

Foreign Coworker Discrimination to Turnover Intentions Moderated by  
International Working Experience and Marital Status.

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions and the moderating role of international working experience in the current company's host country as well as marital status. The convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were used to collect the data from Thai employees who are working with international air transport companies and have foreign coworkers. Questionnaires were distributed onsite at their offices in Thailand and online via email and social media. Finally, 376 questionnaires were included in the data analysis by Partial least square structural equation modeling. To confirm the internal consistency, the convergent and discriminant factor analyses were used to assess the validity while Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficient were used to test the reliability. The results supported the positive association between the perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions. In addition, the association was found to be stronger for the employees who are single or have longer international working experience in the current company's host country. The practical contributions on how to minimize the perceived foreign coworker discrimination have been discussed.

**Keywords:** Foreign Coworker Discrimination, Turnover Intentions, Two-factor Theory

## Introduction

Service businesses play a vital role in driving the world economy by enhancing productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020). According to the World Bank (2022), they have accounted for more than 60% of the world GDP since 1995 and employed more than half of the world's job positions. Although they were severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, they are expected to be continuously recovered (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020). Even though there are new technology inventions for the workplace that are designed to replace laborers with machines, some skills are found beyond machines' capabilities; especially, those skills that are compulsory in service businesses such as communication or customer-oriented (Jacobs & Roodt, 2011). Hence, employees' turnover intentions are more likely to harm the service businesses than others. Compared to other assets, employees are the most difficult to manage because the human mental process is complicated. Various factors should be concerned; however, these factors might influence some employees but not others. Therefore, it is necessary to explore which factors could enhance or lower the level of employees' turnover intentions in order to mitigate the actual turnover rate (Buttner & Lowe, 2017).

This study focused on Thai employees who are working with international air transport companies and have foreign coworkers. The study proposed that foreign coworker discrimination could be easily formed under the international working environment and it tends to influence employees' turnover intentions. Although workplace discrimination has been studied in various groups, such as American (Bibby, 2008) Filipinos (De Castro, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008), Turkish (Özer & Günlük, 2010; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011), Southeast Asian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Arab (Banerjee, 2008; Qu, Jo, & Choi, 2020), Canadian (Jones, Finkelstein, & Koehoorn, 2018), African (De Beer, Rothmann Jr, & Pienaar, 2016; L. T. Jackson & Van de Vijver, 2018; S. Jackson & Jackson, 2019), Hindi, Bengali (Mirpuri, Ocampo, Narang, Roberts, & Gany, 2020), Pakistani (Husainaa & Bahron, 2017), the study in Thai employees is scarce. Thai people are well-known for their outstanding hospitality service that is impressive

and unforgettable (Altinay & Poudel, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the number of Thai people are hired in the service companies worldwide. The objective of this study is to provide extra evidence to prior studies on the influence of workplace discrimination based on the Herzberg two-factor theory. Moreover, this study will also extend the knowledge that the effect intensity of discrimination might be varied according to the employees' characteristics that are marital status and international working experience in the current company's host country.

## Literature Review

### Perceived foreign coworker discrimination

Workplace discrimination is a personal perception and happens when employees feel that they received different and unfair treatment because of their differences (Irhamni & Kristanto, 2021). Their differences may be due to their personal characteristics (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001; Rhead et al., 2021), for example, gender, age, race (Banerjee, 2008; De Castro et al., 2008; Mirpuri et al., 2020; Qu et al., 2020), marital status (Sharma & Kaur, 2019), and disability (Jones et al., 2018), as they were found to associate with the perceived discrimination in the workplace. Madera, King, and Hebl (2012) pointed out that workplace discrimination will be perceived when two essentials are formed; which are belonging to a group and comparing treatment between each group member. Discrimination is more likely encouraged by social norms (Nelson, 2009). The study of Van Laer and Janssens (2011) found that racial discrimination against colleagues may unintentionally occur and it was found to impact the organizational commitment (Ensher et al., 2001). Discrimination in the workplace tends not only to affect the work but also personal life and it impacts both physically and mentally (Nelson, 2009). Previous research found that perceived discrimination influences job satisfaction (Irhamni & Kristanto, 2021), organizational commitment, intention to quit (S. Jackson & Jackson, 2019), organizational attachment (Qu et al., 2020), long sick leave, anxiety (Rhead et al., 2021), physical health (Lewis et al., 2006; Mirpuri et al., 2020), and mental health (Di Napoli et al., 2021; Mirpuri et al., 2020).

