

Job insecurity and employee commitment during COVID-19: mediating the role of quitting intention in family-owned hotels

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ABSTRACT: Using the social exchange theory, this article explores how quitting intention mediates job insecurity and organisational commitment in family-owned hotels during the COVID-19 period in Ghana. A conceptual model was developed to give a clear perspective of the study. Literature was empirically reviewed on job insecurity, the link between job insecurity and employee commitment, and employee job insecurity vis-à-vis quitting intention. Questionnaires were used to elicit employees' views on the key variables of the study. The partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique using SmartPLS-3 for the analysis. The result shows that job insecurity significantly impacts the various dimensions of organisational commitment. Also, quitting intention mediates the relationship between job insecurity and commitment. The study sheds new light on the underlying mechanisms linking job insecurity to organisational commitment in family-owned hotels. The study will provide insights to practitioners in the hospitality and tourism industry in the formulation of policies which are merged with economic recovery strategies during crisis management.

KEYWORDS: social exchange theory, organisational commitment, Ghana, crisis management, structural equation modelling

Introduction

Quitting intention occurs when employees' motivation decreases due to future uncertainties with the job (Akgunduz & Eryilmaz, 2018). Employee intentions to leave a job may depend on both tangible and intangible job outcomes, hence the need to prevent such actions (Yao et al., 2019). Job insecurity is one such outcome which can be harmful to the individual and the organisation. The organisation's long-term objectives and aspirations may be compromised by stressors like job insecurity. Human resource management theorists posit that lack of job satisfaction and commitment have a significant impact on an organization's performance and this is caused at the individual level by job insecurity (Huselid, 1995).

The outbreak and the spread of COVID-19 affected the tourism and hospitality industry globally, and hotels in Ghana were no exception. The hospitality industry experienced drastic losses as room occupancy and other jobs performed by employees disappeared because of social distancing protocols and a rapid decline in the arrival of tourists (Sobieralski, 2020). In Ghana, the government implemented travel restrictions which banned both foreigners and citizens from entering the country. The entrance of tourists into Ghana was therefore restricted and this resulted in a crisis management situation for hotels. The downward spiral of the hospitality industry globally occasioned by the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus consequently threatened employee commitment and performance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Prior to COVID-19, it was already clear that

contemporary workplaces were experiencing uncertainty as a result of technological advancements and other socio-economic issues, making it impossible to ensure employment stability for all workers (Etehad & Karatepe, 2019). Employees may experience job insecurity based on the changes brought about by downsizing, mergers and layoffs, which may affect specific groups in the organisation. Mauno et al. (2014) argue that, collectively, employees may identify stressors that threaten their jobs. These stressors will have negative effects on factors related to job attitudes such as commitment and an employee's psychological health (Tian et al., 2014; De Witte et al., 2015). Niesen et al. (2018) mentioned that restructuring certain factors in organisations increases employees' sense of job insecurity; however, COVID-19 clearly exacerbated the situation.

Existing literature on job insecurity shows that most studies focus on the negative consequences of job insecurity and are skewed towards sources such as the views of supervisors and employees in large and medium-sized hospitality organisations in Western countries. Research findings show that employees who realised their jobs were insecure exhibited decreased job satisfaction and had high quitting intention (Ghosh, 2017; Piccoli et al., 2017). However, little is known about the mechanisms linking job insecurity to job-related outcomes such as commitment (Vander Elst et al., 2016). In addition, existing research has neglected quitting intention as a mechanism that links job insecurity to commitment (Guarnaccia et al., 2018).

Quitting intention occurs when employees suffer from anxiety due to dissatisfaction. This happens because employees become

apprehensive because of job insecurity. Assessing the effects of job insecurity from the perspective of employees is therefore a worthwhile pursuit since there is a paucity of literature from the employee perspective. Testing this relationship is appropriate and significant in defining how the hospitality sector can recover and how it can be sustained in the future.

The tourism sector in Ghana is dominated by family-owned hotels, with an estimated 95% of them employing fewer than 20 employees including family members who participate in the administration of the facilities. According to Camerano (2020), these categories of hotels act as economic engines in tourism destinations. Although family-owned hotels dominate the tourism industry in developing countries, they receive limited attention in empirical research. As a result, this study was inspired by the fact that family-owned hospitality businesses have had little empirical investigation. Employees in these categories of hotels play a significant role in creating customer loyalty and rendering quality services for customer satisfaction, but are likely to leave their jobs when there is a threat in the job environment (Kim et al., 2018). Looking at the substantial amount of research examining job insecurity and its effect on job satisfaction and commitment, it seems like these studies did not talk about quitting intention as having a mediating role between job insecurity and employee commitment. Hence, the purpose of our study is to look at job insecurity and employee commitment in the wake of COVID-19, a pandemic which posed major threats to job security in family-owned hotels in Ghana.

