

Job insecurity and moral disengagement in frontline employees: A moderated mediation effect of perceived organizational support and occupational regret

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Abstract

Purpose: The study's purpose is to analyze the effect of job insecurity on the moral disengagement of frontline employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also analyzes the moderated mediation model incorporating occupational regret and perceived organizational support.

Design/methodology/approach: This study used analytical research design to analyze the moderated mediation effect. Frontline employees working at least three days a week were selected as the respondents and data were collected through the structured questionnaire survey. Hayes's approach was used to examine the moderated mediation model adopting a 95% level of confidence.

Findings: The result revealed that job insecurity is a significant predictor of moral disengagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, occupational regret mediated the predicting ability of job insecurity and moderated by organizational support. This study highlights the essence of organizational support to reduce moral disengagement as a consequence of job insecurity and occupational regret.

Implications: This study contributes to the social cognitive theory. In addition, it recommends that management practitioners ensure organizational support to minimize employees' disengagement. Further, it supports minimizing employees' feelings of job insecurity and occupational regret by maintaining a supportive organizational environment.

Originality/value: This study adds value by examining the mediation effect of occupational regret in the relationship between predicting variable job insecurity and outcome variable moral disengagement. It also examines the moderation effect of perceived organizational support in the mediation model. Thus, this study suggests an integrated model. Further, this study provides recommendations for future research that gauge the level of understanding to manage employees' moral disengagement during the crisis because of intense job insecurity feelings and occupational regret.

Keywords: Job insecurity, Moral disengagement, Occupational regret, Perceived organizational support, Frontline employees

Jel Codes: M12, M54, O15

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1. Introduction

The role of front-line employees is pivotal as they serve as the face and voice of the organization facilitating the interface between customers and the organization. However, the nature of frontline work is inherently troubled with challenges, ranging from high levels of job insecurity to the ethical dilemmas encountered in daily interactions. Job insecurity often develops a sense of low organizational support and low job satisfaction, causing moral disengagement. The increased extent of the crisis may worsen the situation.

In the contemporary and ever-evolving workplace, the rising issue of job insecurity and moral disengagement has garnered significant attention (Huang, Wellman, Ashford, Lee & Wang, 2017; Lee, Huang & Ashford, 2018), especially on the frontline employees during the crisis (Lee, Hur & Shin, 2023). Frontline employees need to represent their organizations during face-to-face customer service (Liao & Chuang, 2004), which leads them to a lingering sense of job continuity in the future (Lee et al., 2023; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002). Job insecurity is characterized by the perceived risk of job loss, i.e., the perceived powerlessness of continuing the current job (Huang et al., 2017), resulting the job disengagement. Despite its pervasiveness, the consequences of job insecurity extend beyond economic uncertainty, invading psychological and behavioral dimensions. Job insecurity can trigger a cascade of negative outcomes, including diminished organizational commitment engendering moral disengagement, probably the crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic increased job insecurity and job disengagement.

Moral disengagement, a psychological phenomenon, refers to the cognitive processes that individuals employ to rationalize or justify unethical behavior. Encompassing the psychological mechanisms, it enables individuals to separate their moral principles from their conduct. Individuals adopt moral justification, inoffensive labeling, diffusion of responsibility, distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame as moral disengagement strategies (Osofsky, Bandura & Zimbardo, 2005). These mechanisms allow individuals to distance themselves from the moral implications of their actions and self-sanction their behavior (Bandura, 2002), ultimately intending to quit the job despite their crucial responsibility during the crisis, resulting in poor job association and performance. Organizations need to invest significant time, money, and dignity to protect employees feeling job insecurity, causing occupational regrets, especially during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, organizations would work to increase the sense of job security and feeling of ‘organization cares’ as the organizational support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a widespread effect on frontline employees working face-to-face during the pandemic period (Lee et al., 2023; Lio & Chuang, 2004). Among the many effects, the major effect was constant employees thinking of uncertainty about their job’s future, i.e., job insecurity, especially in the service sector. Concern over the pandemic caused by news and protection provisions (e.g, vaccination, social distancing, and face masking) during their job times distressed face-to-face interaction with customers, leading to the feeling of pandemic-caused unemployment (Nam & Lee, 2021), i.e., job insecurity (Koo, Lee, Lee, Kim, Song, Park et al., 2020; Oh & Lee, 2020). The repeating wave of the pandemic made the working environment volatile and dreadful, causing frontline employees to quit their jobs, perceiving a low connection to jobs and feeling of fear of job loss. Likely, the workload during the pandemic was high for the frontline employees because of temporary job cuts and social distancing provisions. As a result, the frontline employees may consider the job a burden and engage less with the job. Organizational support may have a counterintuitive effect on this relationship (Probst, Petitta, Barbaranelli & Austin, 2020); for example, the support of line managers enhances employees’ motivation and job involvement (Anvari, Janjaria & Shirvani, 2024). In addition, occupational regret would intensify moral disengagement (Budjanovcanin & Woodrow, 2022). Occupational regret is the feeling of the wrong choice of

