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An Exploratory Study of the Costs of Job Insecurity in Nigeria

Tahira M. Probst^a & John O. Ekore^b

^a Washington State University Vancouver

^b Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria

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TAHIRA M. PROBST AND JOHN O. EKORE

An Exploratory Study of the Costs of Job Insecurity in Nigeria

Abstract: *The vast majority of research on job insecurity has been conducted within Western Europe and North America. The purpose of the current research was to determine whether previously documented effects of job insecurity on attitudes, behaviors, and health-related outcomes would be replicated in a Nigerian sample of mill workers. Using survey data, results indicated that job insecurity was related to lower levels of coworker, work, and supervisor satisfaction; greater turnover intentions; and worse safety attitudes (knowledge and motivation), fewer safety compliance behaviors, and increased injuries. These results are discussed within the context of the Nigerian economy and culture.*

A significant proportion of today's workforce is concerned about job loss. Analysis of data from a nationally representative sample in the United States (Burgard, Brand, and House 2006) found that approximately 25 percent of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or very likely to involuntarily lose their job in the coming year. Similar trends have been observed in European and other Western countries. However, little is known about the perception and consequences of job insecurity in non-Western countries.

Triandis (1994) estimated that more than 90 percent of psychological research has been generated in North America and Europe, areas that are home to less than 19 percent of the world's population. This holds true for job insecurity research as well. A brief keyword search of articles indexed in

Tahira M. Probst is an associate professor of psychology, Washington State University Vancouver; e-mail: probst@vancouver.wsu.edu. John O. Ekore is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; tel. 234-8023007369; e-mail: jekore@yahoo.com.

PsychInfo on job insecurity revealed 537 peer-reviewed journal articles since 1985, the year after the publication of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's (1984) seminal article on job insecurity. Similar to Triandis's (1994) finding, well over 90 percent of these studies were conducted by Western researchers—a mere thirty-nine articles were written by researchers in locations other than North America, Europe, Australia, or Israel. Only one article (Adebayo 2006) was conducted in Nigeria. Thus, the purpose of our study was to expand our knowledge of the consequences of job insecurity to a Nigerian context and to determine whether the effects of job insecurity that have been repeatedly found within Western samples can be replicated in a Nigerian sample.

Consequences of job insecurity

After more than 25 years of research, the body of evidence suggests that the effects of job insecurity are pervasive and overwhelmingly negative. Research has consistently shown that employees who perceive their jobs to be insecure report more negative job-related attitudes and lower levels of job satisfaction than secure employees (e.g., Büssing 1986; Davy, Kinicki, and Scheck 1991; Grunberg, Moore, and Greenberg 1998; Lim 1996; Roskies and Louis-Guerin 1990). Not surprisingly, such negative job attitudes have also been found to mediate the effects of job insecurity on work-related behaviors and outcomes such as turnover intentions (Davy, Kinicki, and Scheck 1998), work withdrawal behaviors (Probst 1998), and measures of performance (Abramis 1994; Brockner et al. 1992). In their recent meta-analysis, Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall (2002) aggregated the results of 72 studies published between 1980 and 1999 and found that job insecurity was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($-.41$) and positively related to turnover intentions ($.28$).

In addition to adverse effects on job attitudes and turnover intentions, recent studies also indicate that employee safety may be jeopardized as well. Probst and Brubaker (2001) found that employees who perceive their jobs to be insecure report lower levels of safety knowledge and reduced motivation to comply with safety policies. In turn, these variables were related to a decrease in safety compliance and an increase in job-related accidents and injuries. In a follow-up study, Probst (2002) found that individuals threatened with layoffs subsequently violated more safety policies than their secure counterparts. A comprehensive review of more than ninety studies conducted in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Africa (Quinlan 2005) found evidence of consistent adverse associations between precarious employment, job insecurity, and occupational safety outcomes such as injury rates, safety knowledge, and safety compliance. Thus, there appears to be growing consensus that job insecurity can negatively affect the safety of employees.

