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Self-Esteem as a Mediator in the Relationship Between Earnings and Job Insecurity

Sevda KÖSE¹ , Beril BAYKAL² 

ABSTRACT

When the researches on job insecurity, which is a considerable subject for both individuals and organizations, are examined, it appears that the researches examining the relationship between job insecurity, self-esteem and earnings are limited. This research aimed to analyze the mediator role of self-esteem in the relationship between earnings (wage & household income) and job insecurity. The research sample is 393 service sector employees in Kocaeli who participated willingly and opted through random sampling. Structural Equation Model was used in analysis of the data. For analyses IBM SPSS 21 and AMOS 21 were used. According to findings self-esteem mediates the relationship between earnings (wage & household income) and job insecurity, and the three variables were associated with each other. Earnings primarily affect the self-esteem of individuals, which, in turn, affect job insecurity. The increase in earnings also increase self-esteem, and this increase in self-esteem affects job insecurity perception in a negative way. Therefore job insecurity decreases. The findings are interpreted based on the relevant literature and previous studies.

Keywords: Job Insecurity, Self-Esteem, Earnings, Mediator Role, Structural Equation Model, Türkiye.

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INTRODUCTION

With the trends towards globalization and technological advancement, as well as the decreasing workforce and the weakening of the ties between employer and employee, job insecurity has become a problem that challenges the working life (Hoffman, Shoss ve Wegman, 2020). New information technologies, recession, industrial restructuring and increasing global competition have dramatically changed the working life by affecting the nature of work and organizations (Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999). Flexible working arrangements, that begins to be implemented with these changes, together with the downsizing, restructuring, merging, privatization and subcontracting seen today, have made the problem of job insecurity deepened and one of the problems that need to be emphasized (Hellgren & Sverke, 2003).

Job insecurity, which harms the health of the individual and causes effects that reduce job satisfaction, causes employees to exhibit negative attitudes towards their

organizations, reluctance to stay in the organization and decrease in performance. However, job insecurity has notable effects on workers' health, attitudes, behaviours rather than its effect on organizations (Klandermans & Vuuren, 1999). In terms of individual results, it was stated that job insecurity causes more psychological distress and somatic health complaints (Strazdins et al., 2004); and can be accepted as one of the factors that cause stress. Employees who experience uncertainty about the future experience anxiety about losing their job, their coping capacity decreases and they are prevented from taking action for better conditions (Strazdins et al., 2004). In addition, it is possible to come across studies showing that job insecurity causes health problems (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989; Ferrie et al., 2001; Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999; Strazdins et al., 2004). Some of the health problems that arise due to job insecurity are problems that harm the psychological well-being such as stress, anxiety, depression, fear, anger, guilt, dissatisfaction with self and environment. Some of them are somatic complaints and physical health problems that arise due to these problems (Sverke et al., 2004).

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In this context, the factors that exacerbate the perception of job insecurity gain importance. Factors affecting perceived job insecurity are sorted into three groups as environmental and organizational factors, individual characteristics, and personality traits (De Witte, 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Kinnunen et al., 1999). Rather than stating that any one factor is more important, it would be more appropriate to investigate different effects of these factors on job insecurity and the relationships between them (Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999: 148). However more studies have analysed premises and consequences of job insecurity (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989; Chirumbolo & Hellgren, 2003; Ferrie et al., 2001; Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999; Klandermans & Vuuren, 1999; Naswall & De Witte, 2003; Strazdins et al., 2004; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002; Sverke et al., 2004), there are few studies about the different effects of these factors and their relationships. So, this research's aim is to analyze the effects of earnings (wage & income) which is an element of organizational and individual characteristics, and self-esteem which is a personality trait, on job insecurity. Despite the prominence of the subject, the number of researches investigating the correlation between earnings, job insecurity and self-esteem is limited. In this regard, first, conceptual framework of job insecurity and self-esteem are discussed and theoretical background regarding the relationship between these concepts is presented. Finally, method will be explained and results will be discussed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Job insecurity

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) define job insecurity as the inability to maintain desired continuity when the job is under threat. For De Witte (2005) job insecurity is the perceived threat of losing job and concerns about this threat. Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall (2002) define it as the subjectively experienced expectation of a basic and involuntary event related to job loss. Accordingly, it involves experiencing uncertainty about absenteeism or job loss (Wilson et al., 2020).