career because of which an intensified thought regarding a better career would be there that which could be intensified in crisis. These issues could be integrated into the social cognitive theory framework as this theory describes how employees position their behavior in a crisis. Meng, Wang, Du, Lin, Zhang and Lu (2023) studied the role of meaningful work on occupational attitude and reported that prosocial impact and autonomy support are the sources of meaningful work. Likewise, Petitta, Probst, Ghezzi and Barbaranelli (2021) suggest that the emotional contagion of anger and joy predicts moral disengagement, resulting in job outcomes. In connection with Petitta et al. (2021), Xu, Dust and Liu (2023) revealed a positive association between death anxiety and occupational intention via meaningful work. Such evidence raises the significance of a comprehensive study incorporating job insecurity and moral disengagement via occupational regret and perceived organizational support with a special focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this study investigated frontline employees' intensity of job insecurity, occupational regret, perceived organizational support, and moral disengagement during the crisis. Further, the research analyzed the effect of job insecurity on employees' moral disengagement in association with occupational regret and perceived organizational support as mediators during the crisis. Further, it bridges the literature on job insecurity, perceived organizational support, occupational regret, and moral disengagement. This study significantly advances the understanding of how job insecurity leads to moral disengagement among frontline employees, especially in crises and emergencies. It proliferates the mitigating role of perceived organizational support, showing that employees who feel supported by their organization are less likely to disengage morally despite job insecurity. By employing a moderated mediation model, the research provides a comprehensive framework that integrates these dynamics, offering valuable insights for organizational strategies to enhance support mechanisms and promote ethical behavior in the workplace.

This paper is organized into subheadings as introduction, literature review and hypotheses, methods, measures, analysis process, results, discussion, and conclusion. Further, the paper incorporates implications, limitations of the study, and future research scope.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1990, 2002, 2016) describes moral disengagement as the psychological state of people and how they violate shared norms and principles despite their moral commitment to ethical principles (Probst et al., 2020). A person first develops the moral argument and then enacts that argument into moral actions. Based on the social exchange theory (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels & Hall, 2017), employees perform work behavior based on the perceived benefits, i.e., they reciprocate their behavior based on the support from the organization. This study followed social cognitive theory and social exchange theory and examined the relationship between and among job insecurity, occupational regret, and perceived organizational support with moral disengagement.

Job insecurity and moral disengagement. Job insecurity, i.e., the extent of risk perception of employees regarding the continuation of their current job (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002), is especially caused by the pandemic-led working environment (Lee et al., 2023). Perceived job insecurity is the individual indifferences caused by differences in self-regulating ability during the crisis, resulting in moral disengagement (MD). MD refers to the processes involved in a dynamic procedure associated with self-regulating behavior that goes beyond usual boundaries within a perspective that sees the mind as capable of agency (Bandura, 1990). Research (e.g., De-Cuyper & De-Witte, 2007; Vander-Elst, De-Cuyper, Baillien, Niesen & De-Witte, 2016) indicates that when employees experience job insecurity, they perceive it as a violation of the implicit psychological agreement with their employer. Psychological agreements represent employees' informal expectations regarding their relationship with their employing organization (Rousseau, 1989). For instance, one such expectation might involve employees working hard and dedicatedly in exchange for job security from their employer (Probst et al., 2020), especially during the crisis. Consequently, the social exchange dynamics between employers and employees are based on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the anticipation of a balance between what is expected from each party (Conway & Briner, 2005). In the line, when employees feel lower expectations from the contract, they tend to break the hard work and dedication for organizational purposes, resulting in low moral engagement. Because of the insecurity caused by pandemic risks, employees might have violated their norms and principles, causing moral disengagement. Based on this discussion, the study formulated the following hypothesis.

