

# Job Insecurity and Burnout: The Moderating Role of Employability

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## Abstract

It seems that feelings of job insecurity are an important problem in the global context. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between employability, job insecurity and burnout of employees. Furthermore, the buffering effect of employability in the relationship between job insecurity and burnout was also investigated. Hypotheses were tested on 154 white collar employees who are working for a newly privatized industrial enterprise in Turkey. A positive relationship was confirmed between job insecurity and burnout. Results also supported that there is a moderating role of employability between job insecurity and burnout. Accordingly, it was observed that as the employees' perceptions of employability increases, they were less affected by burnout. These results suggest that employability is an important resource in coping with the negative outcomes of job insecurity after the privatization. The results have implications for practitioners and future research.

**Keywords:** job insecurity, employability, burnout, newly privatized company, contemporary labor market

## 1. Introduction

Today, the intensity of the competition between enterprises is increasing. Therefore, the structures of the industrial companies also have to change in order to compete in these changing circumstances and uncertainty (Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990; DeWitt, 1993). With those changes, manufacturing businesses are replaced by service businesses, flexible job contracts become popular, also enterprises use of various restructuring methods, such as downsizing, mergers & acquisitions and being privatized, so the concept of job insecurity which becomes a bigger problem that workers face is also gaining more importance than ever (Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall, 2002; Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, & Nätti., 2005; Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001).

Klandermans & Van Vuuren (1999) suggested that job insecurity is not merely a social phenomenon, and can be felt at different levels according to individuals and enterprises. De Witte (2005) examined the causes that affect the perception of job insecurity under three factors; unemployment rates at national or regional levels, macro variables such as changes in the structure of the organization and individual variables including features such as age, seniority, etc. that affects an individual's position at the corporation they work for; and personality traits.

Factors that are leading to job insecurity have individual, organizational and societal qualifications. The outcomes of insecurity at the same time affect the individuals, organizations and hence affect the community. According to the results of the past studies, it was observed that insecurity affects the employees' attitudes such as decrease in job satisfaction, weakening of the organizational commitment (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989; Davy, Kinicki & Scheck, 1997) and work related behaviors such as decline of job performance (Rosenblatt, Talmud & Ruvio, 1999). It also negatively affects individual's physical and psychological health by disturbing the state of well-being and increasing the level of stress (Sverke et al., 2002).

One of the major results for individuals of job insecurity is the burnout syndrome (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001; Bosman, Rothmann & Buitendach, 2005). Burnout arises when employees cannot cope with the working conditions and become resistless to the situation (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Nowadays, employees face major difficulties when enterprises make big changes like; downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and privatizations and also have to cope with the flexible employment contracts. Furthermore with the changes in traditional notion of career approach, career management is not the responsibility of the organizations anymore, but workers take the responsibility for managing their own careers. Under those circumstances, the way is paved for them to have burnout syndrome (Mauno et al., 2005; Burke & Greenglass, 2001; Rajan, 1997).

There are so many factors that lead to burnout such as uncertainty due to the job structure and the role ambiguity, structural characteristics of the organization, personality traits and demographic variables (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). In the studies carried out, it was observed that burnout is associated with low job satisfaction, (Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail, & Baker, 2009). There is an increase in employees' absence and intention to leave hence a decrease in their job performance (Parker & Kulik, 1995). Burnout also threatens employees' physical and psychological health (Maslach et al., 2001).

New psychological contracts of employments have arisen in order to protect both the employees and the employers from the burnout which happens due high job insecurity (Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999). The expectations of employees shift from working in an enterprise for long years, to work in a company that allows employees to improve their knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, thereby increasing their individual employability in an environment (Martin, Staines & Pate, 1998; Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999). Therefore, employers have also become obliged to provide employees with these opportunities and make them employable to maintain employee commitment (Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe, 2005).

With these changing conditions of psychological contracts, employers and employees give up on the long term employment concept and tend to the types of flexible employment. Thus, the traditional career management is replaced by the new career approach which is explored by reference to changing different jobs and/or organizations. Within the frame of this approach, what is expected from employees is that they should be equipped with individual skills to ensure that they can easily find a job in internal and external labor markets when necessary.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Job Insecurity and Burnout

Job insecurity is the threat perceived by the employee on the continuity of his or her current job (De Witte, 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). As it is understood from this definition, job insecurity is a completely different notion from the loss of the job. In case of job loss, the individual tries to deal with the loss and problems originating from it. In case of job insecurity, even the individual doesn't experience a job loss (Sverke et al., 2002) but thinking upon becoming unemployed is as traumatic as getting divorced or death. This may help to understand the potential negative effects this uncertainty can cause in an individual's life (De Witte, 1999; Spera, Buhrfeind & Pennebaker, 1994).

