

Job Insecurity and Affective Commitment in Seasonal Versus Permanent Workers

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to compare seasonal with permanent workers in terms of job insecurity and affective commitment. We also investigate whether job insecurity mediates the relationship between contract type and affective commitment. Surveys from 161 seasonal and 107 permanent workers in the tourism sector in Turkey were analyzed using MANOVA and mediated regression analysis. The results demonstrate that seasonal workers perceive higher job insecurity compared to permanent workers. They are also affectively less committed to their organizations than permanent workers. Furthermore, job insecurity does not mediate the relationship between contract type and affective commitment. Most of the existing empirical research has focused on temporary and fixed-term workers. We examine seasonal workers, a category that is rarely studied.

Keywords: Seasonal work, job insecurity, affective commitment, dual labor market theory.

1. Introduction

Job insecurity has attracted considerable attention in the literature because of the volatile economic conditions and its implications in terms of organizational attitudes and well-being (Schreurs *et al.*, 2010). In recent years, researchers have shown particular interest in job insecurity perceptions of individuals with non-standard work arrangements including temporary work and fixed-term employment (De Witte and Näswall, 2003; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2009). Despite the progress in empirical research on non-standard work arrangements and job insecurity, there still appear to be inconclusive and inconsistent results (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2005; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). In addition, seasonal work, an aspect of non-standard work arrangements, has not been studied. Therefore, we will examine seasonal work as part of increased labor market segmentation. Specifically, we will address the following questions: Do seasonal workers perceive higher job insecurity than permanent workers? Are seasonal workers less committed affectively to their organizations than permanent workers?

2. Conceptual Framework

Dual labor market theory can be used as a basic framework to obtain a better understanding of seasonal work. Rooted in Doeringer and Piore's (1971) earlier work, dual labor market theory argues that the labor market is divided into primary and secondary markets.

The primary labor market is characterized by jobs with high wages, stable employment, good working conditions, and good promotion possibilities. On the other hand, the secondary market is characterized by jobs with low wages, unstable employment, poor working conditions, and limited possibilities for promotion (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Primary markets therefore position as oppositional to the secondary markets (Piore, 1978). Considering the characteristics of secondary markets, one could state that non-standard work arrangements rest on the ideas of dual labor market theory (Hudson, 2007). Non-standard work arrangements tend to have lower wages and poorer working conditions than permanent work (Kalleberg, 2003; Hudson, 2007). One of the typical examples of non-standard work arrangements is seasonal work. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), seasonal worker is described as follows (ILO, 1993):

“Workers in seasonal employment are workers who hold implicit or explicit contracts of employment where the timing and duration of the contract is significantly influenced by seasonal factors such as the climatic cycle, public holidays and/or agricultural harvests.”

In other words, seasonal work is related to specific periods of the year and is mainly seen in specific sectors, including agriculture (harvest and planting seasons) (Fourie, 2008; Grenon and Chun, 1997), tourism (holiday seasons) (Higham and Hinch, 2002), forestry (Lloyd, 2012; Grenon and Chun, 1997), fishery (sea food seasons) (Grenon and Chun, 1997; Lloyd, 2012), and retail (Christmas period) (Lloyd, 2012). Employers therefore need hiring more workers in order to deal with the peaking demands of these specific periods (Kalleberg, 2000). However, seasonal workers are not provided the benefits (e.g. health insurance, medical pensions) and good working conditions (e.g. job safety, training opportunities) like their permanent counterparts across the world (Tucker, 2002). In addition to different treatments in benefits and working conditions, one can also assume that one of the significant differences between the seasonal and permanent workers occurs in job insecurity. A review of the literature shows that most empirical and theoretical studies have focused on job insecurity in terms of temporary workers (e.g. De Witte and Näswall, 2003; De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). This study addresses the research gap by examining job insecurity with a specific focus on seasonal work that is rarely studied.