## Turnover Intentions

Turnover intentions reflect the employees' attitude toward their job (Cohen, Blake, & Goodman, 2016). It refers to the mental process of leaving the company; it includes having an idea to quit the job, thinking of searching for another job, and the intention to quit the job and it tends to relate to the actual turnover decision (Nanayakkara & Dayarathna, 2016). Employees' turnover intention tends to be unavoidable (Modau, Dhanpat, Lugisani, Mabojane, & Phiri, 2018) and happened no matter where or what types of organizations are; hence, proper mechanisms, techniques, or procedures should be put into practice in order to balance the employee turnover rate (Belete, 2018). When the qualified employees quit their job, it extensively costs the organizations; for instance, cost of employee development that could be in form of providing training, cost of recruitment and selection processes, and cost of operations interruption during looking for a new employee and while the new employee is getting familiarization with the jobs (Chiat & Panatik, 2019). Employees' turnover intentions could be developed by organizational-, team-, dyad-, or personal variables. Previous research found that organizational commitment (Irhamni & Kristanto, 2021), perceived organizational support (Hui, Wong, & Tjosvold, 2007), perceived organizational justice (Buttner & Lowe, 2017; Özer & Günlük, 2010), organizational diversity climate (Kaplan, Wiley, & Maertz Jr, 2011), perception of discrimination (Bibby, 2008), and job satisfaction (Irhamni & Kristanto, 2021; Özer & Günlük, 2010) have an effect on the employees' turnover intentions.

## The Herzberg Two-factor perspective

The Two-factor theory was first published by Herzberg in 1959 (F Herzberg, 2009). He introduced two dimensions that are used to explain the motivation in workplace; they are motivational factors and maintenance factors. Motivational factors refer to job characteristics that promote job satisfaction and long-term job performance. They are mostly concerned with the job content, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement. The presence of motivational factors tends to promote favorable behaviors, but its absence tends not to promote unfavorable behaviors. The maintenance factors refer to job characteristics that prevent job dissatisfaction and temporarily affect job attitudes and performance. They

are most concerned with the job environment, for example, company policy and administration, job security, and relationship with coworkers. The presence of maintenance factors tends not to enhance favorable behaviors, but its absence tends to stimulate unfavorable behaviors (Frederick Herzberg, 1968; Nanayakkara & Dayarathna, 2016).

### **The effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on employees' turnover intentions**

This study proposed that Thai employees who perceived higher level of foreign coworker discrimination tend to develop a higher level of turnover intentions. This relationship could be theoretically explained by the Two-factor theory. Working with foreign coworkers, the difference in races is the most noticeable and found to be one of the most powerful categorized criteria (Mohammed & Angell, 2004). Social categorization theory implied that employees start categorizing when they feel dissimilarity; accordingly, the international workgroup is mentally divided into various sub-workgroups on the basis of their races. Employees, then, tend to develop stereotypes of other group members and treat them unfavorably (Chen & Li, 2009; Worchsel, 2005). Moreover, they prefer to interact with their group members and treat them more favorably (Chen & Li, 2009; Rockstuhl & Ng, 2008). These unfair treats by coworkers due to their group membership according to the social category enhance Thai employees' perception of being discriminated against; this negative relationship with coworkers tends to represent the absence of maintenance factor. The result of previous research showed that maintenance factors influence longer sickness leave (Rhead et al., 2021) and turnover intentions (Mirpuri et al., 2020; Nanayakkara & Dayarathna, 2016; Ng, Sears, & Bakkaloglu, 2020). Based on the supporting evidence, this hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived foreign coworker discrimination is positively associated with turnover intentions*