Investigating job insecurity on commitment using quitting intention in the relationship as perceived by employees working in these hotels is relevant since it shows how hospitality organisations can recover and be sustained in the future. Specifically, this study seeks to:

- (1) examine the relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment;
- (2) ascertain how employee's job insecurity influences employee's quitting intention; and
- (3) determine how quitting intention is a mediator of perceived job insecurity and employee commitment.

The following research hypotheses were thus developed:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment.
- Hypothesis 2: Employee job insecurity influences their intention to leave the job.
- Hypothesis 3: Quitting intention is a mediator of perceived job insecurity and employee commitment.

Literature review

Perceived job insecurity

Job insecurity is subjective since people often sense varying levels of uncertainty even in situations where organisational goals are the same (Huang et al., 2013). De Witte et al. (2012) argue that people's subjective feelings vary according to the level of security they experience. Additionally, Goretzki (2016) maintains that job insecurity encompasses both the loss of the whole job and the loss of any specific aspect of the job, i.e. income and promotion opportunities. Employees' perceptions of job insecurity or fear of losing their jobs may reduce organisational commitment. Generally, job insecurity changes employee perceptions about how they are of value to the organisation and enables the workers to raise questions as to whether their career goals are aligned with that of the organisation.

Research findings show that approximately 770 000 workers (25.7% of the total labour force) had pay cuts, and about 42 000 workers were laid off in the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020). Thus, research into job security in the hospitality industry is timely. Hospitality organisations invest in their employees by training them to support the current and future job environment. However, employees are faced with job insecurity and the tendency to leave their job. If this phenomenon is not handled properly, it may lead to several adverse effects on job-related outcomes such as commitment. Though some studies have investigated job insecurity, the factors influencing job insecurity are yet to be explored. Research on quitting intention as a mediator of job insecurity on job-related outcomes such as commitment is sparse in the literature (Murphy et al., 2018). According to Etehadi and Karatepe (2019), little is known about the mechanism linking job insecurity to employees' commitment. Thus, testing this relationship is relevant and timely.

Relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment

The anxiety an employee experiences about losing a job is defined as job insecurity (De Witte, 1999). According to Inoue et al. (2018), job insecurity is a key element that impacts employees' psychological health and lowers motivation (Ünsar, 2011). Several studies on job insecurity emphasise job loss emanating from poor working conditions in organisations, such as downsizing (Keim et al., 2014; Wang & Heyes, 2017). Employees with high job commitment can perform better and might increase organisational effectiveness, promote productive work environments and reduce employee quitting intentions. Commitment, on the other hand, affirms whether issues of HR practices can promote the psychological relationships between the organisation and the employees' personal goals. This is vital in retaining employees and using their abilities to achieve organisational goals (Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003).

Employees experiencing high job insecurity are more likely to have a lower commitment and make little attempt to contribute to organisational goals (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). According to Lo Presti and Nonnis (2012), increased perceived work uncertainty reduces and affects commitment. Similarly, Wang et al. (2015) also found that job insecurity has a negative impact on both commitment and performance. Job insecurity influences employees' perceptions of their value to the organisation and leads employees to ask questions if their values and the organisational goals are not aligned (Murphy et al., 2018). Job insecurity as a work stressor also weakens employee commitment and leads to quitting intention. This explains the job insecurity and commitment relationship among employees in family-owned hotels, especially during COVID-19.

Influences on intention to leave

Job insecurity can threaten organisational growth and could impact on their jobs (Vander Elst et al., 2016). According to De Witte et al. (2016), job insecurity puts fear into employees and causes them to look for alternative jobs. Employees' view of job loss may also activate quitting intention and lack of commitment. Employees who have an intention to leave their jobs might have lost contact with the organisation.

The norm of reciprocity which exists between employers and employees is crucial to the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964). According to this, the employer and the employee engage

in a series of interactions that are dependent on the actions of the other party. When employees are treated well, they feel indebted to the organisation and would usually respond by repaying the organisation through service. According to Holtom and Inderrieden (2006), job insecurity influences employees' voluntary quitting intention. Empirically, the number of studies that discuss the interface between job insecurity and quitting intention is limited. One of the key proposals of this study is that job insecurity negatively influences quitting intention.