H1: Job insecurity has a significant positive effect on moral disengagement.

Job insecurity, occupational regret, and moral disengagement. Occupational regret refers to the unpleasant emotions caused by the dissatisfaction individuals experience concerning their career choices or paths and thinking about what could be better if the next occupation could have been chosen (Budjanovcanin, Rodrigues & Guest, 2019; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). It encompasses feelings of disappointment, frustration, or remorse regarding career decisions made in the past. Occupational regret is associated with factors such as unmet expectations, perceived opportunities forgone, and discrepancies between one's current job and desired career paths (Dyrbye, West, Johnson, Cipriano, Peterson, Beatty et al., 2020; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). Moreover, during crises, frontline employees may experience occupational regret due to various factors such as increased job insecurity, heightened stress levels, and limited control over their work environment (Lee et al., 2023). Frontline employees often face intense pressure and demands during crises, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability and uncertainty about their future in the organization. Individuals perceive a significant gap between their current circumstances and their desired career trajectory; they are more likely to experience regret and dissatisfaction with their career choices (Amiot, Terry, Jimmieson & Callan, 2006), and this happens more prominently with frontline employees because of higher job demand for involvement in a high-risk environment. The perceived job insecurity may further exceed the occupational regret, leading to decreased moral disengagement. Occupational regret can significantly impact the moral and engagement of frontline employees, influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and overall job satisfaction. Frontline employees who experience occupational regret may feel dissatisfied (Köse, 2019) with their career choices or current job circumstances. The pandemic situation compels employees to compare their current situation to unfavorable thinking that the alternative career that could have been chosen would be better resulting in career regret. Regret-related emotions such as disappointment and frustration can undermine employees' emotional attachment to their jobs and organization, leading to decreased motivation and commitment (Howard & Smith, 2021). Frontline employees experiencing occupational regret may exhibit reduced engagement in their tasks and responsibilities (Salmela-Aro, Hietajärvi & Lonka, 2019) as they may become less invested in their work due to feelings of disillusionment or dissatisfaction. Occupational regret may also lead to interpersonal withdrawal or disengagement from colleagues and supervisors. In this way, occupational regret can contribute to emotional disengagement from work among frontline employees. Based on this, the following hypotheses were developed.

H2a: Job insecurity has a significant positive effect on occupational regret.

H2b: Occupational regret has a significant positive influence on moral disengagement.

H2c: Occupational regret significantly mediates the predicted relationship between job insecurity on moral disengagement.

Perceived organizational support, job insecurity, occupational regret, and moral disengagement. Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' subjective perception of the extent to which their organization values their contributions, cares about their well-being, and supports their interests (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2015; Probst et al., 2020). It encompasses employees' beliefs about the organization's willingness to provide resources, assistance, and recognition to help them succeed in their roles (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). Employees' perceptions of organizational supportiveness, can influence their attitudes, behaviors, overall job satisfaction organizational commitment, and performance. Employees perceive high levels of support from their organization, they are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of motivation, engagement, and dedication (Anvari, Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė, Mobarhan, Janjaria & Chermahini, 2023; Probst et al., 2020).

Moreover, studies have shown that POS is associated with various positive outcomes for both employees and organizations, for example, the feeling of job security, cooperation, organizational citizenship behavior (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009), and higher job performance (Imran & Aldaas, 2020; Sabir, Ali, Majid, Sabir, Mehmood, Rehman et al., 2022). Consequently, the POS significantly influences positively to moral engagement (Probst et al., 2020). POS reflects employees' beliefs about the extent to which their organization values and supports them which significantly influences shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance, ultimately contributing to

organizational success and effectiveness through moral engagement. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H3: Perceived organizational support significantly moderates the relationship between job insecurity and moral disengagement.