## The moderating effect of employees' international working experience in the current company's host country

Another estimation of this study is employees' international working experience in the current company's host country also intensifies the positive effect of the perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions. International working experience in the current company's host country refers to the number of years that Thai employees had worked with other companies located in the host country of the current company before; for example, "Have you ever worked in the United States before joining this American company?" or "Have you ever worked in China before joining this Chinese company?". If yes, how long was that?

Thai employees who have longer international working experience in the current company's host countries may have encountered discrimination during working in the former workplace which could be a reason why they decided to leave that company. Joining the current workplace, where social group characteristic is similar to the former workplace and the discrimination is still taking place, could make them more suffering for a longer period of time. Hence, the role of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on enhancing the turnover intentions may be stronger for this group of Thai employees. Contrary, Thai employees who never or had shorter international working experience in the current company's host countries tend to encounter a lower level of discrimination. Hence, the role of perceived foreign coworker discrimination for this group of Thai employees in promoting their turnover intentions should be weaker. Based on the supported discussions above, the hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 2: The positive association between perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions is moderated by the international working experience in the current company's host country.*

*The effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions is stronger for employees who have longer international working experience in the current company's host country.*

*The effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions is weaker for employees who don't have or have shorter international working experience in the current company's host country.*

#### **The moderating effect of employees' marital status**

This study also proposed that the marital status of Thai employees may influence the effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions. According to Heikkinen (2015, p. 15), "spouse 'matters' within a career and ultimately within organization". This is in line with the study of Anita, Abdillah, Wu, Sapthiarsyah, and Sari (2020) who found that married employees who have a work-life balance have a high level of performance. The spouse's support also helps them to cope with challenges in the workplace (Ocampo, Restubog, Liwag, Wang, & Petelczyc, 2018). This is corresponding with the results from previous research which found that married employees have longer job tenure and develop less turnover intention than single employees (Mosadeghrad, Ferlie, & Rosenberg, 2011; Mumford & Smith, 2004).

Conforming to family systems theory, self-differentiation is a function of the marital system. Self-differentiation allows married employees to separate their thinking from the feeling which enhances flexibility (Bowen, 1976). The positive relationship between self-differentiation and marital satisfaction was found in the study by Peleg (2008). Given that married life not only allows a more tolerant attitude toward others but also enhances the adaptation in order to maintain a smooth and happy marriage (Skowron, 2000), married Thai employees would be able to restore the balance of perceived foreign coworker discrimination and keep working to achieve their jobs. Marriage life tends to be one of the powerful resources that help them to handle this job demand in the workplace. Even though married Thai employees have perceived foreign coworker discrimination, their self-differentiation and spouse support may neutralize the role of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on the turnover intentions. Based on the above supporting evidence, this hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 3: The positive association between perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions is moderated by the employees' marital status.*

*The effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions is stronger for employees who are single.*

*The effect of perceived foreign coworker discrimination on turnover intentions is weaker for employees who are married.*

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Sample and Data Collection**

The sample of this study is Thai employees who are working with international air transport companies and have foreign coworkers. The convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were applied in the data collection. Although the convenience sampling method could limit the generalization of the population, it allows the easy and maximum reach of the samples as well as less time and cost consuming (Cr, 2020; Sekaran, 2003). Questionnaires were distributed onsite at their offices in Thailand and online via email and social media. Finally, a total of 376 questionnaires was analyzed. The respondents' personal and job characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

The study is quantitative with the cross-sectional approach. A self-assessment questionnaire was employed for data collection. Conforming to the ethical consideration for justice, participants who were invited to participate were voluntary. They were first introduced with the participant information sheet which indicated all details of this study including the backgrounds, aims, processes, and benefactions. They were also informed about how the obtained data would be confidentially and anonymously treated. They were finally shown the informed consent statement. They can either leave or participate in this data collection process. Even though they have started filling out the questionnaire, they can stop anywhere they want; and those questionnaires will not be included in the analysis. Participants can also skip any questions if they feel uncomfortable. The obtained data will be destroyed after 3

years. The data collection procedures and tool have been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC). The reference number is KUREC-SS63/244.