An examination of the economic and cultural context within Nigeria suggests that many of these findings would be replicated in a sample of Nigerian workers.

The Nigerian context

According to the Nigerian Labor Congress (2004), the primary concern among Nigerian workers is the lack of jobs and job security due to factory closures, noncreation of jobs by the Nigerian government, and stated government intentions to reduce the public work force by 40 percent. Although unemployment officially stands at only 6 percent, unofficial estimates put that figure nearer to 40 percent (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002). Further, 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and the GDP per capita is only \$1,500, compared to \$44,000 in the United States (*CIA World Fact Book* 2007). These economic statistics comport with recent analyses conducted by the International Labor Organization (2004).

According to the report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), countries around the world often have fundamentally different approaches with respect to the extent to which they emphasize or provide labor market security to their populace. In a recent analysis of economic security, the ILO categorized countries around the globe as “pragmatists,” “pacesetters,” “conventionals,” or “much-to-be-done countries.” “Pacesetting” countries are considered exemplary in their policies that seek to protect the economic security of their citizens. Such countries demonstrate a strong constitutional and policy commitment to social welfare, a category dominated by twenty-one European countries, Canada, Israel, and Japan. Although “pragmatist” countries such as the United States exhibit less governmental policy commitment to labor market security (e.g., the United States has not ratified certain ILO conventions related to employment security), employees in the United States nonetheless have a satisfactory level of economic security relative to global standards. Conventional countries (primarily former Eastern bloc nations and Russia) are those that have appropriate governmental policies in place, but economic security has failed to flourish due to governance challenges.

The final cluster of “much-to-be-done” countries contains most African and Middle Eastern countries. These countries generally neither attempt to formalize policies that would result in economic security for their citizens nor do they score well on economic indicators such as per capita GDP and unemployment. Nigeria falls squarely within the “much-to-be-done” category. In the ILO’s rankings of ninety countries, Nigeria was ranked eightieth in Income Security, seventy-seventh in Labor Market Security, eighty-second in Employment Security, seventy-eighth in Job Security, and sixty-eighth

in Work Security (see ILO 2004 for specific definitions of each economic security index).

Based on the ILO analysis, it is clear that the vast majority of research on job insecurity has been conducted in pacesetter or pragmatist countries where employees are typically granted by law a certain level of protection from arbitrary, unfair, or abrupt layoffs. However, very little research has been conducted on the consequences of job insecurity in much-to-be-done countries such as Nigeria that offer little protection against abusive employment practices or traditionally offer low levels of economic security to their citizens.

Despite this dearth of research and precisely because of Nigeria's status as a low economic security country, it is expected that the consequences of job insecurity would be adverse among Nigerian employees. First, there are limited opportunities in terms of job openings in a country with a high level of unemployment and a culture of downsizing as part of the global trend emanating from automation of production activities. Additionally, most workers at lower levels in manufacturing organizations are not amenable to changes in technological adaptation with regards to skills, knowledge, and ability. There are also cultural differences from many Western countries with respect to normative expectations of caring for extended family members. In Nigeria, cultural norms allow for extended family members, including friends who have employment difficulties, to depend on an individual's salary (Ekore and Onomerike 2004). This would potentially heighten the level of anxiety generated by job insecurity when the worker considers those who depend on his or her income. Finally, perceived job insecurity might also have adverse consequences among Nigerian workers due to age discrimination in employment. In Nigeria, older employees have much more difficulty finding alternative job opportunities. Most advertised positions usually specify an age limit, and it is typical for most organizations not to hire any applicant beyond age twenty-six at entry levels and forty-five for expert positions both in manufacturing and service organizations.