Based on the discussion, we have developed a research framework (Figure 1).

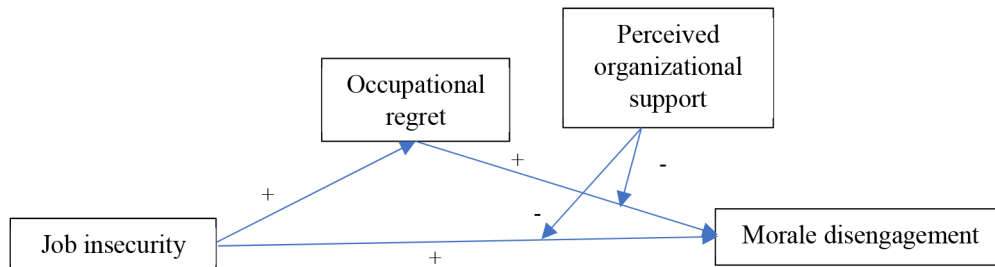


Figure 1. Conceptual moderated mediation model with findings

3. Methodology

This study was conducted using a survey of the frontline employees assuring anonymity and confidentiality to the organizations in Kathmandu after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Frontline employees were chosen in the study as they are primary point of contact customers in the organization whose engagement directly influence the customers' satisfaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, frontline employees were vulnerable to external pressure of customers' complaints and internal pressure of performance within the possibility of personal harm. These factors can exacerbate feelings of job insecurity and contribute to moral disengagement. Understanding how frontline employees navigate these challenges is essential for fostering a supportive work environment. Data was collected from the service sector frontline employees who worked at least three days a week and had internet access. The participation of respondents in the survey was voluntary. A total of 389 employees (many were identified using snowball sampling: respondents forwarded to their colleagues and friends) were interested in participating in the survey. However, the responses of 348 employees were usable, meeting the working conditions and working at least three days a week in the frontline. The participants pose homogeneity in terms of job characteristics (frontline employees sharing risk of infection from the COVID-19) from the diverse service sector, especially from hotels and restaurants ($n = 69$, 19.82%, male = 39, female = 40, average weekly working hours = 54), sales stores ($n = 72$, 20.69%, male = 45, female = 27, average weekly working hours = 49), banking and financial services ($n = 155$, 44.54%, male = 55, female = 100, average weekly working hours = 32), and hospitality tourism ($n = 52$, 14.94%, male = 30, female = 22, average weekly working hours = 30). Among the respondents, 51.44% of the participants were female in comparison to 48.56% were male with average weekly working hours of 39.58 hours and average organizational tenure of 4.80 years.

3.1. Measure

Measurement items were adapted from researchers with strong validity and reworded to make them contextual and understandable to the respondents. Respondents reported their response in each item in to five-point Likert scale (1 for *strongly agree* to 5 for *strongly disagree*). The experience sampling method as suggested by Fisher and To (2012) was adapted to select and collect the data. Respondents reported several times a week based on their experience, the Google Form's provision to upgrade/modify the response was used to facilitate respondents.

Job insecurity items were adapted from Vander-Elst, De-Witte and De-Cuyper (2013), one of the items was 'Chances are, I will soon lose my job'. Moral disengagement items were adapted and reworded from Gini, Pozzoli, and Bussey (2013), one of the items was 'it is okay to tell small lies to consumers because they don't do any harm'. Occupational regret items were adapted from Gini et al. (2013) and reworded to make them contextual, one of the items was 'I wish I had chosen a different occupation back when I was starting my career'.

Likewise, the perceived organizational support items were adapted from Celep and Yilmazturk (2012), one of the items was ‘My manager is interested in my wellbeing’.

3.2. Analysis Process

The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the demographic information as well as to analyze the effect of job insecurity on moral disengagement in direct and moderated mediation relations. For this, the study used path analysis, using 10,000 bootstrapping for robustness.

