

Effect of Job Insecurity on Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior: Mediating Role of Job Stress

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Abstract

Employees occasionally engage in unethical behavior intended to benefit their organization despite the moral ambiguity of such actions. This phenomenon, known as (UPB), is often motivated by a desire to shield the organization from external criticism and align with its interests. However, not all questions about the antecedents of UPB, its consequences and the boundary conditions have yet been answered. This study analyzes the effects of job insecurity and job stress on UPB. Within this context, the mediating role of job insecurity and the moderating role of job experience are explored. Research data were gathered from 202 sales and marketing employees (% 73.3 male, SD: 0.73; mean age: 37, SD: 0.444) through face-to-face surveys. Research hypotheses were tested by structural equation modeling (SEM). The results indicate that job insecurity exerts positive effects on job stress and UPB. In addition, job stress fully mediates the effect of job insecurity on UPB. Thus, it was concluded that work experience is one of the boundary conditions of UPB intention among employees. This study contributes to UPB literature by showing what consequences the interaction of job stress and perceived job insecurity can have on employees. In addition, this study offers a new perspective on coping strategies for UPB.

Keywords: *Job Insecurity, Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior, Job Stress, Conditional Effects.*

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<https://doi.org/10.30798/makuiibf.1605291>

Article Type	Application Date	Admission Date
Research Article	December 22, 2024	June 16, 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

Unethical behavior has plagued organizations for a long time and is frequently motivated by personal gain or a desire to harm the organization (Seuntjens et al., 2019; Thau et al., 2015). However, researchers have recently directed their attention toward a specific form of unethical conduct that is designed to benefit the organization (Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Wang, Zheng & Zhao, 2022; Yan et al., 2021; Zhang, 2020). This phenomenon is called unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) and defined as “actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct” (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Examples of such behavior include misrepresenting the truth to create a favorable image of the organization, presenting its products and services more positively than warranted, and withholding unfavorable information from the public (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010). Although UPB is intended to be beneficial for the organization, it may have detrimental effects on the interests of various stakeholders (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). If UPB is revealed or noticed by external stakeholders, the consequences will be devastating. Disclosure of UPB has the potential to cause significant financial and legal issues for an organization, in addition to negatively impacting its image and reputation. While it may seem like harmless support from the employee, UPB can be a significant challenge for businesses. Consequently, it is imperative to take action to prevent this potential threat.

There is a growing body of research on the antecedents and consequences of UPB (Luan et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2022; Mo et al., 2022). A search of the Web of Science revealed that approximately 250 academic articles with the title "Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior" have been published since 2010. A growing number of studies are exploring why and how employees engage in UPB. To date, various individual, organizational, and contextual factors have been examined as antecedents of UPB (see Mo et al., 2023, for a detailed review and synthesis of the literature on UPB).

In recent years, companies have been physically downsizing and consequently laying off employees because of increasing costs, price instabilities, and intense competitive conditions. Layoffs caused by destructive competition have made job insecurity (JI) a widespread concern among employees. Individuals experiencing JI may face an uncertain work environment. In an environment where the future of employment is uncertain, employees may experience elevated levels of job stress (JS) due to concerns about the potential for job loss (Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Ghani et al., 2022). This may prompt employees into some gray areas in order to keep their positions. By definition, the direct benefit of UPB should not accrue to the employee (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). However, it is probable that the employee who intends to benefit the organization through UPB anticipates an indirect benefit for themselves. From this perspective, it is likely that employees experiencing significant stress due to the risk of job loss will seek to utilize UPB in order to obtain an indirect benefit that will serve to protect their position. Employees who fear losing their jobs may adopt UPB as a coping mechanism.

The dual nature of UPB, which includes both "unethical" and "pro-organizational" behaviors, may explain why employees experiencing JI resort to such behaviors as coping mechanisms (Wang, Weng et al., 2022).

When examining the studies conducted on UPB to date, it is observed that there is an interaction and relationship between UPB and various individual, organizational, and leadership variables such as organizational identification (Effelsberg et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2019; Kong, 2016; Li, 2023; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010; Vadera & Pratt, 2013), organizational commitment (Ebrahimi & Yurtkoru, 2017; Matherne III & Litchfield, 2012), work engagement (Gigol, 2020; Kong, 2016), ethical leadership (Hsieh et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023; Miao et al., 2013), empowering leadership (Dennerlein & Kirkman, 2022), transformational leadership (Effelsberg & Solga, 2015; Effelsberg et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2015), charismatic leadership (Zhang et al., 2020), authentic leadership (Gigol, 2020), leader-member exchange (Bryant & Merritt, 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Vriend et al., 2020), moral disengagement (Chen et al., 2016; Hsieh et al., 2020; Lian et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021), moral identity (Matherne III & Litchfield, 2012; Zhang et al., 2018), organizational support (Kong, 2016; Wang, Zheng & Zhao, 2022), job satisfaction (Dou et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2022; Zhang, 2020), performance pressure (Chen & Chen, 2021). Furthermore, although there are studies on the relationship and interaction between job insecurity (JI) and UPB (Ghosh, 2016; Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017; Wang, Weng et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023) and job stress (JS) and UPB (Chen et al., 2022; Shaw & Liao, 2018; Xu & Wang, 2020), they are insufficient and limited level. In the literature, no study has been found that addresses the combined effects of JI and JS on UPB. This study aims to consider these three variables together, and it is believed that this study will contribute to literature and fill this gap.