**Table 1 Respondents' characteristics.**

Demographic factors	Descriptive statistics
Gender	Female: 330 (87.77%) Male: 45 (11.97%) Not specify 1 (0.26%)
Marital Status	Single: 315 (83.78%) Married: 61 (16.22%)
Age (years)	Min: 21 Max: 51 Mean: 33.32 SD: 6.835
International working experience in company's host country (years)	Min: 0 Max: 5 Mean: 0.059 SD: 0.415
International education experience in company's host country (years)	Min: 0 Max: 3 Mean: 0.037 SD: 0.271

### Measurement Tools

There are two main parts of the questionnaire. In the first part, the participants were asked about their personal and work characteristics. In the second part, the participants were asked to evaluate the level of their perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions.

The level of perceived foreign coworker discrimination was measured by adopting the scale developed by Sanchez and Brock (1996) which was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The level of turnover intentions was measured by adopting the scale developed by (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) which was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (a lot).

International working experience in the current company's host country, the moderating variable, was measured by the number of years that they had worked with other companies located in the host country of the current company before.

Employee's marital status, another moderating variable, was measured by using a dummy variable; single was coded as 0 and married was coded as 1.

### **Control variables**

Control variables included age which was measured by a number of years; and the international education experience in the current company's host country which was measured by the number of years that they had studied in the host country of the current company before.

### **Estimation method**

The tool that was used to analyze the proposed hypotheses in this study is Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). It was designed to analyze several dependent variables from a set of one more independent variables and handle non-normal distributed data (Garson, 2016). The Jarque-Bera (Normal-JB) test and the Robust Jarque-Bera (Normal-RJB) test were conducted to assess the data distribution (Jarque & Bera, 1980). The results showed that all variables have non-normally distributed data confirming that PLS-SEM is appropriate for the analysis in this study. Warp PLS version 7.0 was used to perform the analysis in this study.

### **Results**

The validity and reliability of variables were tested before the analysis. Factor loadings were used to perform the convergent validity test. The results showed that all variables have loadings greater than 0.5, which is an acceptable level recommended by Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle,

and Mena (2012), and they are presented in Table 2. Later, the comparison between the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) and its correlations with other variables was used to perform the discriminant validity test. The results showed that the square root of AVE is higher than its correlations with other variables, which is satisfactory as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and they are shown in table 3. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficient were used to perform the reliability test. The results showed that all scores are higher than .899, which is above the minimum requirement of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The results are presented in Table 2. Furthermore, a full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) was performed, and the results showed that the VIF values of all variables are less than 3.3 which ensures that multicollinearity was not a serious problem in this model (Kock, 2017). The values are presented in Table 4. The results from the PLS-SEM analysis are as follow and are shown in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that perceived foreign coworker discrimination is positively associated with turnover intentions. The results show that there is a significantly positive association between these two variables ( $\beta=.377$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Hence, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the positive association between the perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions was moderated by the international working experience in the current company's host country. The result supported the positive moderation ( $\beta=.085$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The regression line comparing between the longer and shorter period of the international working experience in the current company's host country is shown in figure 2.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that the positive association between the perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions was moderated by the employee's marital status. The result supported the moderation of employees' marital status ( $\beta=-.183$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The regression line comparing between married and single employees is shown in figure 2.

