

Family Background and Its Impact on Job Embeddedness and Turnover Intention: The Moderating Role of the Number of Dependents and Family Income Level

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Article History

Received: 7 April 2019

Revised: 18 August 2019

Published: 30 September 2019

Abstract

This research extended the existing literature by examining the moderating effects of family background (the number of dependents and family income level) between job embeddedness and turnover intention. Family background and its impact on job embeddedness and turnover intention, to the best of the author's knowledge, has never been studied before. Data were collected from 362 full-time employees from five FMCG companies in Thailand. The findings demonstrate that organisation fit and organisation sacrifice have a negative relationship with turnover intention; on the other hand, family income level moderates the effect between job embeddedness and turnover intention. With interaction term (family income) shows significant relationship with turnover intention, we can reasonably believe the effect of turnover intention would be different for individuals who come from families with different income levels. This paper sheds light on an untouched academic field and hopefully can be extended to further investigate this area in the future.

Keywords: Job Embeddedness, Turnover Intentions, Family, Dependents, Income Level

Introduction

Employee turnover is the biggest challenge and a popular research topic in the areas of organisation behaviour and organisation psychology. Businesses are well aware of the associated costs of losing talented employees since the costs associated with finding a new employee (i.e. recruitment and training expenses) may exceed 100% of the annual salary of the job being filled (Casio, 2006). Researchers are trying to pinpoint and to understand the mechanics that drive employee turnover in order to come up with possible solutions to prevent and to reduce turnover and its potential costs (Price, 2001). In this paper, the famous job embeddedness (JE, hereafter) theory, proposed by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez (2001), who investigated its effect on employee turnover intention, will be examined. To extend the study further, we study the moderating effect of family background-number of dependents and family income level-on organisation embeddedness and turnover intention. Since the theory debut, JE has gained popularity and many empirical studies on JE have validated the theory's reliability. Consequently, the results are very promising. The majority of researches supported the significant relationship of JE with employee turnover. The findings showed JE is a better predictor of turnover over traditional variables such as job satisfaction, job alternatives, job search, and organisation commitment (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Crossley et al., 2007; Mallol, Holtom, & Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2004). JE is the concept exploring factors or the web of forces related to why employees continue to *stay* within a particular organisation in contrary to the traditional turnover predictors that study the reasons

of why they leave. JE theory introduced three key components-fit, link, and sacrifice-that enhance employee attitudes towards staying; those who are highly embedded have more reasons to stay. It is a combination of psychological, social, and financial influences on employee turnover (Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012). Employees that score highly on JE are less likely to leave the organisation (Holtom et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, the theory was based on the Western context. Holtom et al. (2008) suggested JE and turnover theories have paid little attention to cultural differences within and among countries. This is in line with Ramesh & Gelfand (2010) and Peltokorpi, Allen & Froese (2015) arguing that there have been few studies of turnover across cultures. There exists differences between Western and Eastern cultures, especially when it comes down to 'Family'. East and West have different views and stances on the influences of family on the decision made by an employee. In the West, where individualism is favoured, employees emphasise an individual's autonomy and independence (Bochner, 1994; Kashima & Callan, 1994). In the East, however, where collectivism is preferred, family is a significant part of employees' decision making because the emphasis is on the values of belongingness, harmony, and cooperation (Triandis, 1995). In Asia, family has long been known to be a significant part of one's life. Asian people place a high value on family as the main source of identity and protection against the hardships of life. Many researchers have started to look into the importance of family and its effect on the individual's turnover decision (Posthuma et al., 2005), since the opinions of family can affect individuals' decisions to stay with an organisation. In this research, two family variables will be tested, as well as their moderating impact on JE and turnover intention. First is the number of dependents that employees must take care of, i.e. spouses, kids, parents, siblings, and relatives. The number of dependents can affect employees' turnover decision because the greater the number of dependents, the more pressure there is on them to have a stable income; in addition, there are more things to consider when deciding to leave one's job since their decision will affect the people who rely and depend on him/her. Secondly, in this study we are interested in whether family income background affects employees' decision to leave. Family income background, based on Thompson & Hickey (2005), can range from lower to working class, lower middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class. Some employees have more responsibilities than others, whereas some have high stability and are financially free and so can leave their job whenever they like.