Quitting intention as a mediator of the perceived job insecurity and organisational commitment interface

The study proposes that quitting intention mediates job insecurity and organisational commitment. Several scholars have studied job insecurity and quitting intention. Ashford et al. (1989) found that job insecurity increases an employee's preparedness to secure a new job. Employees who have the intention to leave their work do not demonstrate commitment in their work (Ferreira et al., 2017). The reformulation theory of attitude posits that workers make a cognitive assessment of circumstances. Undergoing hostile situations would therefore give rise to negative emotional attitudes. Under such conditions, when family-owned hotel employees experience job insecurity, their commitment level drops. There is proof from extant literature which indicates that quitting intention is treated as a mediator. For instance, according to Appaw et al. (2018), quitting intention mediates job insecurity and employee's job outcomes. Lee and Jeong (2017) found that job insecurity causes a reduction in organisational commitment and its effect strengthens quitting intention. Mauno et al. (2014) and Schreurs et al. (2012) found that job insecurity culminates in negative outcomes such as high quitting intention in an organisation.

Based on social exchange and reformulation attitude theories and limited empirical evidence, we propose that quitting intention mediates the association between job insecurity and employee commitment. The relationship is depicted in the conceptual model in Figure 1.

Methodology

Participants

Data was gathered from employees of family-owned hotels who are registered with the Ghana Tourism Authority, the regulatory body for the hospitality and tourism industry in Ghana (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2021). Hotels in Ghana are broadly classified into one- to five-star ratings. For the purpose of this study, the hotels which were used for the study have been broadly

classified into two groups. Group 1 consist of one- to two-star rating hotels, and Group 2 comprises hotels that are unrated. The hotels were selected from the Volta, Greater Accra and Eastern regions of Ghana. Hotels with these star ratings were selected because they are the most patronised in Ghana. The purpose of categorising the hotels into two groups is to avoid skewing the data. Past research shows that the star rating has effect on organisational performance. Questionnaires were hand-delivered to the selected hotels and frontline supervisors assisted in administering the questionnaires to the respondents over two weeks. A convenience sampling technique was used in the selection of respondents. The categories of employees were front-office personnel, chefs, waitresses, room attendants, bar attendants and cashiers. In all, 350 questionnaires were distributed to different hotels and 292 were returned, giving a response rate of 83%.

Instrument

A questionnaire was the data collection instrument that was used. Respondents expressed their agreement with various statements on a five-point Likert scale with "1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree". The questionnaire was divided into four parts: Part A solicited information on respondents' demographic data; Part B had eight items and captured information on respondents' job insecurity; Part C of the questionnaire had six items and sought the employees' views on their commitment level in the organisation; and Part D had five items and captured information on the respondents' quitting intention in their organisation.

The partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique using SmartPLS-3 was used for the analysis. In PLS-SEM, the guideline is that the sample size should be ten times as many observations as the number of variables to be analyzed (Hair et al., 2019). In this study, a total of three latent variables are in the conceptual model. The sample size of 292 was far in excess of the requirement of 30 for valid surveys.

Measures

The study adopted established measurement instruments to gather data on job insecurity, organisational commitment and quitting intention (Table 1). The scale that focused on the perception of losing one's job was used to measure job insecurity (Delery & Doty, 1996). Organisational commitment was measured using a five-item scale from (Allen & Meyer, 1990). For quitting intention, the scale by Cammann et al. (1979) was used.

Reliability and validity of the measurement

Structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM, version 3) was used to test the hypothesised relationship. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the reliability of the measurement. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The items having factor loadings smaller than 0.600 were discarded, except two indicators which had values approximately equal to 0.600. The results for reliability and validity and factor loadings are presented in Table 2. Alpha values and CRs were higher than the recommended value of 0.600. The average variance extracted (AVE) and CRs was higher or close to 0.500 and 0.700 respectively. Multicollinearity was also assessed, with the value of each indicator (VIF) less than 5. Finally, it was observed that the factor loadings were greater than cross-loadings which signified discriminant