4. Results

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on AMOS 25 for Windows using maximum likelihood estimation to analyze the discriminant validity (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014). Results revealed a good fit index as CMIN (698.93, $df = 164$, $p = 0.000$), GFI (0.918), NFI (0.908), IFI (0.959), TLI (0.955), CFI (0.963), PNFI (0.713 > 0.1), RMSEA (0.033) (Hair et al., 2014; Hayes, 2019).

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4
Occupational regret (1)	2.701	1.114	0.852	0.538	0.263	0.865	0.733			
Job insecurity (2)	2.939	1.284	0.901	0.649	0.263	0.932	0.513	0.805		
Moral disengagement (3)	2.945	1.104	0.870	0.574	0.059	0.880	0.072	0.242	0.758	
Organizational support (4)	3.879	0.869	0.869	0.573	0.146	0.881	-0.382	-0.319	-0.141	0.757

Table 1. Mean, SD, and validity concern of constructs

The results (Table 1) revealed evidence of convergent validity of measurement instruments ($AVE > 0.50$, $CR > 0.70$, $AVE > 0.50$, and $CR > AVE$) as suggested by Fornell, and Larcker (1981) and Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma (2003) cited in Terlgav, Ruzzier and Kase (2016). The results also support the discriminant validity ($AVE > MSV$) providing evidence of discriminant constructs in a good model fit. Further, the mean response of the frontline employees regarding perceived job insecurity, moral disengagement, and occupational regret was found to be high (less than cutoff point 3), however, the perceived organizational supports were above the average (3.88).

Direct and indirect effects were examined using Process Macro 4.2 for a robust test and the hypotheses were tested as suggested by (Hayes, 2019). Model 15 as suggested by Hayes (2019) was used to examine the moderated mediation model of interest.

Direct effects. Table 2 provides the direct effect of social support predicting the training effectiveness. In a direct effect, job insecurity, occupational regret, and perceived organizational support were examined as predictors of moral disengagement. Likewise, the direct effect of job insecurity was examined in predicting occupational regret.

The results revealed that job insecurity feelings among frontline employees significantly predicted moral disengagement (CI: .145 – .345, $coeff. = .245$), meaning that the increased perceived job insecurity caused moral disengagement supporting H1. The results supported the H2a, i.e., job insecurity causes a significant positive influence on developing organizational regret among the frontline employees during the pandemic crisis ($coeff. = .386$, CI: .304 – .468). Likewise, hypothesis H2b was supported by the results ($coeff. = -.085$, CI: -.201 – -.031), stating that higher organizational regret causes a higher level of moral disengagement. Meaning that the frontline employees who suffered from occupational regrets were disengaged from their moral responsibilities.

Similarly, organizational support had a significant negative influence on frontline employees’ disengagement during the crisis (CI: -.299 – -.010, $coeff. = -.154$) providing the evidence of a positive role of organizational support in protecting frontline employees from their moral disengagement during the crisis. During the crisis, employees who perceived that their organization supported employees’ physical, psychological, and social well-being behaved with high moral behavior with the consumers. The unconditional interaction of perceived organizational support with job insecurity and occupational support was found significant (-0.168, -0.068)

suggesting that the organizational support to the employees reduced the tendencies of moral disengagement however their perception of job insecurity. Likewise, the effect of occupational regret on predicting moral disengagement remained significant supporting H2b with the interaction effect of perceived organizational support which describes that occupational regret cannot make employees less moral if they perceive higher support from the organization. This result suggests that leadership must ensure adequate financial support, support to employees' career growth and, if necessary extended support to the family members during the crisis to reduce the chances of their occupational regrets.