In this research, we extend JE theory in three areas. First, we explore JE in the context of an Asian country, namely Thailand, to see which aspects of organisation embeddedness will play the greatest role in predicting employee turnover in a collectivist culture such as Thailand. This will extend the theory that is mainly conducted in the West to an Asian developing country. Second, we examine the theory based on individual differences, particularly on the effect of family background on turnover intention. Employees act differently based on the differences in demographic characteristics. A study conducted by Peltokorpi, Allen & Froese (2015) shows demographic characteristics and value orientations moderate the relationship between embeddedness and turnover intention. To our knowledge, to date, family background has never been tested before. Lastly, in our study, we will examine the moderating effect of family background on embeddedness and turnover intentions. This is to answer the main research question of whether an employee's family background has a moderating effect on JE and turnover intention.

Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

JE

JE theory is based from the ideas of embedded figures and field theory in psychological testing (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014; Peltokorpi, Allen & Froese, 2015). A highly

embedded person has more attachment and a greater number of reasons for not quitting the organisation, and vice versa. The theory explores the factors that make employees more likely to stay, in addition to the reasons that make them leave. Researchers describe embeddedness as a form of “stuckness” or a “spider web” that prompts an employee to stay with an organisation (Peltokorpi, Allen & Froese, 2015; Lee et al., 2014).

Embeddedness theory consists of three components: fit, link, and sacrifice. These three components can be further categorised into either work-related or nonwork-related; thus, forming a total of six dimensions of JE theory. Nonetheless, the nonwork-related category has been shown to be a non-stable predictor of turnover through an inconclusive and difference results reveal from past literatures (Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012). In this study, only the work-related dimension will be discussed; namely, *organisation fit*, *organisation links*, and *organisation sacrifice*. As the name suggests, organisation fit is how well a person, in their opinion, is suitable for a job. This can happen when personal values, skills, ability, and career aspirations are compatible with the organisation he or she belongs to. The stronger the fit the lesser the employee turnover (Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001). Organisation link refers to the ties or social network of the individual with organisation members. Link can be either formal or informal and is usually a relationship with a supervisor, co-worker, or another party in the organisation; those with greater numbers of links are less likely to leave (Mosshaolder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005; Yao et al., 2004; Friedman & Holtom, 2002; Burt, 2001). Organisation sacrifice is the cost of material or psychological benefits-in addition to other job-related losses-an employee has to give up if they were to leave an organisation. It is the sacrifice one has to bear when leaving the organisation and includes money (salary), health insurance, or other benefits.

Empirical studies on organisation embeddedness have shown that all three components are significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention. The greater one’s compatibility with the job-particularly if that job comes with great people and great benefits-the less likely it is for one to think about quitting. This is particularly true in a collectivistic culture where group identity is important to one’s value (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Beck & Beck, 1994). Nonetheless, the cross-cultural implications of JE remain unclear: Do people from different backgrounds and cultures leave for the same reasons suggested by the JE theory? The work of Ramesh & Gelfand (2010) suggested a different method of predicting turnover intention in Western and non-Western cultures; the study compared whether people leave for the same reasons in India and in the U.S., two culturally different countries. Person-job fit was a significant JE dimension for predicting turnover in the U.S., whereas person-organisation fit and organisation link ranked high in predicting a lower turnover in India. This result suggested a difference culturally. Ramesh & Gelfand (2010) stated that even though research on JE theory has increased in recent years, almost all of the published works have been conducted in the U.S. or the U.K.. The cultural aspect is often ignored and is one of the most neglected antecedents in exploring factors affecting turnover decisions (Maertz, 2004; Miller et al., 2001; Posthuma et al., 2005). This in turn gives rise to this paper to extend JE theory in a non-Western collectivistic culture from an emic perspective to test the impact of JE and its components on turnover intention in Thailand.