Job insecurity is analysed under two dimensions in the literature as objective and subjective job insecurity (Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999). Individuals with different perceptions of job insecurity due to their self-sufficiency levels under similar working conditions and in similar occupations, having pessimistic or optimistic personality traits etc. can be explained as having subjective job insecurity (Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999). While having in mind that the important thing is the insecurity that employees feel rather than the reality (Kinnunen, Makikangas, Mauno, Siponen & Natti, 2011), this study is on this subjective job insecurity concept.

Burnout, however, is defined by the Maslach & Jackson (1981) as individuals' physical and psychological long term exhaustions, feeling desperate and the negative attitudes against the others. According to Maslach & Jackson (1981) people firstly experience emotional exhaustion due to over work-load, then their work relationships starts to be affected by that burnout and break down phase towards other people begins. When they realize their desensitization, they get the feeling as if they were not sufficient for their job and they label themselves as unsuccessful.

In studies carried out by Burgard, Kalousova & Seefeldt, (2012), it was seen that job insecurity causes stress and increases the tendency towards anxiety and depression among employees. Also De Witte (1999) suggested that job insecurity is the most important factor that causes stress depending on the work load. Considering that chronic stress connected with the work can cause burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995) and uncertainty of job insecurity is a stress factor, and it may be suggested that job insecurity causes stress. In relevant studies, it was also determined that the burnout level of the employees bearing perception of job insecurity is meaningfully higher than other employees (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001; Westman, Etzion, & Danon, 2001; Bosman et al. 2005; De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno & Witte, 2012). In this respect, one of the hypotheses of the research is as follows:

**H1:** *Job insecurity is positively related to burnout.*

### 2.2 Employability and Burnout

Employability means an individual's qualifications which allow him or her to gain and remain in employment through-out his or her work life (Brown, Hesketh, Williams, 2003). From the employees' perspective, employability depends on employees' knowledge, skills, attitudes and their ability to use them and the way they present them to employers (Hillage & Polard, 1998).

Employability concept is entered to the literature in 1950s and in those times the concept was analyzed through a variety of parameters, such as unemployment rate, and interventions the government should implement on labor market (Forrier & Sels, 2003). Today, however, with the changes in the psychological contract and the career management conception, a paradigm shift has occurred. As a result, the responsibility of self-development and necessary qualifications to allow an individual to find a job, burden the individual (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Brown et al., 2002).

Perceived employability implies an individual's perception of his or her possibility of acquiring a new employment (Berntson, Sverke & Marklund, 2006). Employees' attitudes and behaviors will be shaped according to their perceptions of job insecurity rather than the objective situation. For this reason the concept was discussed in individual terms in this research.

It is found that perceived employability arises as a feeling in employees' minds that they have the control over their career, and thus, increases their career satisfaction, therefore it has a positive effect on their well-being and state of health (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, Witte Alarco, 2008; Berntson, 2008; Nauta, Vianen, Heijden, Dam & Willemsen, 2009). It was observed that employees who perceive themselves as employable can fight against the organizational and peripheral difficulties they may encounter better than compared to those who perceive themselves less employable (De Cuyper et al., 2008). Earlier studies suggest that perceived employability decreases the burnout level of employees (Berntson, Näswall & Sverke, 2010; De Cuyper et al., 2012). In this context, it is conceived that employability may have an effect on burnout and one of the hypothesis reads as follows:

**H2:** *Employability is negatively related to burnout.*

### 2.3. The Moderating Role of Employability

With the decline of manufacturing businesses and the rise of service businesses as a result of globalization and technological advances, the structure of enterprises has started to change which in return has brought the changes in working conditions and expectations from the employees. Thereby the concept of employability has become more important than ever. Under these circumstances, it is at stake that individuals encounter job insecurity. Not to be affected by negative results such as burnout etc. due to this uncertainty, a necessity arose that individuals must be employable (De Cuyper et al., 2012).

Mohr (2000) found that employability has a decreasing effect on anxiety disorder, one of the negative results caused by job insecurity. Kalyal, Berntson, Baraldi, Naswall & Sverke (2010) stated that employability moderates the relationship between job insecurity and commitment to change. In the studies that analyze the role of employability in the job insecurity relationship with burnout, it is observed that in the group of employees perceiving themselves as employable, the burnout level is lower than those who perceive themselves as less employable (Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiró & De Witte, 2009; Berntson et al., 2010).