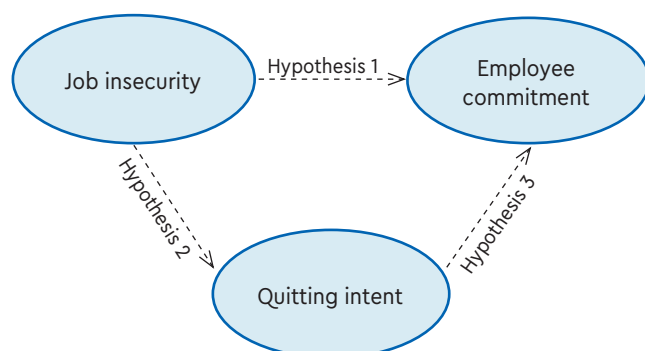


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model

TABLE 1: Code description for observed variables on job insecurity, commitment and leaving intention

Code	Code description
Job insecurity (JI)	
J11	<i>I am confident that I will keep my job</i>
J12	<i>I am sure of my job environment</i>
J13	<i>I think I will be able to continue working here</i>
J14	<i>There is only a small opportunity that I will not be employed</i>
J15	<i>I fear that I might get fired anytime</i>
J16	<i>I am worried about my career progression</i>
J17	<i>I am worried about losing my job</i>
Employee commitment (OC)	
OC1	<i>I am willing to put in much effort for the organisation's success</i>
OC2	<i>I talk about the organisation to my friends</i>
OC3	<i>I accept all kinds of jobs assigned to me</i>
OC4	<i>My personal values and that of the organisation are similar</i>
OC5	<i>For me, this is the best organisation to work for</i>
Quitting intent (QI)	
Q11	<i>I sometimes feel compelled to leave my job</i>
Q12	<i>I will leave my job in a year or less</i>
Q13	<i>I am seriously considering leaving my current job</i>
Q14	<i>I will leave working in this hotel if the conditions get worse</i>
Q15	<i>I will stop working in this hotel if the conditions do not improve</i>

TABLE 2: Item loading, reliability and validity

Code	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	VIF
J11	0.895	0.880	0.926	0.807	2.409
J12	0.922				2.845
J13	0.877				2.274
OC1	0.617	0.848	0.870	0.630	1.276
OC3	0.871				1.953
OC4	0.804				1.82
OC5	0.857				1.995
Q15_r	0.729	0.642	0.745	0.426	1.032
Q11	0.597				1.62
Q12	0.704				1.795
Q13	0.565				1.578

*The factor loadings (≥ 0.4) and Cronbach's alpha (≥ 0.6) for all items are above the accepted threshold.

validity. Discriminant validity was further tested by Fornell and Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) method. Table 3 shows that the values for the constructs are lower than the threshold value of 0.9 (Gold et al., 2001; Teo et al., 2008; Henseler et al., 2015) thus discriminant validity was established. The final structural model is given in Figure 2.

Descriptive analysis

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents were female (67.1%), most of the respondents had their highest educational level as tertiary (40.8%), and the number of years of working (between one to five years) represented 58.2% of the total.

TABLE 3: Discriminant validity using the Fornell and Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) method

Code	JI	OC	QI
J1	0.898	0.68	0.346
OC	0.579	0.794	0.416
QI	-0.311	-0.389	0.652

Note: Diagonal and bold elements are the square roots of the average variance extracted and the HTMT values.

TABLE 4: Demographic profile of respondents (N = 292)

Variable	n	%	
Sex	Female	196	67.1
	Male	96	32.9
Educational level	Basic	46	15.8
	Secondary	84	28.8
	Tertiary	119	40.8
	None	43	14.6
Number of years working	<6 months	95	32.5
	1-5 years	170	58.2
	6-10 years	21	7.2
	>10 years	6	2.1

Findings

The study looked into the correlation between the variables and the descriptive test for demographic statistics. Structural equation modelling (SEM) through SmartPLS-3 was used to test the suggested hypotheses. PLS-SEM is a method for estimating complex cause-effect-relationship models in management research (Gudergan et al., 2008). Results are shown in Table 5. The study tested H1 and H2 to validate the proposed job insecurity and organisational commitment relationship as shown in Table 6. JI negatively correlates with QI.

- Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment.