Hypothesis 1a: Organisation fit has a significant negative relationship with turnover intentions in Thailand

Hypothesis 1b: Organisation link has a significant negative relationship with turnover intentions in Thailand

Hypothesis 1c: Organisation sacrifice has a significant negative relationship with turnover intentions in Thailand

Family background: Number of dependents and family income

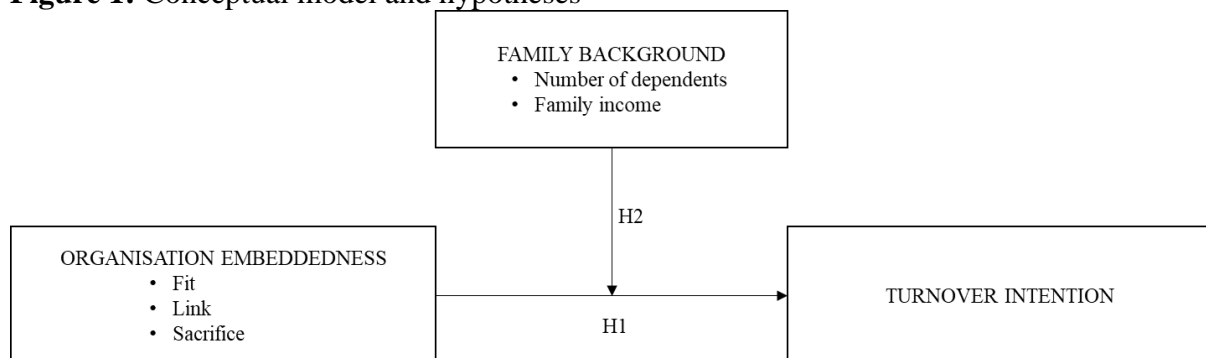
There remains no concrete evidence stating whether the number of dependents and family income background plays a role in turnover intention. As noted in the previous section, in collectivist cultures family is a crucial part of one's life and often has an impact on employees' decision making. It is expected that with a higher number of dependents, employees have a greater need for a stable job and income. This held universally true both for Western and Eastern cultures. However, this can be much stronger in Eastern cultures where collectivism is high, and one often has an extensive network of dependents. Moreover, they are frequently expected to take care of and financially support their elders and sometimes siblings and other relatives.

Family income background, as categorised by Thompson & Hickey (2005), can be classified into five sections; namely, lower class, working class, lower middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class. In this research, we hypothesise that those who enjoy the privilege of being a part of the upper class will act and think differently to those coming from the lower class. This is because those from richer backgrounds can have a higher turnover intention rate than those of lower classes when, during their employment, they are unsatisfied or encounter obstacles because they are able to quit whenever they want. They would have a cushion to fall on and food on the table with or without a job, in contrast to those that have to work to take care of themselves (and others) and have bills to pay. The likelihood of them being stuck in an organisation is higher. Therefore, we hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 2a: The number of dependent moderates the negative relationship between organisation embeddedness and turnover intention

Hypothesis 2b: Family income background moderates the negative relationship between organisation embeddedness and turnover intention

Figure 1: Conceptual model and hypotheses



Research methods

Sample and procedure

This research is an exploratory cross-sectional study in which data were collected through an online survey platform. Five Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies in Thailand were selected and contacted. E-mails containing web links to the questionnaire were sent out to all employees through the help of the companies' human resources departments, thus introducing the study to the participants, where they completed the online survey. A total of 432 responses were received. Eliminating incompleteness and missing data, a total of 362 usable responses were used in our final sample. Before the final questionnaire was distributed, a pilot study was conducted to gain validity and to determine whether any adjustments were needed.