Accordingly, on the basis of support in the literature, directed to the existing relationships between job insecurity and employability and between job insecurity and burnout, it can be suggested that perceived employability may be a potential moderator role to cope with burnout. In this context, the purpose of this study is to analyze whether employability has a moderating role in the effect of job insecurity on burnout. In this respect, our primary hypothesis of the research is as follows:

**H3:** *Perceived employability moderates the relationship between job insecurity and burnout.*

## 3. Method

We used a cross-sectional research design in this study and we aimed to contribute to literature by analyzing the moderating effect of employability on job insecurity and burnout relationship in a newly privatized big industrial company.

### 3.1. Data Collection and Participants

Especially, perceived job insecurity is an important problem that workers feel in newly privatized companies in developing countries. Because of this reason for testing hypotheses, data were selected and collected among white-collar workers from one of the post privatized company via online self-report questionnaire in Turkey. Also this firm was in Turkey's top 500 Industrial Enterprises List 2013. 500 questionnaires were sent, 154 were returned. Despite of anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to encourage of the respondent's candidness, response rate comparatively was low. Response rate was approximately 30%. The participants consisted of 18% (29) women- 82% (125) men, and the mean of age was 36.6. In participants, no one was affiliated to any labour union. The majority of the respondents held a bachelor degree (73.2%). 26.8 held a master degree. Respondents' organizational tenure was, on average, 9.25 and all of worked fulltime.

### 3.2. Measures

In this research, previously applied, validated scales were used to measure. All variables, except for the control variables, were measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5.

**Employability** was measured with five item scale (Berntson and Marklund, 2007). This scale assessed respondents' perceived skills, experience, network, personal traits, and knowledge of the labour market (e.g., "My competence is sought-after in the labour market."). High score in this scale indicate high level of perceived employability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was .87.

**Job Insecurity**, was measured with four item scale developed by De Witte (in Schreurs, van Emmerik et.al., 2010). This scale assessed respondents' perceived job insecurity of the labour market (e.g., "There is a risk that I will lose my present job in the near future."). High score in this scale indicate high level of job insecurity. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale was .78.

**Burnout** was measured with twenty-two item Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et.al, 1981). Respondents indicated how often they experienced each item on five point Likert scale (1=never; 5= always). High score in this scale indicate high level of burnout. To investigate whether the items measure three dimensions of burnout, they were subjected to principal component analysis. Three factor extracted as consistent with the literature (KMO=.83,  $p < 0.001$ ). While Cronbach's alpha for all burnout scale was .89, for emotional exhaustion was .89, personal accomplishment was .79, and depersonalization was .77.

**Control Variables:** In order to assess the relationship between variables, age, tenure, gender and education were controlled in data analysis.

## 4. Results

Table 1 shows the correlations, means, standard deviations and reliability coefficients of the study variables. All constructs

had satisfactory internal consistency. The coefficient alpha reliabilities were above satisfactory level for all variables ( $\alpha > .70$ ) as it indicated measure section (Nunally and Bernstein, 1978). A strong negative correlation between burnout and employability have found ( $r = -.462, p < 0.001$ ) besides this, a strong positive correlation between burnout and job insecurity have found ( $r = .528, p < 0.001$ ) as expected. On the other hand inconsistent with previous research (Bernston et al. 2010), the correlations between age, employability and job insecurity were non-significant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Means, Standard deviations, Cronbach's Alpha Reliabilities and Correlations (N=154)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean	SD
<b>1. Age</b>	1								36.6	9.49
<b>2. Tenure</b>	,90**	1							9.25	8.77
<b>3. Gender (dummy)</b>	,09	,004	1						,81	,39
<b>4. Education (dummy)</b>	,02	-,03	-,04	1					,26	,44
<b>5. Employability</b>	,02	,04	,254**	-,01	1	<b>.87</b>			3.98	,73
<b>6. Job Insecurity</b>	-,007	-,03	-,14	,07	-,347**	1	<b>.78</b>		2.39	,96
<b>7. Burnout</b>	,00	-,01	-,22**	-,03	-,462**	,528**	1	<b>.89</b>	2.22	,56

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01.level (2-tailed)

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare means of perceived employability, job insecurity and burnout for male and female. According to the findings, men have higher level of perceived employability in comparison with women. Table 2 shows that, there are statistically significant differences, at the .05 level of significance, between male and female white-color workers in perceived employability and burnout, but not with perceived job insecurity. Results show that females had higher perceived job insecurity means, but no statistical difference exists between males and females in terms of perceived job insecurity level.