Apart from the relationships of the main hypotheses, the relationships of the control variables were as follows. Employees' age is significantly associated with turnover intentions

( $\beta=.115$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while international education experience in the current company's host country is insignificantly associated with turnover intentions ( $\beta=.033$ ,  $p=.214$ ).

Table 2 Validity and Reliability Analysis Results

Variables	Factor Loadings		Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Composite Reliability coefficient
DISC			.919	.933
DISC1	(0.640)	-0.006		
DISC2	(0.666)	0.016		
DISC3	(0.703)	-0.015		
DISC4	(0.754)	0.031		
DISC5	(0.778)	0.013		
DISC6	(0.784)	0.178		
DISC7	(0.853)	-0.003		
DISC8	(0.766)	-0.011		
DISC9	(0.843)	-0.079		
DISC10	(0.819)	-0.112		
TurnInt			.899	.930
TurnInt 1	-0.005	(0.865)		
TurnInt 2	0.044	(0.927)		
TurnInt 3	-0.112	(0.799)		
TurnInt 4	0.058	(0.911)		

Notes: DISC = Perceived foreign coworker discrimination, TurnInt = Turnover Intentions,

Table 3 The correlations and square root of average variance extracted of variables.

Variables	DISC	TurnInt	Int'l Work Exp	MStatus	Age	Int'l EduExp	Int'l WorkExp * DISC	MStatus * DISC
DISC	(.764)	.413***	.008	-.012	.118*	.030	-.027	-.130*
TurnInt		(.877)	-.023	.030	.161**	.014	.057	-.234***
Int'l WorkExp			(1.000)	.043	-.020	.384***	.188***	-.013
Marital Status				(1.000)	.275***	.074	-.013	-.024
Age					(1.000)	.041	-.019	-.004
Int'l EduExp						(1.000)	-.245***	-.035
WorkExp * DISC							(1.000)	-.017
MStatus * DISC								(1.000)

Notes:

- \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p <.01, \*p <.05
- Square roots of average variance extracted of latent variables are shown in parentheses.
- DISC = Perceived foreign coworker discrimination, TurnInt = Turnover Intentions, MStatus = Marital status,
- Int'l WorkExp = International working experience in the current company's host country,
- Int'l EduExp = International education experience in the current company's host country

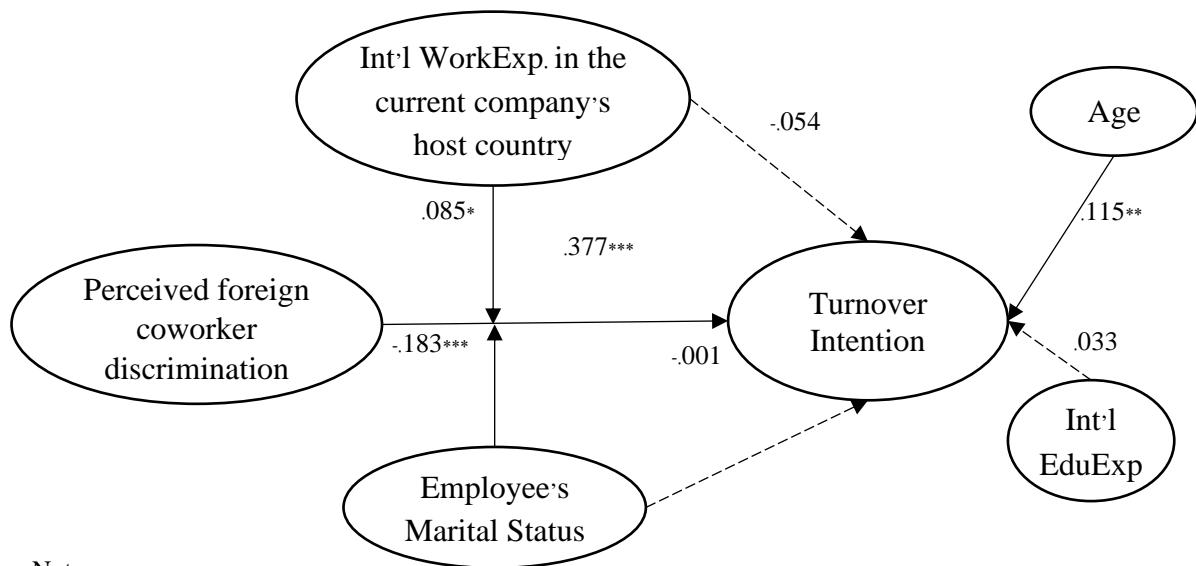
Table 4 Variance inflation factor values and Data distribution