There are different approaches in defining job insecurity. These approaches can be categorized as subjective-objective, qualitative-quantitative, affective-cognitive. Subjective job insecurity is psychological that it expresses anxiety for the future of the job (Van Vuuren, 1990). According to Van Vuuren (1990), subjective job insecurity reflects three aspects. First, it is subjective and need not be associated with specific employment groups. Second, it is about future; that is, employees are not sure about future of their jobs. Third, it is about job continuity,

not continuity of job content. Objective job insecurity is about external factors such as crisis and globalization (Çakır, 2007). Hellgren, Sverke, and Isaksson (1999) define job insecurity as qualitative and quantitative. Accordingly, while quantitative job insecurity is concern for losing job; qualitative job insecurity is concern for losing significant characteristics of the job. Perceived threats to quality of employment relations like ingravescent work conditions, absence of career opportunities, and not making wage improvements are about qualitative job insecurity. Borg and Elizur (1992) define job insecurity as cognitive and affective. Accordingly cognitive job insecurity is expressed as stress type caused by individuals' possible job changes. Cognitive job insecurity, which is thought to be possibility of losing job, is related to environmental threats that cause stress in individuals. Fear of job loss is affective job insecurity (Huang, Lee & Asford, 2012).

Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984) postulate two main dimensions of job insecurity: the severity of perceived threat and the perceived powerlessness to resist threats (Table 1). The severity of threat to job continuity depends on extent and significance of the potential loss. The severity of threat includes characteristics of job under threat, the value of each feature to the individual, the subjective possibility of losing each characteristic, the number of threat sources. The feeling of powerlessness is also a considerable element of job insecurity as it increases threat experienced. Powerlessness includes areas where insecure individuals experience power deficits.

Factors affecting perceived job insecurity are sorted into three groups as environmental and organizational factors (organizational change, communication, etc.), individual characteristics (age, education, gender, income, etc.) and personality traits (locus of control, personality, self-esteem, etc.) (De Witte, 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Kinnunen et al., 1999). Job insecurity experiences, regardless whether they are quantitative or qualitative/cognitive or affective, result from the interaction between the situational characteristics and the individual's characteristics that affect individual's interpretation of environmental factors (Blackmore, 2011).

In this research, first of all, the relationship between earnings (one of the organizational and individual characteristics) and job insecurity will be examined. According to Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984) perception and effect of job insecurity are associated to employee's commitment to current job. If this commitment, which includes economic insecurity expresses that an individual cannot afford living costs without income earned from his job, is excessive, the individual may feel the threat of job

Table 1. Job Insecurity Dimensions

Severity of threat	Uncertain job loss Temporary job loss Downgrading of job within organization Career development Income flow Status/self-esteem Self-determination Sources Society Decline/ reducing age Reorganization Technological change Physical danger
Powerlessness	Lack of protection Unclear expectations Authoritarian environment Dismissal

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984: 442) Dimensions of Job Insecurity

insecurity deeply. Frese (1985) and Kinnunen et al. (1999) stated that individuals with lower income are often more dependent on their income and are defenceless to the threat of losing job. So, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Earnings are related to job insecurity.

Self-esteem.

Self-esteem (SE), a socio-psychological phenomenon, expresses the individual's perceptions and attitudes regarding their worth. Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as the general self-evaluation of the individual. Therefore, "self-esteem is an evaluation of one's quality as an object, how good or bad, valuable or worthless, positive or negative, or superior or inferior one is" (Thoits, 1999). SE is a state of appraisal arising from the acceptance of the self-concept that the individual reaches as a result of self-evaluation, and it defines the state of self-satisfaction, appreciation, value to be loved, and trust in one's essence without considering himself/

herself inferior or superior (Özcan, Subaşı, Budak, Çelik, Gürel & Yıldız, 2013). Accordingly, self-esteem is an individual's feelings about their personal worth, competence, and suitability (Liu, Yang & Zou, 2021).

Individuals with high SE appreciate themselves, believe they are inherently valuable. Therefore they have a positive retention of their characteristics; so they are aware of their own competencies and abilities and have beliefs that they can do what their will. These individuals display a positive attitude when comparing themselves to others. Low SE refers the opposite of the positive qualities and results in negative situations as self-harm, helplessness, powerlessness, weakness and depression (Kağıtçıbaşı & Cemalcılar, 2016; Smelser, 1989).

SE of the individual starts to form from childhood and takes shape in line with the reactions given to life experiences. Praised and supported children through these experiences, will develop positive SE when evaluated as successful environment. Criticized, mocked and punished

children can have an unhealthy SE and begin to question their competence and worth. The quality of relationship with parents is important in this period. During adolescence the adolescent's attachment to parents decreases and interaction begins with friendships and socialization between gender. In this period, social groups and age-mate approval are effective in shaping SE (Richman, Hope & Mihalas, 2010). With the adulthood period, SE develops primarily within the scope of social relations and occupational issues. In this period, features of the job (such as wages), socio-economic status (education, income etc) are the factors that affect SE (Cited in Tufan, 1990).