Thus, based on the empirical evidence reviewed earlier from Western researchers and this examination of the unique Nigerian context, we expected that:

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of job insecurity in Nigeria will be negatively related to (H1a) satisfaction with coworkers, (H1b) satisfaction with work, and (H1c) satisfaction with supervisors;

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of job insecurity will be related to higher turnover intentions; and

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of job insecurity will be related to more negative safety outcomes.

Empirical support for these hypotheses would strengthen existing theory on job insecurity by allowing us to generalize the theoretical properties related to the consequences of job insecurity to non-Western populations, specifically within the African context, where very little job insecurity research has been conducted.

Methods

Participants and procedure

The data for this study were collected from a sample of pulp and paper mill workers in Nigeria ($N = 94$). This setting was selected because the job security of Nigerian mill workers has been adversely affected in recent years for a variety of reasons. Specifically, Nigerian paper mills are often beset by problems related to lack of spare parts for equipment, logistic difficulties, and production delays due to frequent power failures resulting from the energy crisis in the country. In addition, high interest rates cause many factories to decommission aging equipment rather than retool or replace obsolete machinery resulting in the layoff of employees working on those lines.

Surveys questionnaires containing the measures described below were administered and collected in person. The surveys were provided in English, the official language of Nigeria. Participants were informed prior to the study that they would be invited to participate, that their participation was voluntary, and that their responses would remain confidential. However, participants were informed that management at their organization would receive a summary of findings based on aggregate data only.

The modal age of the respondents fell within the 25- to 29-year-old category, and employees had worked an average of 3.12 years at the mill. Three percent of the employees had obtained a college degree. The sample consisted of equal numbers of men and women with 41.1 percent of the sample reporting they were married. Finally, 7.4 percent of the respondents were managers.

Measures

Job attitudes. The nine-item coworker, supervisor, and work satisfaction subscales of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Smith, Kendall, and Hulin 1969) were used to assess job attitudes. Respondents indicated using a three-point (yes, question mark, no) response scale the extent to which each item described their job. Agreement with positively worded items was scored 3;

question marks responses were scored 1; and agreement with negatively worded items was scored 0. Although unusual, this scoring procedure has been found to yield equivalent reliability, stability, and validity of the JDI subscales across two forms of the JDI (Likert-type vs. *yes-no-?* scaling; Johnson, Smith, and Tucker, 1982) and was further validated by the method Hanisch (1992) using polychotomous item response theory. The scale alphas were .84 (coworker satisfaction), .84 (supervisor satisfaction), and .85 (work satisfaction).

Perceptions of job insecurity. The Job Security Index (Probst 2003) was used to measure employees' cognitive appraisal of the future of their job with respect to the perceived level of stability and continuance of their employment. As with the JDI, respondents indicated on a three-point scale (yes, question mark, no) the extent to which nine items described their future employment with their organization (e.g., "my job is almost guaranteed"). Responses were scored using the Hanisch (1992) recommendations described above such that higher numbers reflect more job insecurity. The Cronbach's alpha was .84.

Turnover intentions. Turnover intentions were measured using three items from the Job Withdrawal scale developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991). These items assess respondents' reported desirability and likelihood of quitting using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Responses were scored such that higher numbers reflect greater intentions to quit. The scale reliability was .78.

Safety outcomes. Neal, Griffin, and Hart's (2000) safety scales were used to assess knowledge about safety practices and procedures (four items; $\alpha = .92$), safety motivation (four items; $\alpha = .94$), and safety compliance (four items; $\alpha = .94$). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and were scored such that higher numbers reflect more positive safety attitudes and behaviors.