In our final sample, the average age of respondents was 30.51 years old ($SD=5.77$), with the majority (72.90%) being female. The respondents had different educational backgrounds, with 172 respondents (47.50%) having a master's degree, whilst 72 respondents (19.90%) and 118 respondents (32.60%) had a bachelor's degree or a degree lower than a bachelor's degree, respectively. Participants' average tenure in their current company was 2.35 years ($SD=1.16$). For participants' number of dependents, 112 respondents (30.90%) had no dependents, meaning they worked only to support themselves, while the rest had to support either their parents, siblings, relatives, spouse, or kids. 178 respondents (49.2%) had one dependent to take care of, 64 respondents (17.70%) had two dependents, and eight respondents (2.2%) had three dependents. For family income class, 1.70%, 15.50%, 52.50%, 27.10% and 3.30% considered themselves growing up in the lower class, working class, lower middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class, respectively. The average family income level for our sample was 3.15 ($SD=0.78$), which meant that the majority of our respondents live between the lower-to upper-middle classes.

Measures

The questions used in the questionnaires were selected from the previous literature through an extensive literature review. Questionnaires were translated to Thai and back-translated to prove their reliability.

Demographic characteristics and family background. In addition to age, gender, education level, and tenure in their current organisation, respondents were asked for their number of dependents and their family income class. For number of dependents, respondents chose one answer for their number of dependents—none, parents, siblings, relatives, spouse (only), spouse and kids. The family income class was separated into five categories; lower class: “My family barely [has] the means to meet [our] day-to-day living expenses. It is very difficult for us to put food on the table”; working class: “We have got just enough to get by for daily expenses. We generally do not have savings”; lower middle income level: “We have enough money to live comfortably, but we don't have money to waste on luxuries”; upper-middle level: “I have brand name items. My parents bought me a car when I first went to college. We often go on a family holiday once a year”; upper level: “I do not generally have to work for a living; I have my own trust fund”.

Turnover intention. Turnover intention was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). The five questions asked were taken from Crossley et al. (2007) and Crossley, Grauer, Lin, & Stanton (2002). A sample question is: “I intend to leave this organisation soon.” Among the five questions, there was one reverse-coded statement: “I do not plan on leaving this organisation soon.” The Cronbach's alpha of the five items was 0.87

Organisational embeddedness. The questions were adapted from Hom et al. (2009) and Mitchell et al. (2001) measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). Only the questions on organisation fit, link, and sacrifice were used in this study. Our final scale on embeddedness consisted of 24 questions. The sample questions on organisation fit, link, and sacrifices are: “I feel like I am a good match for this company”, “How long have you worked for this company?” and “I am satisfied with [the] compensation for my level of performance (such as fixed salary and variable pay)”, respectively. The overall reliability of the 24-item organisation embeddedness scale was 0.696

Control variables. In line with many studies in the turnover field, and in an effort to test the discriminant validity of JE and respondent family background, we included the following control variables: age, gender, education, tenure, job satisfaction, perceived job alternative, and job search behaviour in our model. Job satisfaction was measured using three adopted questions from Mitchell et al. (2001), perceived job alternatives using the three-item scale from Steel and Griffeth (1989), and job search behaviours using the 12-item scale from Blau

(1994). Since Blau (1994) is rather out-of-date, adjustment were made. During pilot testing, the sample group suggested the main source of job hunting is via the famous job search site LinkedIn; the changed statement is: “Search for wanted/classified ads online, LinkedIn, or in a newspaper, journal, or professional association.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the studied variables. Organisational fit ($r=-.29, p<0.01$) and organisation sacrifice ($r=-.31, p<0.01$) had a negative relationship with turnover intention, suggesting that the greater an employee fitted an organisation, and the more afraid he/she became of losing the benefits the company offered, the longer they tended to stay and, as such, the less they thought about quitting. Nonetheless, organisation links have been shown to have no significant relationship with turnover intention. Overall, JE is negatively correlated with turnover intention ($r = -.14, p < 0.01$), which supports the theoretical grounds of this study. The more an employee is embedded, the less they want to quit. The number of dependents also has a significant negative relationship with turnover intention at $r = -.23, p < 0.01$, meaning that the larger the number of dependents, the less an employee thinks about quitting. Family income demonstrates a positive significant relationship with turnover intention at $r = 0.34, p < 0.01$; that is, the richer one is, the more one thinks about turnover. Thus, we rejected Hypothesis 1b and accepted Hypotheses 1a and 1c.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the studied variables.