In this research, secondly, relationship between SE and earnings will be examined. Individuals with higher incomes have high SE levels than do individuals with low incomes (Ross & Mirowsky, 1996). Rosenberg & Pearlin (1978) stated that high levels of economic success will bring high SE. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Earnings are related to self-esteem.

The mediator role of SE

Every employee has different personality traits, influenced by the personality of each element contained within the individual, and one of them is self-esteem (Soelton et al., 2020). Among personality traits, role of SE, in the relationship between job insecurity and earnings has not been clearly studied yet. In particular, SE may influence perceptions by buffering effects of stressors like low income and wages. In this context, an individual with high SE may evaluate a stressful or negative job situation as challenging rather than threatening (Callea, Presti, Mauno & Urbini, 2019).

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) identified SE as an emotional-based coping strategy. Accordingly, individuals who have higher SE can deal with any stress-related situation more actively than their precedents who have low SE and prefer to avoid challenge (cited in Adekiya, 2018).

"Behavioral plasticity theory" developed by Brockner (1988) indicates that external factors affect individual. According to the theory, individuals differ in the extent to which they stand by & respond to external cues. The factor that determines the extent of an individual's response to external cues is SE. Individuals who have low SE are more reactive (plastic) than those who have higher SE. While individuals who have high SE are expected to react less to these cues and to exhibit less related consequences; individuals who have low SE are expected to show more sensitivity and reaction to this negative situation (Cited in Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Low SE individuals are more sensible to environmental events than high SE individuals. High SE individuals are expected to be more elastic to external conditions and stress factors, and according to Lasdat (2010), the perception of job insecurity differs between individuals due to personal characteristics. SE can affect the perception of job situations, the choice of dealing strategies, the intensification of an individual's actions (De-Keyser, Vlerick & D'hoore, 2011). Therefore an increase/decrease in SE is related to a decrease/increase in perceived job insecurity (cited in Adekiya, 2018). Accordingly, third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Self-esteem is related to job insecurity.

In the perspective of above explanations, it can be said that low earnings may lead to low SE and high level of perceived job insecurity and negative consequences. So we can say that higher earnings may increase SE and therefore decrease the perception of job insecurity and negative results of environmental factors. So the last hypothesis is as follows;

H4: Self-esteem mediates (affects) the relationship between earnings and job insecurity.

Accordingly, research model was designed as depicted in Figure 1.

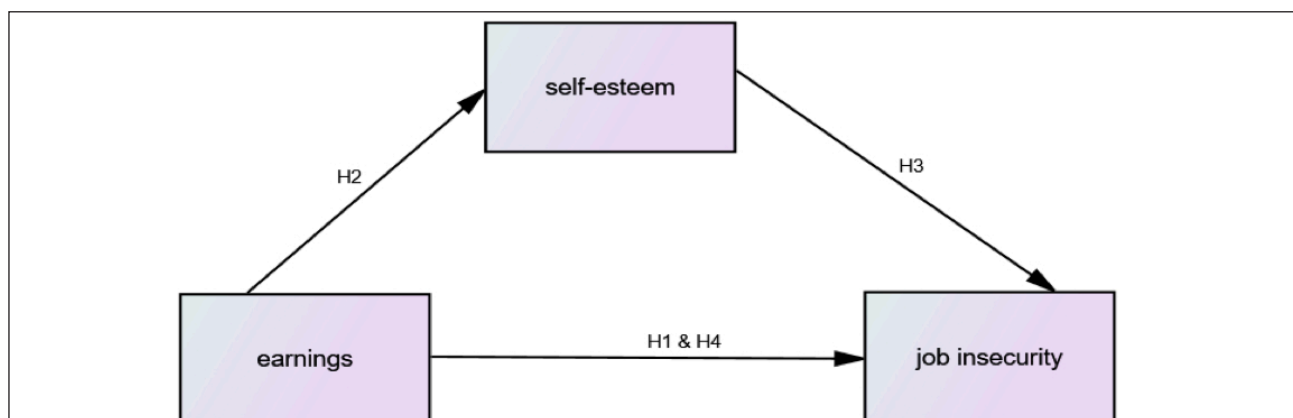


Figure 1. The Conceptual Model: Job Insecurity, Self-Esteem, Earnings and Hypotheses

METHOD

The Aim Of the Study

The aim of the research was to analyze mediator role of self-esteem in the relationship between earnings (wage & income) and job insecurity.