	DISC	Intention to leave	Int'l WorkExp	MStatus	Age	Int'l EduExp	Int'l WorkExp * DISC	MStatus * DISC
VIF values	1.219	1.288	1.309	1.091	1.120	1.346	1.192	1.063
Normal-JB	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Normal-RJB	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Notes: DISC = Perceived foreign coworker discrimination, TurnInt = Turnover Intentions,

MStatus = Marital status, Int'l WorkExp = International working experience in the current company's host country,

Int'l EduExp = International education experience in the current company's host country



Notes:

- \*\*\* $<.001$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \* $p<.05$
- Standardized coefficients are reported.
- Solid line represents a relationship that is statistically significant.
- Int'l WorkExp = International working experience in the current company's host country, Int'l EduExp = International Education experience in the current company's host country

Figure 1 PLS Results

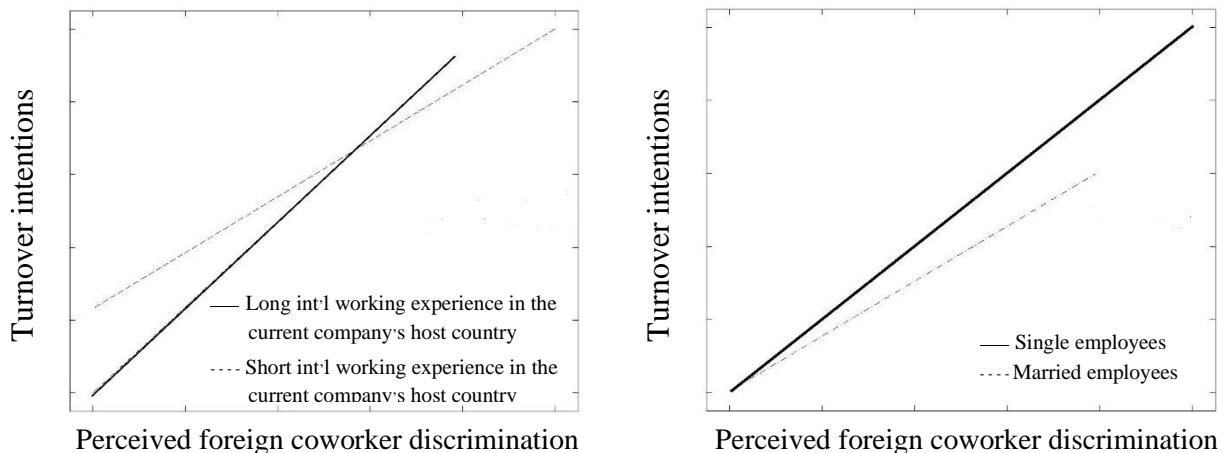


Figure 2 Moderating Effects

## Discussion and Conclusions

### Discussion of findings

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the level of perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intentions of Thai employees who work in the international air transport companies and have foreign coworkers. The results showed that Thai employees who perceived a higher level of foreign coworker discrimination tended to have a higher level of turnover intentions. This finding is in line with the previous research by (Husainaa & Bahron, 2017); S. Jackson and Jackson (2019); (Qu et al., 2020) who found that employees who perceive the higher level of workplace discrimination tend to have higher level of turnover intentions. In terms of theoretical perspective, this finding conforms with Herzberg's Two-factor theory which suggested that the absence of the maintenance factors could lead to negative work outcomes. Because perceived foreign coworker discrimination represents the negative relationship with coworkers that was found to be one of the maintenance factors (Frederick Herzberg, 1968; Irhamni & Kristanto, 2021; Nanayakkara & Dayarathna, 2016), Thai employees tend to develop turnover intention with an expectation of the better relationship with coworkers in the new workplace.