Variable	Correlations								
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. Turnover intention	3.45	1.79							
2. Organisation fit	3.70	0.62	-.29**						
3. Organisation links	3.89	2.20	.01	.10*					
4. Organisation sacrifice	3.58	0.62	-.31**	.59**	.03				
5. JE	11.17	2.53	-.14**	.48**	.90**	.41**			
6. Number of dependents	0.91	0.75	-.23**	.25**	.07	.23**	.18**		
7. Family Income	3.15	0.78	.34**	.07	-.03	-.00	-.01	-.24**	

Note. $N=362$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

We conducted a linear hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2) with turnover intention as the dependent variable to test H2. In Model 1, we included all the control variables as predictors. In Model 2, we tested organisation fit, link, and sacrifice. The results showing organisation link do not have a significant relationship with turnover intention. The components of JE that are negatively associated with turnover intention in our sample are organisation fit ($\beta=-.022, p<0.05$) and organisation sacrifice ($\beta=-.120, p<0.05$).

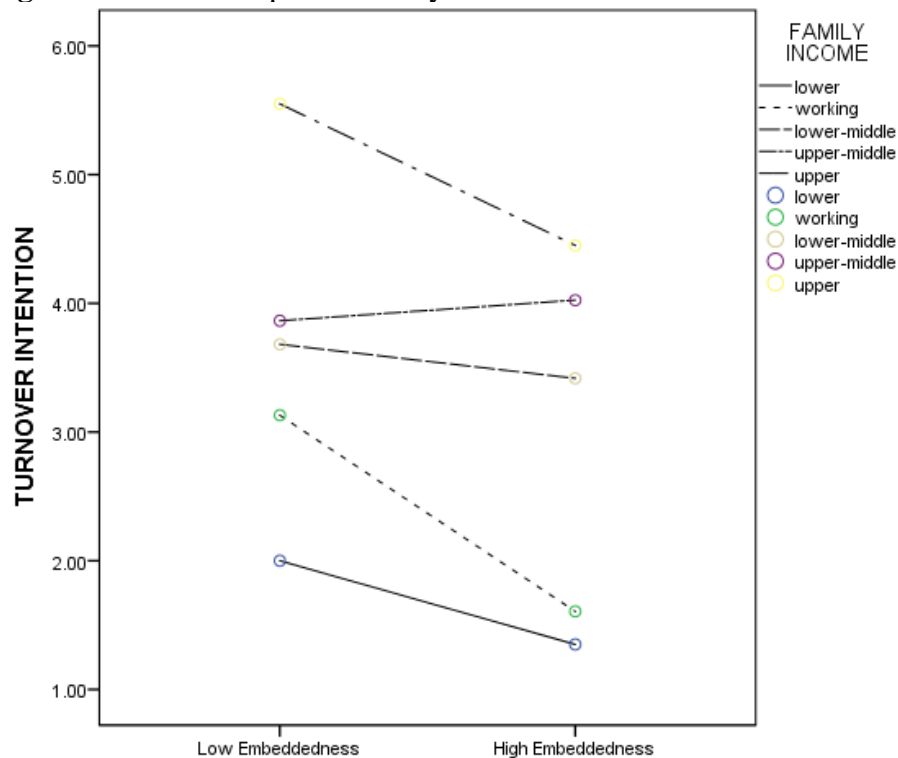
In Model 3, we introduced the interaction terms to test H2. The number of dependents as an interaction term to JE does not demonstrate a significant relationship with turnover intention. However, family income level significantly interacts with JE in predicting turnover intentions ($\beta=.322, p<0.001$); an increased R^2 ($\Delta R^2=.041$) indicates that the interaction terms are meaningful. To facilitate the interpretation of the significant interaction terms, we plotted the relationship of family income and its moderation of JE and turnover intention in Figure 2. From the results shown, Hypothesis 2a is rejected and Hypothesis 2b is accepted.