Table 2 Results of t-tests and Descriptive Statistics Perceived Employability, Perceived Job Insecurity, and Burnout by Gender (N=153)

Outcome	Group						95% CI for Mean Difference	Tdf	
	Male			Female					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	N			
Perceived Employability	4.07	0.62	124	3.6	1.00	29	-.76146, -.18370	-3.232*	151
Perceived Job Insecurity	2.34	.81	124	2.66	.96	29	-.02621, .66428	1.826	151
Burnout	2.16	.49	124	2.47	.74	29	.09018, .54.062	2.767*	151

\*  $p < .05$ .

The research model was analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression. Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken (2003) procedure was followed to test the interaction effect. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to investigate the main effect and the interaction effect of job insecurity and employability on burnout. In order to test the interaction effect firstly continuous variables were standardized and multiplicative terms were created for the standardized independent variables. Variables entered in three successive steps. In the first step, age, tenure, gender and education were added to control their possible influence. In the second step, job insecurity and employability were added. And in the final step multiplicative of job insecurity and employability as an interaction term were added the model. As a result of this analysis, the moderating effect

of employability on the relationship between job insecurity and burnout was presented in Table 3.

Results from hierarchical multiple regression in Table 3, in the first model, demographics did not explain variance of burnout significantly. In the second step, demographics along with job security and employability explained 37% of the variance. In support of Hypothesis 1 and 2, job insecurity was positively associated with burnout ( $\beta = .427$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and employability was negatively associated with burnout ( $\beta = -.312$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the third step, final model explained 41% of variance of burnout, and in accordance with Hypothesis 3, adding the interaction term to the model did result in a significant increase in the amount of variance explained ( $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Employability showed a significant interaction effect with job insecurity on burnout ( $\beta = -.233$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 3 Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Burnout

	Burnout		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	.17	.03	.02
Gender	-.24**	-.09	-.05
Education	-.05	-.08	-.08
Tenure	-.16	-.01	.01
Job Insecurity		.427**	.394**
Employability		-.312**	-.24**
Job Insecurity* Employability			-.233**
$R^2$ (Adjusted)	.03	.37**	.41**
$\Delta R^2$	.05	.34**	.04**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .level (2-tailed)

## 5. Discussion

In the present study, the relationships between job insecurity, perceived employability and burnout was investigated. According to our findings, all relationships between study variables were significant and all hypotheses were confirmed. Evidence was provided for statistically significant direct and interaction effects.

Firstly, our results revealed that perceived job insecurity increases employees' burnout level. According to previous research, job insecurity is associated with symptoms of psychological stress and burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Lava, Bosman & Buitendach, 2005). Our result is also consistent with the concept of "survivor syndrome" which has been used to describe the reactions and behaviors of employees who have still-employed but anticipated potential job loss after having undergone a redundancy, downsizing or privatization programme. "Survivor syndrome" may lead to stress, anger, low morale, decreased commitment, reduced loyalty, inefficiency and burnout (Bosman et al., 2005: 48).

Secondly, the result showed that employability decreases employees' burnout level. De Cuyper et al. (2012) state that perceived external employability as a personal resource in relation to job insecurity and exhaustion. Accordingly, in economic volatile context, perceived employability can be seen a buffer against the negative consequences associated with felt job insecurity. Because, employees feel have resources and capable of resource gain or they are less vulnerable to resource loss. Highly employable employees are able to protect their jobs and they feel in control over their career and life. In addition to direct effect of variables, our research revealed interaction effect of perceived employability and job insecurity on burnout. According to the findings presented Figure 1; when employability was high, the job insecurity did not have large impact on the burnout of white color workers. The negative effect of job insecurity was made worse by the interaction term between low job insecurity and low employability prospects in case of burnout. When high employability interacted with high job insecurity, the negative effect of job insecurity on burnout was relatively small. In previous research job insecurity and psychological distress and life satisfaction relationships were positive (Silla et al., 2008). In comparison with the field of job insecurity and perceived employability, and job insecurity and burnout, the findings of this study were consistent with the literature (Hellgren et al, 1999; Bosman et al, 2005; Silla et al, 2008; De Cuyper et al 2008).