Model Summary Predicting occupational regret (O_R) by job insecurity (JI)						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.445	0.198	0.999	85.454	1.000	346	0.000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	0.000	0.054	0.000	1.000	-0.105	0.105
JI	0.386	0.042	9.244	0.000	0.304	0.468
Model summary predicting moral disengagement (M_D) by job insecurity (JI), occupational regret (O_R), and organizational support (OS)						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.312	0.098	1.116	7.4	5	342	0.000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.992	0.06	50.236	0.000	2.875	3.109
JI	0.245	0.051	4.827	0.000	0.145	0.345
O_R	0.085	0.059	-1.448	0.038	-0.201	-0.031
OS	-0.154	0.074	-2.098	0.037	-0.299	-0.010
Int_1	0.051	0.06	-2.844	0.009	-0.168	-0.069
Int_2	0.103	0.061	-2.689	0.002	-0.117	-0.024
Product terms key						
Int_1: JI x OS						
Int_2: O_R x OS						
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y: JI -> O_R -> M_D						
OS	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
-0.869	-0.068	0.04	-0.156	-0.001		
0	-0.033	0.026	-0.086	-0.014		
0.869	0.002	0.029	-0.055	-0.010		
Index of moderated mediation:						
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
OS	0.040	0.028	-0.102	-0.006		

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95%

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 10000

Table 2. Direct and Indirect effect on predicting moral disengagement

The mediated model, i.e., the conditional indirect effects of job insecurity on moral disengagement through occupational regret was significant (none zero Boot interval) at different levels of organizational support supporting H2c. The results also support the hypothesis (H3) regarding significantly moderated mediation of perceived organizational support and occupational regrets on the prediction of employees' moral disengagement by job insecurity. The result suggests that the frontline employees' disengagement can be lowered with increased organizational support and reduced occupational regrets during the crisis. The integrated model with the effects is shown in the Figure 2.

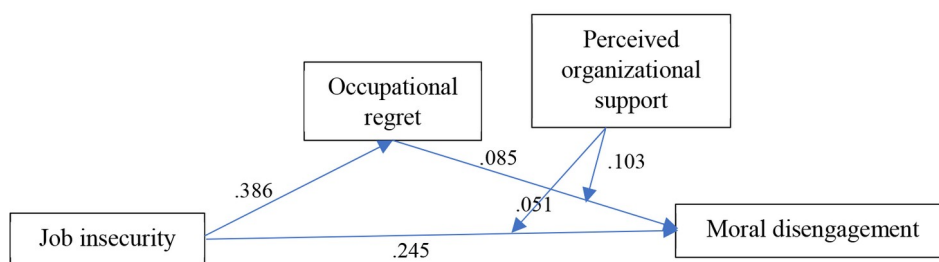


Figure 2. Conceptual moderated mediation model with findings.

5. Discussion

Moral disengagement occurs when individuals feel disillusioned, unmotivated, or disconnected from the purpose or values of their work or organization (Agina, Khairy, Abdel-Fatah, Manaa, Abdallah, Aliane et al., 2023; Vander-Elst et al., 2016). This study examined the perception regarding job insecurity and organizational support during the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzed how job insecurity influences job engagement among frontline employees directly and indirectly in association with occupational regret and perceived organizational support. A crisis often increases job insecurity leading to poor or negative job engagement. The study explored that the exposure of frontline employees to work at risk of virus transmission because of inadequate health equipment, changed working conditions, financial instability, and emotional stress as the major factors causing insecurity. This study revealed evidence of disengagement of frontline employees during the pandemic crisis supporting the findings of Kakar, Misron, Rauza, Meyer and Durrani (2023). And, the job insecurity was indeed a significant factor contributing to moral disengagement in the workplace supporting the findings of several studies (e.g., Huang et al., 2017; Probst et al., 2020; Vander-Elst et al., 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic made jobs unstable which led the employees to perceive financial risks, risk of job loss, and risk of infection causing behavioral deviation from moral duties and responsibilities (Elshaer, Azazz, Mahmoud & Ghanem, 2022). When employees perceive their jobs as unstable or at risk, it can lead to a range of negative emotions and behaviors that undermine moral and productivity. During the pandemic, few employees were forced to work a long time and serve many consumers causing physical and psychological stress (Gauam & Gautam, 2023; Elshaer et al., 2022) causing occupational regret and intended for moral disengagement. Employees prioritizing survival over working at risk were prone to displace their job responsibilities leading to disengagement. The risky working environment failed to convince the frontline employees to adapt changing environment, adapt to new work protocols, and motivate ethical standards causing moral disengagement.