2.1. Job Insecurity of Seasonal Versus Permanent Workers

Even though job insecurity has been defined by various authors in different ways (De Witte, 1999; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002), one basic conception lies at the core of all definitions: Job insecurity is a subjective perception that is only experienced directly by the person (Klandermans and Van Vuuren, 1999; Hesselink and Van Vuuren, 1999; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). Job insecurity is therefore defined as an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). However, several authors have also treated it as an objective phenomenon (e.g. Büssing, 1999; Ferrie *et al.*, 1998) that is experienced by all the individuals who are exposed to the same objective conditions including high levels of unemployment, downsizing organizations (Büssing, 1999), and secondary labor markets. In this study, we will focus not only on subjective job insecurity as an individual perception, but also on objective job insecurity in terms of secondary markets and seasonal work. Based on the basic ideas of dual labor market theory (Doeringer and Piore, 1971), objective job insecurity is a significant characteristic of secondary labor markets. Similarly, Jacobson and Hartley (1991) suggest that secondary labor market workers including ethnic minorities, older workers, handicapped workers, and seasonal workers can be concerned about job insecurity. We therefore suppose that seasonal workers perceive higher levels of job insecurity than permanent employees.

H1: Seasonal workers perceive higher levels of job insecurity than permanent workers.

2.2. Organizational Commitment of Seasonal Versus Permanent Workers

The vast majority of empirical studies have focused on investigating well-being and organizational attitudes of permanent workers (Connelly and Gallagher, 2004). A review of the literature demonstrates that a great deal of attention has been given to the organizational attitudes of individuals in non-standard work arrangements, depending on their increasing use. While most studies have researched temporary workers (e.g. De Witte and Näswall, 2003; De Cuyper and De Witte, 2008; De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006; De Cuyper, *et al.*, 2008), empirical studies on seasonal workers and their attitudes are very rare (Wilkin, 2012).

Considering the fact that seasonal workers play an important role in dealing with the peaking demands of specific periods (Kalleberg, 2000), one can assume that positive organizational attitudes of seasonal workers are as crucial for their organizations as those of the permanent workers. One of the specific organizational attitudes in this regard is organizational commitment that is generally defined as a psychological link between the employee and his or her organization (Allen and Meyer, 1996). The magnitude of organizational commitment is owing to its impact on job performance, turnover intentions, and absenteeism (Mowday *et al.*, 1982). According to Meyer and Allen's (1991) widely accepted conceptualization, organizational commitment is composed of three components (affective, continuance, and normative commitment). Affective commitment refers to the workers' emotional attachments to their organizations, and continuance commitment refers to workers' perceptions of costs of leaving their organizations (Allen and Meyer, 1996). Normative commitment refers to workers' feelings of moral obligation to remain with their organizations (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Most empirical studies have found that affective commitment has the strongest relations with positive work-related outcomes (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). This study therefore focuses on affective commitment of seasonal versus permanent workers.

Doeringer and Piore (1971) argue that workers in the secondary labor market, which is characterized with non-standard working arrangements (Hudson, 2007), tend to report more negative organizational attitudes including higher levels of turnover, absenteeism, and counter-productive behaviors. We therefore suppose that seasonal workers are affectively less committed to their organizations than permanent workers.

H2: Seasonal workers are affectively less committed to their organizations than permanent workers.

2.3. Job Insecurity: A Mediation Approach

According to dual labor market theory, job insecurity is one of the outstanding characteristics of secondary labor markets. As seasonal workers are a typical category of workers belonging to the secondary labor market, they face job insecurity. In addition, seasonal workers can be easily replaced when they leave their organizations (Higham and Hinch, 2002). This might also contribute to job insecurity perceptions among seasonal workers. Since seasonal workers are not considered to be part of the category of core workers, one could expect that it might be harder for them to attach emotionally to the organization. Also perceived job insecurity can cause workers to doubt about their future in the current organization, and can reduce workers' involvement in their organizations in terms of affective commitment, as suggested by the meta-analysis of Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall (2002). Thus, we can expect a mediating role of job insecurity in the relationship between contract type and affective organizational commitment.