Table 2: Results of linear hierarchical regression analysis on turnover intention.

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
(Constant)						
Age	-.191	-3.514***	-.208	-3.796***	-.177	-3.294**
Gender	-.004	-.079	-.010	-.216	-.026	-.584
Education	.105	2.086*	.103	2.001*	-.044	-.756
Tenure	.112	2.072*	.084	1.357	.130	2.091*
JS	-.285	-5.653***	-.204	-3.197**	-.178	-2.831**
PJA	.199	4.055***	.194	3.929***	.164	3.385**
JSB	.128	2.603**	.132	2.673**	.151	3.120*
Org.Fit			-.022	-.345*	-.106	-1.640*
Org.Link			.064	1.176	-.128	-1.800
Org.Sacrifice			-.120	-1.975*	-.179	-2.913**
JE x No. of Dependents					-.078	-1.493
JE x Family Income					.322	4.303***
R^2	.303		.317		.358	
ΔR^2			.014		.041	
F	21.954***		16.260***		16.190***	
ΔF			2.376		11.142	

Note. $N=362$, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Family income level: 1=lower, 2=working class, 3=lower-middle, 4=upper-middle, 5=upper

Figure 2: Interaction plot of family income and JE

Discussion

Does an employee's family background have a moderating effect on JE and turnover intention? If so, which of the JE facets plays a significant role in turnover intention in the case of a collectivism culture such as Thailand?

Through our analysis, we found organisation fit and organisation sacrifice to have a significant negative effect on turnover intention, which is in line with the original work by Mitchell et al. (2001). The significant relationship of organisation fit and organisation sacrifice is not a surprise finding. However, it contradicts the work of Ramesh & Gelfand (2010) which found that in India, another collectivism country, fit and link were significant predictors of turnover. Link has not been consistently associated with turnover in past literature, and our finding thus supports the notion that increased links do not necessarily translate into higher embeddedness. Companies should therefore consider link quality rather than link quantity to encourage employees to stay. Fit and sacrifice are make employees more embedded in their job; hence employers should focus their attention on recruiting and selecting the employees that best fit the company so as to reduce the turnover rate and to provide satisfactory (and if possible, above average) compensation and benefit packages to welcome employees to the organisation.

The interaction effect of family income level and JE have shown to be a significant predictor of turnover intention; individuals with a less fortunate background have increased loyalty to the firm. This provide a great input to the academic world where family income level could also play a part in predicting turnover intention. However, another observed factor, the number of dependents, does not demonstrate any interaction effect on turnover intention. This is not in line with our hypothesis that states that a higher number of dependents means it is harder for an employee to leave their job. The reason behind this result could stem from our sample, in which the majority only had one dependent to take care of. All in all, it would be interesting to further examine the number of dependents and family income level to determine whether this could also hold true in other contexts and settings.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, this research is context specific in that it is limited to only 362 samples from FMCG industries in Thailand. Further investigation is needed to see whether the results can be generalised to the Thai population and, if possible, from a variety of industries. Secondly, this research is a cross-sectional study where turnover intention was observed at a given point in time. Due to our time constraints, future research could be conducted as a longitudinal study observing both turnover intention and actual turnover. Third, the person's own interpretation of family income level could be simply their perception of it and may not be true of their actual status. Nonetheless, this research has shed light on additional observed factors, namely family background, that might play a role in turnover intention. Further research to examine this factor in different situations would be of interest to the field.

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