The analysis results confirmed the positive relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment (H_1 ; $\beta = 0.579$, $t = 11.918$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that employees that

TABLE 5: Discriminant validity - cross loadings

Code	JI	OC	QI
J11	0.895	0.525	-0.278
J12	0.922	0.537	-0.334
J13	0.877	0.496	-0.218
OC1	0.372	0.617	-0.095
OC3	0.547	0.871	-0.4
OC4	0.408	0.804	-0.254
OC5	0.484	0.857	-0.395
Q15_r	-0.284	-0.406	0.729
Q11	-0.15	-0.136	0.597
Q12	-0.155	-0.178	0.704
Q13	-0.141	-0.111	0.565

TABLE 6: Latent variable

Code	OC	JI	QI
OC	1.000	0.579	-0.387
J1	0.579	1.000	-0.311
QI	-0.387	-0.311	1.000

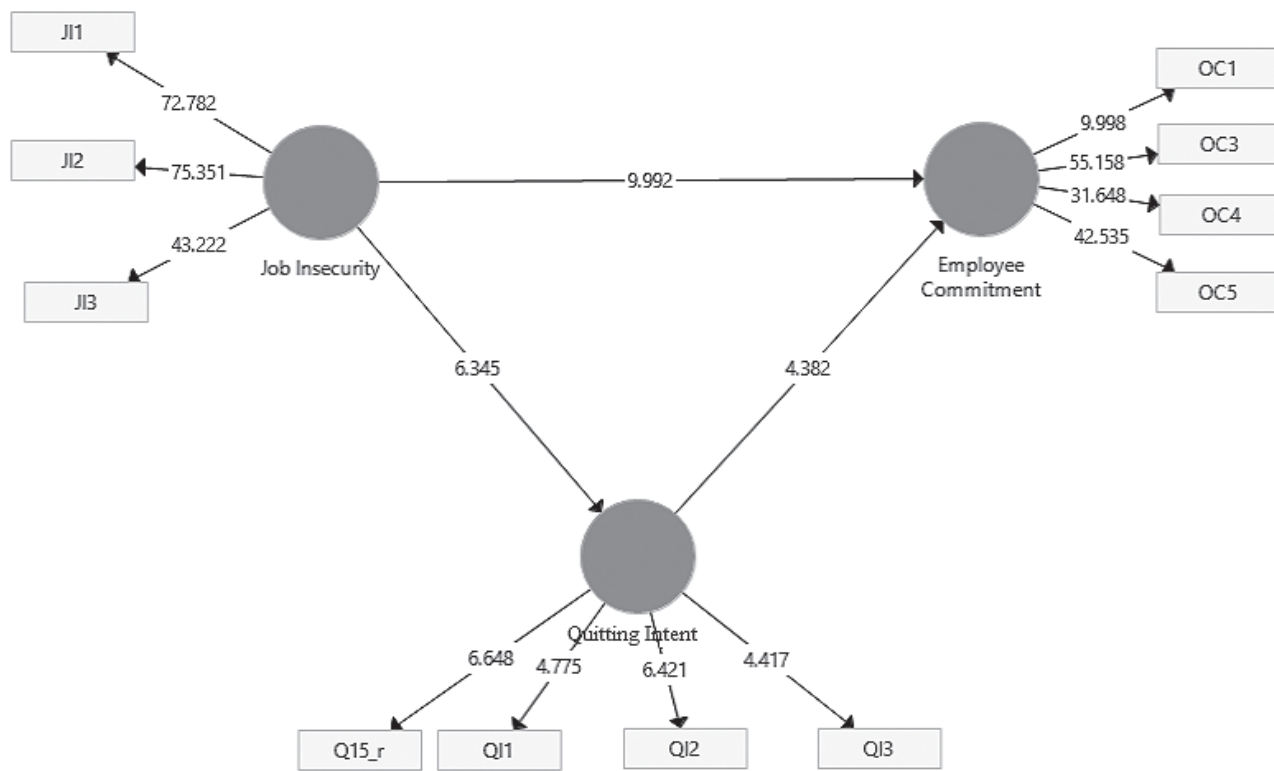


FIGURE 2: Structural model for job insecurity, employee commitment and quitting intent

are uncertain about their future prospects at work will not show much dedication and vice versa.

- Hypothesis 2: Employee job insecurity influences their intention to leave.

The analysis revealed a negative correlation between job insecurity and quitting intention ($JI \rightarrow QI = -0.311$) as indicated in Table 6. This means the more insecure an employee is about their job, the less the likelihood that they will consider quitting their job.

- Hypothesis 3: Quitting intention is a mediator of perceived job insecurity and employee commitment.