In addition to the direct association between the perceived foreign coworker discrimination and turnover intention, the results showed that its effect could be varied depending on the employees' international working experience in the current companies' host country and marital status. The moderating analysis showed that the effect of the perceived foreign coworker discrimination on the development of turnover intention tends to be stronger for Thai employees who have longer international working experience in the current company's host country. This result is in line with the study of Seriwatana and Charoensukmongkol (2020) who found that employees with longer years of service tend to experience a higher level of job burnout and Abate, Schaefer, and Pavone (2018) who found that employees facing a higher level of job burnout tend to develop a higher level of turnover intentions. Thai employees tended to suffer from being discriminated against from the old workplace and are continuously facing at the current workplace. A prolonged period of being

discriminated against could lower their tolerance to discrimination, hence they tend to easily develop turnover intention. In addition, the results showed that the effect of perceived coworker discrimination on the development of turnover intentions tends to be weaker among married employees. The result is in line with the study of Emiroğlu, Akova, and Tanrıverdi (2015) who found that, in hotel businesses, married employees tend to have a lower level of turnover intention than single employees. Maintaining a smooth and happy married life tends to equip married employees with the ability to tolerate different opinions and behaviors. Spouse support is also there to encourage and that could help to relieve the feeling of unfair treats. Given that married employees tend to have enough resources to handle the perception of discrimination, they are less likely to develop turnover intentions.

This study has academically contributed by adding extra evidence to the workplace discrimination studies which still lack the context of Thai employees. In addition, this study provides more support to the existing research that employees with different characteristics may be influenced by the perception of foreign coworker discrimination to varying degrees. These findings suggest that some employees' characteristics should also be considered when the maintenance factors are offered. Some factors might be more important for some employees than others.

### Practical implications

The findings from this study provide some management guidelines. As employees tend to play an important role in most of the service companies' operations, their turnover intentions could be expensive to the companies. This study found that the absence of maintenance factors which is the perception of foreign coworker discrimination influences employees' turnover intentions. As perceived discrimination is formed when employees feel the unfair treatment because of their differences, this study suggests that the company should make them proud of their differences by communicating how much the company values their employees' differences and how those differences are important to the company, such as the company's motto and slogan that flourishes its employees' differences. Proud of their differences may enhance the attractiveness and favorable interactions between them. In

addition, the understanding of their differences may help to lessen the negative attitudes and interactions between them as they know what and why their foreign coworkers are behaving that way. Hence, the company may provide the knowledge regarding the different backgrounds of their employees; including learning by studying such as training course and by doing such as company's activities. Regarding the findings of some personal characteristics that tend to benefit the specific working environment. As this study found that married employees are better at handling the perception of foreign coworker discrimination, this study suggests that during the recruitment process some candidates' qualifications should be considered advantageous in a particular working environment.

#### **Limitations and Future research suggestions**

Several limitations are found in this study. As the data were collected from Thai employees working with the international air transport companies with the convenience and snowball sampling methods, it may limit the generalizability of the findings. Hence, the extension of samples in future studies, such as other nationalities or other kinds of service companies, could help to generalize the findings of the study. More areas of perceived discrimination could also be investigated. Future studies may examine workplace discrimination against happening between different levels, for example between supervisors and staff, whether or not they will have the same relationship with turnover intention as coworker discrimination. In addition, future studies could explore whether other personal or job characteristics will moderate the effect of perceived discrimination on turnover intentions such as age or educational level.

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