The study also revealed occupational regret among the frontline employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Frontline workers faced heightened health risks due to their continuous interaction with customers during the pandemic. They experienced regret over choosing careers that exposed them to such significant health risks, especially when adequate protection measures were lacking, leading to fears of contracting the virus and spreading it to loved ones. Frontline employees regretted not having safer working conditions or feeling inadequately protected by their employers, which contributed to anxiety and stress about their health and well-being. Organizational support, on the contrary, reduced the chances of occupational regrets.

The occupational regret was high among employees who perceived low organizational support as reported by Park, Closser, Cooney, Atkins, Thrul, McDonald et al. (2023) and Newman, Jevé and Majumder (2022). In the lack of a safe and meaningful workplace, employees realized the job insecurity which ultimately affected their moral values (Hadjisolomou & Simone, 2021), the pandemic created such a workplace. Employees with higher occupational regret faced more intense moral disengagement during the pandemic. Occupational regret is developed by unexpected situations of perception regarding opportunities forgone, and discrepancies between one's current job and desired career paths (Dyrbye et al., 2020; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). However, the organizational support to employees using two-way communication, flexible work schedules, employee assistance programs, training, and development to deal with the pandemic crisis, and peer support networks facilitated employees to get rid of occupational regret and hence improved moral engagement. Similarly, the financial support during the pandemic crisis and health and wellness initiatives to the frontline employees made them comfortable and confident to serve consumers with high moral engagement. Occupational support reduces

professional stress, helps to establish financial stability, and hence improves the employees' attitude and behavior supporting the findings of Steinheider, Hoffmeister, Brunk, Garrett and Munoz (2019). Based on the Social Cognitive Theory, this study supports elucidating cognitive processes underlying employees' disengagement resulting as the response to job insecurity. Organizational regret increases the tendency to commit unethical behavior like absenteeism, ignoring responsibility, and misbehaving with consumers. However, if employees feel that their organization is supportive of their obstacles either personal or for their family members. Using the moderated mediation model, it can be generalized that perceived organizational support can intervene in the negative consequences of uncertainty and organizational regret.

6. Conclusion and Implication

Moral disengagement is a growing concern among scholars specially in crises which may be the consequence of many reasons. It negatively influences the consumers' satisfaction and loyalty. This study examined the effect of job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic on the moral disengagement of frontline employees. This study concluded that job insecurity was a strong predictor of moral disengagement during the pandemic. Further, the study concluded that occupational regret intensifies the effect of job insecurity on moral disengagement. However, the joint effect of job insecurity and occupational regret can be neutralized or decreased with effective support from the organization.

This study developed a moderated mediation model of job insecurity, occupational regret, and organizational support to predict the moral disengagement of frontline employees during the pandemic. This model contributes to the social cognitive theory describing the employees' psychological state for violating shared norms and principles of the organization and the occupation. Further, this study argues that moral disengagement depends upon the perceived benefits and support from the occupation and the organization. In practical refinement, this study suggests organizational management to develop employee support programs and communicate them effectively to the employees to excel in their moral engagement especially to cope with crises. In addition, we advise organization management to care about employees' interests and job security promises and ensure career growth opportunities to prevent employees' moral disengagement. Further, the findings and conclusion of the study recommend organizations develop and ensure occupational safety and health assessment provisions so that employees feel a strong sense of organizational support to reduce occupational regrets and job insecurity.

7. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Scope

The study used snowball sampling because of the COVID-19 pandemic situation; and incorporated employees working during the period. This may cause intensified occupational regret and higher job insecurity. Respondents' self-reported data was used to analyze the model which may cause common method bias. Future research can opt for probability sampling and supervisor reports on the moral disengagement of subordinates. Further, the study used the mediated effect of occupational regret on the predicted effect of job insecurity on moral disengagement which may be limited scope; future research can incorporate other social and organizational variables for the increased rigor of the study.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare the absence of conflicts of interest.

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