H3: Perceived job insecurity mediates the relationship between contract type and affective commitment.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted in the tourism sector, one of the typical examples of seasonal work. The data was collected from seasonal and permanent workers who are working in five stars hotels of the Muğla Region in Turkey. The Muğla Region is one of the most popular summer destinations in Turkey, and the amount of tourists is considerable during summertime. Thus, hotels employ an increasing amount of seasonal workers in this period. According to figures from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there are 42 five-star hotels in this region. A total of 870 questionnaires were distributed to seasonal and permanent workers. 161 seasonal and 107 permanent workers responded; with a response rate of 31 % from 26 five-star hotels. Males comprised 74 % of the sample. The average age of participants was 29.65 years old ($SD=7.24$), ranging from 18 to 60 years, with an average work experience of 8.5 years ($SD=6$), ranging from 2 to 27 years, and an organizational tenure of 4.83 years ($SD=4.96$), ranging from 1 to 21 years. 21.6% of the participants had a bachelors degree, 22% had college education, 39.6% were high school graduates, and 16.8% were primary school graduates.

3.2. Measures

Control Variables

Gender (0=male, 1=female), age, and organizational tenure were included in all analyses as control variables.

Contract Type

One categorical dummy variable was created, including seasonal work (1) with permanent workers (0) as the comparison group (Aiken and West, 1991).

Perceived Job Insecurity

Perceived job insecurity was measured using the 4-item scale of De Witte (2000), validated in the recent study of Vander Elst, De Witte and De Cuyper (submitted). A sample item is “I feel insecure about the future of my job”. The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the present study was .78. The items were scored on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was measured using the 6-item scale of Meyer *et al.* (1993). Items were scored on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A sample item is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”. The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the present study was .93.

The original job insecurity and affective commitment scales were developed in English. Thus, these scales were translated into Turkish. Subsequently, the translated scales were back translated into English by the authors using established techniques (Brislin, 1986) and adjusted again in the Turkish version.

The respondents’ demographic data, such as gender, age, education level, and years of work experience (tenure) were also collected.

3.3. Results

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1-Gender	-	-	-						
2-Age	29.65	7.24	-.113	-					
3- Organizational Tenure	4.81	4.97	-.108	.584**	-				
4-Type of Contract	-	-	.081	-.461**	-.268**	-			
5-Job Insecurity	3.24	1.32	.013	-.003	-.022	-.208**	-		
6-Affective Commitment	4.09	1.41	-.028	.072	.095	-.189**	-.311**	-	

N=268 *p<.05, **p<.01, Gender; 0=Male, 1=Female, 0=Permanent, 1=Seasonal

In order to test the hypothesized differences (H1 and H2), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with job insecurity and affective organizational commitment as dependent variables. Prior to conducting MANOVA, the assumptions underlying MANOVA were checked. In order to test the homogeneity of covariances, Box’s M tests were performed. The results demonstrated that the assumption of homogeneity of covariances was not violated (p= .078). Wilks’ Lambda statistics also showed that the MANOVA was significant (p= .000). Thus, the theoretical assumptions underlying MANOVA were met.

H1 stated that seasonal workers perceive higher levels of job insecurity than permanent workers. The results showed that there was a significant overall difference between seasonal and permanent workers in job insecurity (Multivariate F (df=2,265) = 5.50, p<. 05). As seen in the Table 2, seasonal workers (M=4.10, SD=1.33, p<.05) significantly perceived higher levels of job insecurity than permanent workers (M=3.24, SD=1.30, p < .05), supporting H1.

Table 2: Job insecurity and affective organizational commitment of seasonal versus permanent workers

<i>Contract Type</i>			
	Seasonal	Permanent	Multivariate F
Job Insecurity	4.10	3.24	5.50*
Aff. Org. Comm.	3.90	4.47	5.50*

* $p < .05$

H2 stated that seasonal workers are less committed affectively to their organizations than permanent workers. The results showed that there was a significant overall difference between seasonal and permanent workers in affective commitment (Multivariate F (df=2,265)/=5.50, $p < .05$). As seen in Table 1, seasonal workers (M=3.90, SD=1.38, $p < .05$) were less committed affectively to their organizations than permanent workers (M=4.47, SD=1.40, $p < .05$), supporting H2.