Workplace injuries were assessed by totaling the number of injuries workers indicated they had experienced as a result of their job within the past year. The list of injuries was developed in consultation with the safety officials at the mill to include the most common injuries experienced by employees: shoulder or neck problems, back injuries, cuts or puncture wounds, bumps and bruises, slips or falls, repetitive motion injuries, skin or lung problems, and hearing problems. Thus, the injury variable could range from 0 to 8.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job insecurity	93	.00	3.00	1.57	.45								
2. Coworker satisfaction	93	.00	3.00	1.65	.64	-.53**							
3. Supervisor satisfaction	93	.00	3.00	1.52	.67	-.38**	.68**						
4. Work satisfaction	93	.00	3.00	1.22	.88	-.55**	.40**	.34**					
5. Turnover intentions	92	1.00	5.00	3.36	1.02	.45**	-.35**	-.25*	-.49**				
6. Safety knowledge	92	1.00	7.00	4.58	1.33	-.24*	.18	.17	.37**	-.31**			
7. Safety motivation	92	1.00	7.00	4.73	1.30	-.27**	.27**	.25*	.36**	-.25*	.72**		
8. Safety compliance	92	1.00	7.00	4.69	1.32	-.27**	.22*	.21*	.35**	-.29**	.66**	.76**	
9. Workplace injuries	34	.00	7.00	2.71	2.25	.47**	-.25	-.17	-.19	.00	-.22	-.05	.07

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all the variables measured in the study. Replicating previous research, job insecurity was negatively related to job attitudes, safety attitudes, and safety compliance, and positively related to turnover and injuries.

Consequences of job insecurity in Nigeria

In order to reduce Type I error, a multivariate GLM (general linear modeling) analysis was first conducted to determine if job insecurity was significantly related to the eight outcome variables. This was significant, $F(8, 24) = 3.92$, $p < .005$. However, a multivariate analysis only utilizes data from individuals with complete data on all the variables. Since our questionnaires were not all complete, there was a listwise deletion in our analysis and the effective sample size was reduced to 33 respondents. Therefore, in order to utilize as much of the data as possible, separate univariate analyses controlling for age, gender, education, and organizational tenure were next conducted to interpret the relationships between job insecurity and each outcome.

As can be seen in Table 2, after controlling for the demographic characteristics, job insecurity was related to negative outcomes across the board. Specifically, job insecurity was related to lower levels of coworker satisfaction ($\beta = -.51$), lower supervisor satisfaction ($\beta = -.34$), and lower work satisfaction ($\beta = -.56$). Job insecurity was also related to greater turnover intentions ($\beta = .42$). Finally, job insecurity was related to a host of adverse safety outcomes: less safety knowledge ($\beta = -.22$), lower safety motivation ($\beta = -.29$), reduced safety compliance ($\beta = -.36$), and higher numbers of workplace injuries ($\beta = .39$). Thus, it appears that all three hypotheses found empirical support and that job insecurity accounts for significant incremental variance explained in these outcomes ranging from 5 percent to 30 percent.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to extend previous empirical work on the consequences of job insecurity to the Nigerian context. Although a large body of research has demonstrated the negative effects of job insecurity on employee attitudes, behaviors, and health-related outcomes, virtually all of that research had been conducted in Western countries. Because studies have shown that replication in non-Western cultures cannot be taken for granted

Table 2
Regression results of job insecurity on outcomes in Nigeria

Variable	Dependent variables									
	Coworker satisfaction	Supervisor satisfaction	Work satisfaction	Turnover intentions	Safety knowledge	Safety motivation	Safety compliance	Workplace injuries		
Step 1										
Age	.04	.04	.25	-.31*	.24	.26	.28	.00		
Education	-.06	.05	.18	.11	.29*	.08	.10	-.21		
Tenure	.26	.25	.00	.02	.01	.00	-.09	-.36		
Gender	.14	-.01	.18	-.36**	-.04	-.14	-.03	-.14		
ΔR^2	.08	.09	.11	.14	.19	.13	.09	.20		
ΔF	1.69	1.86	2.33	2.97*	4.44**	2.77*	1.76	1.60		
Step 2										
Job insecurity	-.51**	.34**	.56**	-.42**	.22*	.29**	.36**	-.39*		
ΔR^2	.25	.11	.30	.17	.05	.08	.13	.13		
ΔF	27.86**	10.25**	37.08**	18.10**	4.64*	7.20**	11.88**	4.67*		