Population and Sample

The population of research is service sector employees in Kocaeli. The research sample is 500 service sector employees in Kocaeli, selected through random sampling. From this 500 participants, 393 interview was reliable for this research. For interviews, an application

was made to the Kocaeli University Committee of Social and Human Sciences Ethics, and Ethics Committee Approval was obtained at the Committee's meeting, numbered 2021/12 and dated 30/09/2021.

The sample's socio-demographic characteristics were represented in Table 2.

Data Collection Tools

The following scales were carried out by face-to-face interview method with participants who agreed to participate in order to collect data:

Job Insecurity Scale. This 7-item and 5-point Likert scale, which has two dimensions as qualitative and quantitative

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	N	%		N	%
Sex			Position		
Female	196	49.9	Managerial	89	22.6
Male	197	50.1	Non-Managerial	304	77.4
Age			Occupation		
Under 25	101	25.7	Managers	41	10.4
25 – 34	197	50.1	Professionals	154	39.2
35 – 44	55	14.0	Assistant professionals	41	10.4
45 +	40	10.2	Customer service and office	79	20.1
Marital Status			Years Worked		
Single	247	62.8	Less than 1	71	18.1
Married	146	37.2	1-5	181	46.1
Education			Wage		
<High School	18	4.6	6-10	83	21.1
High School	89	22.6	10 +	58	14.8
Undergraduate	267	67.9	Minimum Wage	189	48.1
Postgraduate	19	4.8	5500-10000 TL	141	35.9
Total	393	100	Over 10.000 TL	63	16
			Total	393	100

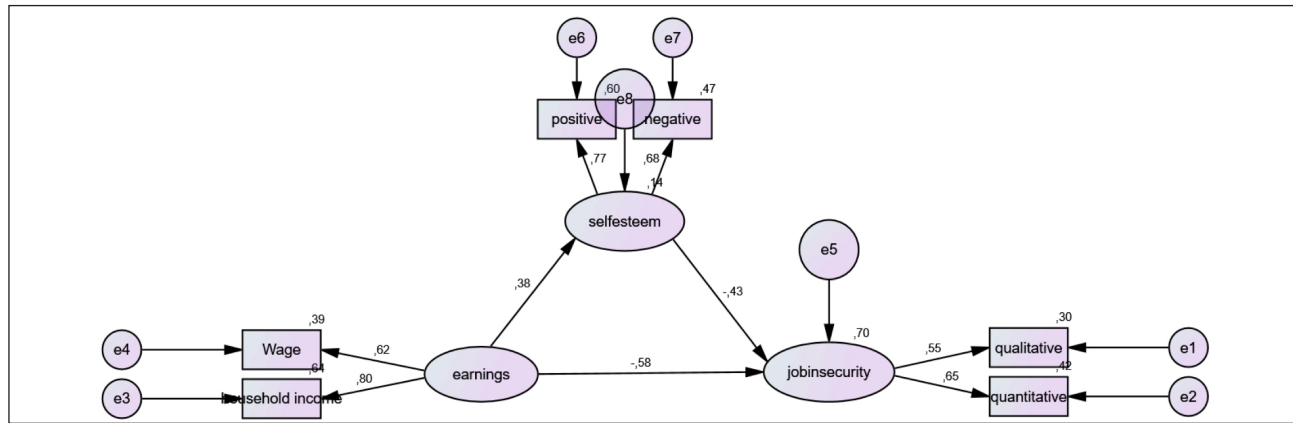


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

job insecurity, was developed by Hellgren, Sverke, and Isaksson (1999). There are four items to test qualitative job insecurity and three items to test quantitative job insecurity. Scale's score ranges between '1' (strongly disagree) and '5' (strongly agree).The scale, which was translated into Turkish, was tested for reliability and the reliability level was high (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.732).

Self-Esteem Scale. This 10-item and 4- point Likert type scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965) and has 10 items. Scale's score ranges between '1' (strongly disagree) and '4' (strongly agree).There are five items to test low SE and five items to test high SE. The scale, which was translated into Turkish, was tested for reliability and the reliability level was high (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.800).

Demographic Questions. There are some demographic questions about the participants' gender, age, education, seniority and position, professions, wages and household income.

Process and Analysis

IBM SPSS 21 and AMOS 21 were used to analyze the data. For analyzing the factor structure of variables confirmatory factor analysis was used. Model fit was measured through the values of the comparative fit index (CFI), the chi-square goodness of fit statistic (χ^2 , χ^2/df), the standardized root mean square residuals (SRMR) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Measures of goodness of fit of model are χ^2 : 271,281; χ^2/df : 2,422; CFI: 0,914; RMSEA: 0,06 and SRMR: 0,05. The CFA results showed that the measurement model had an acceptable fit.