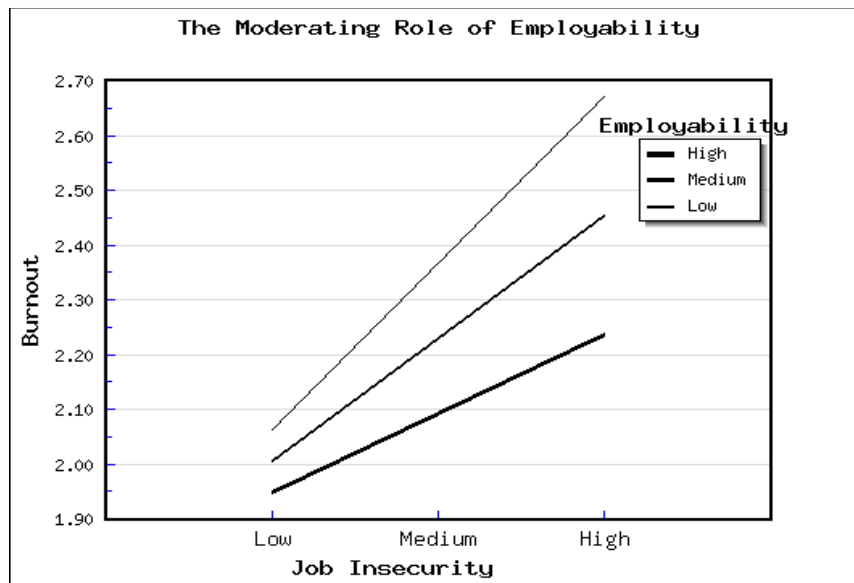


Figure 1: The Moderating Role of Employability

Perceived employability may buffer the unfavorable consequences of feelings job insecurity on burnout (Forrier and Sells, 2003; Silla et. al., 2008). According to Berntson et.al (2010), in times of turbulence such as our case, individuals may benefit to know that experiences of employability could secure them greater control over their working lives and also afford them better opportunities to affect their situation in insecure times (Berntson et.al., 2010: 226). Employability is related to contextual factors such as local labour market and variations in the business environment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). In the turbulent economic environment and continuing liberalization market place, privatization causes more feeling of job insecurity. Thus, in order to overcome some uncertain job insecurity conditions, employees, who work in the conditions of privatization, need employability skills. In this process, if employment policies focus on generating individuals' employability skills, employees could feel less job insecurity. Otherwise they may feel burnout relatively more. The finding of this study is not generalizable to all conditions but may give an idea about other related outcomes for post-privatization organizations, such as well-being, employee engagement, performance etc.

Finally, one of the findings of our study, women have feel less perceived employability and more burnout with comparatively men. This result may be explained country conditions. While OECD average women employment rate 57.2 %, In Turkey context women employment rate is 28.7 % in OECD Employment 2013 report. Despite no differences in terms of education, women believe less employable than men on the labour market. It requires being investigated with further researches deeply in terms of cultural and psychological conditions.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the moderating effect of employability on relationship between job insecurity and burnout. The current research findings revealed that employability was a moderator between job insecurity and burnout relationship. In sum, the promotion of high levels of employability in instable economies and precarious labour market may help workers to cope with the negative effects of job insecurity. Although the current study has focused on employability at individual level, findings presented implication for organizations and macroeconomic policy. In this environment, perceived employability may be a means to cope with job insecurity. Organizations should increase training opportunity offerings. In addition, employment policy should focus on improving employees' employability skills and their transferable work related knowledge.

In the further research, other personal and organizational coping resources such as positive psychological capital, personality, social support, empowerment etc., which may be buffering effect on job insecurity and burnout relationship, should be taken into account. They may be effective on this relationship. Also future research could investigate the moderating effect of employability on the other related outcome variables of job insecurity; such as employee engagement, individual and contextual performance etc.

## 7. Limitations

This study has also some limitations. Our findings need to be interpreted with caution. First of all, the data in this study were obtained using self-report measures, and because of this reason results may be contaminated the common method variance. It would be more appropriate to complement these measurements with different methods. The second limitation of the study, the sample was consisted of employees who work in a newly privatized company. Because of the special case, the study may be criticized for its lack of generalizability. The following studies may use the more general samples and get more healthy results. Another limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design. Nothing is known before privatization. In the following



studies, with longitudinal research design, before and after privatization for any other special company may tell more true information.

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