coefficient of the independent variable was .59, the regression coefficient of the moderator was .05, and that of the interaction term ($JI \times JE$) was .131, which is significant. Therefore, we conclude that job embeddedness has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between job insecurity and job embeddedness.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of Covid19 fear on emotional exhaustion and job insecurity. Moreover, the moderating impact of job embeddedness was investigated in a single model by testing through SEM based on quantitative data. The findings demonstrated that the standardized value of $H1 = .259$, which proves that fear of covid-19 causes emotional exhaustion in employees significantly, which is consistent with Hwang et al. (2021). Employees need to use both physical and mental resources; however, because of the fear of covid-19 employees are in a state of constant fear and anxiety, which restricts them from using these resources effectively or completely in extreme conditions, leading to emotional exhaustion. This exhaustion can lead the individual to quit his job as his level of job satisfaction and positive feelings towards the job are reduced, and he starts thinking about leaving the job (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Rathi & Lee, 2016).

The results of our hypothesis against $H2$ are significant, proving that fear of covid-19 causes an increase in job insecurity, which is consistent with the findings of (Jung et al., 2021; Vo-Thanh et al., 2021). Moreover, job insecurity leads to emotional exhaustion among employees, and the findings prove it significant; therefore, $H3$ is also accepted and aligned with prior studies (Nauman et al., 2020; Vo-Thanh et al., 2021). Hypothesis 4 of the study indicated that fear of Covid19 has an indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through job insecurity, and the results proved this. The conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), shows that job embeddedness is a set of factors that prevent a person from quitting their work (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001)(Ch et al., 2021). An increased level of embeddedness in an individual leads to a pleasant and well-matched feeling in an organization (Holtom et al., 2008) thus reducing the chances of emotional exhaustion.

Our results found a significant moderating effect of embeddedness on the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, as the value of standardized estimates for $H5 = .131$ at the significance level of .048, so the hypothesis was accepted. This means that job embeddedness has a significant effect on and strengthens the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Job embeddedness helps organizations create friendly relationships among employees (Abdullah et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Xuecheng et al., 2022). Organizations can arrange different informal activities among employees, so that they can feel comfortable with each other. They can also arrange training programs and other seminars or webinars to teach employees how to perform in such crises and guide them to use different software and apps if they have to work from home. In this way, employees can feel secure and try to give their best in unfavourable situations.

5.2 Research Implications

This study may help organizational authorities develop a framework to manage their work during crises like Covid19 and other crises, including calamities or disasters. Practically, this study helps to provide employees with an environment where they can work comfortably around or with their staff, and it can urge organization employees to provide staff with different training opportunities as required by the situation, for example, train them how to communicate and work by using technology and different platforms during crises or by arranging seminars or webinars where an employee can know the latest information about Covid19 and how they can take care of themselves to keep their mind relaxed and stay motivated under certain circumstances. Organizations should strictly follow appropriate practices to reduce the chances of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion caused by employees during COVID19. Employees play a significant role in an institute. Thus, if employees feel insecure or exhausted for any reason, it will not only affect their performance but also affect the output of the institute. Specifically, educational institutes should educate their employees about the consequences of Covid-19 and how they can use protective measures to reduce their risk by maintaining social distancing and should follow Covid-19's SOPs during work.

5.3 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effect of fear of Covid-19 on job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, along with the moderating role of job embeddedness. To achieve the study objectives, data were collected from educational institutions in Pakistan. The results revealed that fear of Covid-19 is positively associated with job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. It also mediated the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, hypothesis testing proved that the moderating impact of job embeddedness strengthens the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. The findings of the study help the institutional sector as well as another service sector to make proper policies and guidance from employees to management to create a smooth and secure environment during the Covid-19 situation.

5.4 Limitations and Future Suggestions

Every study in social science has some limitations and future avenues, as per their provisions. Similarly, this study was limited by time, data, and sectors, and some crucial elements such as job satisfaction and job engagement were underpinned based on COR theory but were not investigated in this research. Future researchers could investigate the same model based on a larger sample size to generalize the results. Moreover, this framework can be enhanced by adding positive side variables, such as job satisfaction and job engagement in the Covid19 scenario. Future researchers can study the effect of fear of covid on other types of burnouts, such as depersonalization and lower self-evaluation. Future studies can also examine different aspects of mindfulness or perceived organizational support as moderators between fear of being covid and job insecurity.

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