Structural Equation Model was conducted for testing hypotheses and whether self-esteem mediates the effect of earnings on job insecurity.

FINDINGS

SEM findings were shown in Figure 2. First, SEM findings showed that earnings [$\beta = -.740$, $p < .01$] affect job insecurity significantly and negatively. Job insecurity decreases as earnings increase. Hence, H1 was supported. Second, SEM findings revealed that earnings [$\beta = .380$, $p < .01$] affect SE significantly and positively. Hence, H2 was supported. In short, as earnings increases the individual's SE increases. Third, SEM findings showed that SE affect job insecurity in an negative way significantly [$\beta = -.430$, $p < .01$]. Thus, H3 was accepted.

Lastly, with the bootstrapping method the mediator role of SE in the relationship between earnings and job insecurity is examined. Total effect value of earnings on job insecurity is significant ($\beta = -.307$, $p < .01$). Standardized direct effect value of earnings on job insecurity is $\beta = -.580$, $p < .01$ and standardized indirect effect value of earnings on job insecurity through SE is $\beta = -.160$, $p < .01$. Whether standardized indirect effect value is significant or not is checked with bootstrap 95% confidence interval. The fact that this range does not contain value zero ($\beta = -.160$, 95% CI[-.246,-.084] indicates that standardized indirect effect value is significant. Findings show that SE mediates the relationship between earnings and job insecurity. Hence H4 was supported.

The model shows satisfactory fit for most of the goodness of fit measures (χ^2 : 7,054; χ^2/df : 1,176; CFI: 0,99; RMSEA: 0,021 and SRMR: 0,019).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Flexible working arrangements, downsizing, restructuring, merging, privatization and subcontracting seen today with globalization, have made the problem of job insecurity more crucial because of affecting individuals well-being, physical and mental health, job

attitudes negatively. Environmental&organizational factors, individual characteristics, personality traits are factors that affect job insecurity. In perception of job insecurity, earnings (wage and household income) are related to organizational and individual factors, while SE (overall evaluation of self) is related to personality traits. This research focuses on the effect of these two factors on job insecurity based on the plasticity theory.

This research aimed to analyze the mediator role of SE in the relationship between earnings and job insecurity. Findings confirmed that SE mediates this relationship, variables correlate with each other. The first noteworthy finding revealed that the relationship between earnings and job insecurity is negative and significant; that is, as earnings increases, job insecurity decreases. Brockner et al. (1992), Kinnunen et al. (1999), Kristensen, Borg And Hannerz (2002), Bustillo and Pedraza (2010) and Scicchitano, Biagetti And Chirumbolo (2020) also found that individuals with low income were more influenced by job insecurity.

The second considerable showed that the relationship between earnings & SE is significant and positive. This positive relationship between earnings and SE has also been shown in previous researches (Rosenberg & Pearlin,1978; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge & Piccolo, 2008).That is, as earnings increases, SE level increases.

The research's findings also revealed a significant and negative relationship between job insecurity and SE. Orpen (1994), Kinnunen et al. (1999), Kinnunen et al. (2003) and Callea (2019) obtained similar results in their work. So, high level of SE decreases perception of job insecurity. Taking into account that this research was conducted with individuals employed in the service sector, highly competitive, demanding & stressful, job insecurity is an important problem for these individuals. It can be said that high self-esteem can help these individuals to deal with highly competitive and stressful environmental factors such as low wages and can affect the perception of job situations and the choice of dealing strategies.

As a result, it can be said that earnings primarily affect SE of individuals and SE affects perception of job insecurity. An increase or decrease in earnings causes a parallel change in SE, which adversely affects the perception of job insecurity. The higher the earnings, the higher the individual's SE and the lower job insecurity. In contrast, the lower earnings will negatively affect SE and individual's ability to deal with stress and

difficulties, leading to higher job insecurity. As assumed in plasticity theory low SE individuals are more sensible to environmental events. Therefore perception of job insecurity will be higher for them. High SE individuals are more adaptable to external circumstances and stressors, therefore perception of job insecurity will be lower for these individuals. This situation will also affect the individual's well-being, mental and physical health and work attitudes. Therefore, it can be said that having earning sources that positively affect SE is important for the perception of job insecurity.

LIMITATIONS

This research had some limitations. First, because of cost and time constraints, research was carried out in Kocaeli with the service sector. Therefore, generalization cannot be made to all employees. Second, using of quantitative method in the research limits an in-depth analysis. Despite these limitations, this research contributes to further research by ensuring a reliable and generalizable perspective about the mediator role of self-esteem. For more comprehensive findings, future research can be done using mixed research methods, different sectors and a large population.

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