The findings confirm quitting intention as a mediator between job insecurity and employee commitment ($H_3: \beta = 0.072, t = 3.896, p < 0.001$). The detailed results for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3 are provided in Table 7. Thus, quitting intention is a significant intermediary factor that an employee considers before resigning from their job after experiencing uncertainties about future prospects on the job.

Discussion and conclusion

This study examined how job insecurity influences the level of commitment directly and indirectly through the mediating role

of quitting intention during the COVID-19 pandemic in family-owned hotels in Ghana. It is relevant because the hospitality industry was one of the most strongly affected industries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using social exchange theory, we examined job insecurity and commitment relationship in which quitting intention mediates the relationship, and established theoretical underpinnings for the link between job insecurity and commitment from responses of family-owned hotel employees in Ghana. There are past studies on job insecurity in general in an organisational environment; however, there is a scarcity of research on the perceived job insecurity from the perspective of employees in family-owned hotels and their quitting intention during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first empirical research into Ghana's hospitality industry that substantiates the significant effect of job insecurity during the pandemic from the perspective of employees in hotels. The results present a theoretical opportunity to explore justification of the factors that induce job insecurity, an academic discourse that may be further explored in future studies. The direct and indirect relationship was strong, denoting that job insecurity influences employee commitment in family-owned hotels. Our major findings also support the mediating effects.

TABLE 7: Path coefficients with t-values and p-values for the structural model

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient (β)	t-statistics	p-value	Hypothesis results
H1	JI \rightarrow OC	0.579	11.918	<0.001	Supported
H3	JI \rightarrow QI \rightarrow OC	0.072	3.896	<0.001	Mediation supported

Studies have opposed the assertion that job insecurity has a direct impact on employee commitment and quitting intentions. Some theorists assume a negative effect on employee commitment; however, with respect to the findings from Hypothesis 1, employees that are uncertain about their future prospects at work will not show much dedication and vice versa. This finding is in line with Lo Presti and Nonnis (2012), who stated that increased perceived work uncertainty reduces and inconsistently affects commitment. Similarly, Wang et al. (2015) also found out that job insecurity has a negative impact on both commitment and performance. Employees who feel insecure in the workplace cannot be controlled and do not care if they leave the job. Being a work stressor and sometimes a shock to employees who fear they might lose their jobs, job insecurity prevents employee commitment.

Results from Hypothesis 2 reveal a negative correlation between job insecurity and quitting intention. This means the more insecure employees feel about their job, the less the likelihood that they will consider quitting their job. This could be attributed to the high rate of unemployment in Ghana and the difficulties associated with finding a new job. This finding also affirms the study of Mihailescu and Rinaldi (2021), which indicates that 67.9% of unemployed people responded that it will be highly unlikely for them to get a job during COVID-19. However, the findings sharply contrast the findings of Holtom and Inderrieden (2006), who stated that job insecurity influences employees' voluntary quitting intention. Also, the findings of De Witte et al. (2016) indicate that job insecurity puts fear into employees and causes them to look for alternative jobs.

Hypothesis 3 sought to find out if quitting intention is a mediator of perceived job insecurity and employee commitment. The findings confirm quitting intention as a mediator between job insecurity and employee commitment. In line with social cognitive theory (Wood & Bandura, 1989), our results show that job insecurity deters employees' growth and learning and has an effect on quitting intention. This finding agrees with other researchers like Ashford et al. (1989), who indicated that job insecurity increases an employee's preparedness to secure a new job, and this is affirmed by Ferreira et al. (2017), who reported that employees who have the intention to leave work are not committed and under this situation, they are not involved in the work and thus exhibit the tendency to leave.

This study's findings contribute to a growing understanding considering the paucity of empirical research using job insecurity and other job factors that influence commitment, specifically in family-owned hotels in sub-Saharan Africa. If employees feel insecure in the selected hotels, they may think of quitting their jobs when they perceive their expectations are not in line with that of the organisations. Lack of strong ties and commitment may influence the tendency to leave the job and this will have an effect on productivity. Employees that lack the needed commitment occasioned by job insecurity unarguably cannot properly respond to dissatisfied customers during service encounters. The findings from this research are important as it contributes to knowledge on the interface between job insecurity and organisational commitment. Other empirical studies that corroborate the findings of this study posit that job insecurity influences job-related outcomes such as commitment, performance and engagement (Appaw et al., 2018). The results of this study also confirm the assertion by Murphy et al. (2018) that if employees have a sense of job insecurity in their

respective organisations, they begin to rethink about future progression. This may also have an effect on their relationship with the management of their organisations.

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