$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

(Amir and Sharon 1987), it was important to independently replicate these findings in Nigeria. Given factory closures, low flexibility of workers in terms of skills and knowledge, age discrimination in employment, noncreation of jobs, continuous layoff policies, and restructuring efforts to cut cost of operations and production, it was argued that the experience of job insecurity would result in adverse consequences for Nigerian employees. And, indeed, the current data showed that job insecurity among Nigerian employees was in fact related to more negative job attitudes (lower levels of coworker, work, and supervisor satisfaction), greater turnover intentions, and worsened safety outcomes (e.g., lower safety knowledge, motivation, and compliance, and more workplace injuries).

As noted earlier, one possible explanation for this may be due to the Nigerian workers' responsibility to other extended family members who depend on their income. Ekore and Onomerike (2004) found that cultural norms dictate that primary breadwinners in Nigeria are expected to support both nuclear and extended family members as well as close friends. Bearing responsibility for the financial well-being of such a large network of individuals may cause great strain when one's job and source of income is perceived to be at risk.

Another factor explaining our results may be found in the World Bank and ILO analyses of global economic indices that have consistently identified Nigeria as one of the lowest on the rungs of the socioeconomic ladder with rates of unemployment reaching as high as 40 percent. Loss of one's job in Nigeria results in immediate cessation of income, few chances of reemployment in the near future, and no government unemployment assistance to tide one over in the interim. Thus, given the dire economic conditions that prevail in Nigeria coupled with the responsibility of caring for large numbers of family and friends, it is perhaps not surprising that job insecurity would be related to adverse consequences among workers in Nigeria.

Although the current results are intriguing, there are several limitations to our study that should be addressed in future research. First, due to the cross-sectional survey method used to gather data, common method bias could account for a proportion of the degree of relationship observed among the variables. Second, although English is the official language of Nigeria, it is unclear what proportion of respondents was fluent in English or would consider English their first language. Moreover, our sample was drawn exclusively from the pulp and paper industry and consisted of traditional blue-collar workers. As a result, our initial conclusions can only be generalized to this particular industry.

Future job insecurity research should include individuals from other industry sectors where jobs are precarious and include professional white-collar workers whose jobs are also at risk. Future work within Nigeria might also

benefit from expanded contextual information. For example, it would be interesting to assess the number of dependents and relatives that the employee is financially responsible for and empirically assess the extent to which this accounts for differing reactions to job insecurity. Similarly, measures of cultural values could be included in order to determine the extent to which different reactions to job insecurity can be explained by cultural versus economic differences.

Finally, the results of this study also suggest that it would be worthwhile to expand job insecurity research to other “much-to-be-done” countries, where little research has been conducted. It is perhaps not surprising that most of the research to date has been conducted in pacesetter and pragmatist countries, given that by definition these countries have purposefully developed policies to address issues related to employment security. Perhaps these governmental differences in attitudes (and presumably research funding) trickle down to the level of individual researchers and may account for greater corresponding attention paid to this issue by researchers in these countries. Nonetheless, our results suggest that the consequences of job insecurity may be worse in the “much-to-be-done” countries, where the issue of employment security attracts little governmental attention.

In conclusion, while the bulk of job insecurity research indicates that there are multiple negative attitudinal, behavioral, and health-related consequences, the vast majority of such research has been conducted in Western countries. Our research adds to that growing literature by demonstrating that these negative effects are replicated in an African sample. Given the globalization of today’s economy and our very limited understanding of the phenomenon of job insecurity in nonindustrialized nations, it is increasingly important to acquire more knowledge about job insecurity in a variety of international contexts. The current results show that the phenomenon of job insecurity and its resulting consequences are very similar to what has been found in prior Western research despite the very different economic contexts within which the phenomenon occurs.

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