Hypothesis 3, suggesting a mediation of job insecurity in the relationship between contract type and affective commitment was tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step procedure. The first condition stated by Baron and Kenny (1986) is that the independent variable is a significant predictor of the mediator. As shown in Table 3, we found a significant negative relationship between contract type and job insecurity (B= -.417, $p < .01$). The second condition proposes that the independent variable is a significant predictor of the outcome variable. The results demonstrated that contract type was negatively related to affective commitment (B=-.593, $p < .01$). Finally, the third condition states that the explanatory power of the independent variable as predictor of the outcome variable is reduced (or lost) when controlling for the mediator. The results in Table 3 show that when we regressed affective commitment on both contract type and job insecurity simultaneously, the effect of contract type continued to be significant (B=.599, $p < .01$), rejecting H3.

Table 3: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: mediation of the relation between type of contract and affective organizational commitment by job insecurity

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Job Insecurity</i>	<i>Affective Org. Commitment</i>
<i>Step 1</i>		
<i>Control Variables</i>		
<i>Gender</i>	.029	-.045
<i>Age</i>	.003	.005
<i>Organizational Tenure</i>	-.001	.002
ΔR^2	.010	.010
<i>Step 2</i>		
<i>Direct Effect</i>		
<i>Contract Type</i>	-.417**	-.593**
ΔR^2	.030**	.031**
<i>Step 3</i>		
<i>Mediation Effect</i>		
<i>Contract Type</i>		-.599**
<i>Job Insecurity</i>		-.332***
ΔR^2		.096***

N=268 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$,

4. Discussion

This study aims to contribute to the job insecurity literature by investigating seasonal versus permanent workers' job insecurity perceptions. In line with the ideas of dual labor market theory, seasonal workers are often seen as a part of the secondary labor market, which is characterized by jobs with low wages, unstable employment, poor working conditions, and lack of security. We therefore hypothesized that seasonal workers perceive higher levels of job insecurity than permanent workers.

Consistent with the previous empirical research on temporary work (also belonging to the secondary labor market), we found a significant difference between the perceptions of seasonal and permanent workers in terms of job insecurity. This result can be explained by the contract of seasonal workers. Since seasonal workers are employed for specific periods of the year, one can assume that they feel more insecure about their job than permanent workers.

This study investigated the affective commitment of seasonal versus permanent workers. On the basis of dual labor market theory, we argued that secondary labor market workers have higher levels of turnover intention, absenteeism, and counterproductive behaviors (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). We therefore hypothesized that seasonal workers are less committed affectively to their organizations than permanent workers. Previous empirical studies on organizational commitment of temporary workers found inconsistent results. For instance, several authors found that permanent workers are less committed affectively to their organizations compared with temporary workers (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2005). On the other hand, several authors found no significant differences according to contract type (De Witte and Näswall, 2003). We found that seasonal workers are less committed affectively to their organizations in this study. Considering the fact that seasonal workers do not receive the same kind of benefits (e.g. health insurance, medical pensions) and good working conditions (e.g. job safety, training opportunities) as permanent workers, one can argue that they are not strongly embraced as members of the organization. This could result in lower involvement and lower emotional attachment to the organization among seasonal workers. Moreover, seasonal workers usually work from three to six months according to fluctuations in demand. As a consequence, one can argue that they do not have enough time to get familiar with the employing organization, to internalize its values, and to demonstrate a strong desire to stay.

This study also examined the mediating effect of job insecurity in the relationship between contract type and affective commitment. Contrary to expectations, we did not find a mediating effect in the present study. This result first of all suggests that contract type might be one of the most important indicators of affective commitment among seasonal workers. Taking into account the employment duration of seasonal workers and the lower levels of benefits they receive (in line with dual labor market theory), this finding seems reasonable. Second, the finding that job insecurity did not mediate the relationship between contract type and affective commitment suggests that this relationship is explained by other variables, not analyzed in this study, as suggested in the literature review of De Cuyper and colleagues (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). Future research could benefit from testing the role of those mediators.

The findings of the present study have a few limitations. Self-reported cross-sectional data is one limitation. As a follow-up to the present study, it might be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal survey study, in order to test for causality. Moreover, the present study was conducted in Turkey. The results therefore can not be readily generalized to other countries.

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