This study is based on the Conservation of Resources theory. COR is predicated on the necessity of acquiring and protecting resources, a natural and instinctive need concomitant with human existence. The theory is a principle that motivates people to protect their own resources or obtain new resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to the COR theory, individuals attempt to avoid the loss of resources (e.g. employment, income, status, sense of control) and seek to retain them (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Job insecurity is the threat of losing one of the individual's most basic resources, their job, and this is a serious source of psychological stress (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). Job stress may prepare the ground for the individual to use unethical means (e.g., UPOB) to prevent this loss. Because the individual may try to make himself/herself seem more valuable and indispensable by making "extra effort" for the benefit of the organization.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the independent and joint effects of JI and JS on UPB. To achieve this aim, a survey was conducted among sales and marketing employees in commercial companies, where intense target pressure and high competition are experienced. This study has several contributions. Firstly, an original contribution was made to UPB literature by examining the interactive effects of JI and JS on UPB. As a second contribution, it was suggested that "solely benefiting the

organization" perspective in the UPB definition be expanded to include indirect benefits for the employee. This new perspective posits that UPB can be adopted as a coping strategy by employees. Finally, most of the studies conducted with UPB have examined the relationship or effect of UPB with positive variables (organizational identification, leadership, organizational commitment, work engagement, organizational support, job satisfaction, etc.). It is expected that this study will develop and contribute to literature by addressing negative variables such as job stress and job insecurity.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior, Job Insecurity, and Job Stress Relations

Studies in organizational behavior, organizational ethics, and organizational psychology have generally focused on the damage caused by employees' unethical behaviors (such as wasting the organization's time and resources, embezzlement, theft of office supplies, etc.) to the organization (Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Moore et al., 2012). However, employees may also engage in some unethical activities in the belief that they will benefit their organization (e.g., misrepresenting information to portray the organization in a positive light). These behaviors are known as UPB and differ from other forms of behavior because they are voluntarily performed as extra-role behaviors to provide more benefits than harm to the organization (Kong, 2016). The concept of UPB not only improves the understanding of the antecedents of unethical behavior but also significantly advances research in the field of organizational ethics by expanding the theoretical perspective to understand such behaviors (Chen et al., 2016).

When defining UPB, it refers to actions that violate fundamental values, traditions, laws, or appropriate behavior standards of society while aiming to support the organization or its managers effectively (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). In other words, UPB can be characterized as behaviors that, for the benefit of the organization, simultaneously break ethical norms, potentially causing harm to external stakeholders and the overall interests of society (Effelsberg et al., 2013). UPB does not necessarily involve severe crimes, such as covering up serious offenses. UPBs are performed to help the organization achieve its goals (Graham et al., 2015). As previously stated, UPB is both pro-organization and non-ethical. It is evident that this phenomenon is distinct and cannot be fully explained by existing concepts. Therefore, it can be defined as out-of-duty behavior that disrupts social norms but is done for the benefit of an organization and its members (Kim et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024; Zhang & Du, 2023). Destroying files containing criminal elements to protect the organization's reputation, failing to refund customers who have been mistakenly overcharged, recommending an incompetent employee to another organization with the thought that she/he will be another organization's problem instead her/his organization (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010;), destroying important documents that could tarnish the organization's image (Dou et al., 2019), manipulating or making positive changes to organizational accounting records to satisfy stakeholders (Vadera & Pratt, 2013) some notable UPBs from academic studies.

Identifying and expressing behaviors related to UPB is challenging due to the requirement of being both unethical and beneficial to the organization. Umphress and Bingham (2011) have proposed three conditions that are not included in this frame to determine UPB. The first condition pertains to employees' unethical behaviors without seeking any specific benefits. An example of such behavior would be when employees do not inform customers about a significant product flaw due to a lack of knowledge. Because such behaviors do not aim to consciously benefit the organization, they are not considered within the scope of UPB (Liu & Qiu, 2015).

The second condition relates to behaviors when employees attempt to benefit the organization, but the outcome of those actions does not align with the intended purpose. For instance, employees may have disposed of evidence that could implicate their organization in unlawful activities to safeguard it. Nevertheless, the removal of these documents may not have been advantageous for the organization. Moreover, this circumstance may cause external auditors to view the organization as suspicious and may result in long-term harm to the organization (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Thus, this type of behavior does not qualify as UPB. The final condition refers to unethical behaviors demonstrated by employees for personal gain. These actions are not classified as UPB because they are executed for the employees' benefit rather than the entire organization's benefit (Liu & Qiu, 2015).

Considering the above conditions, a behavior may be deemed UPB if it is performed with conscious intent, provides benefit to the organization, and is designed to safeguard the organization's interests. Employees may experience JI, which manifests as fear and anxiety about losing their jobs and becoming unemployed. Previous studies have indicated that employees dealing with JI may resort to coping mechanisms such as working longer hours, striving for higher performance, and avoiding counterproductive behaviors (Sverke et al., 2002; Armstrong-Stassen, 2006; Probst et al., 2007; Gilboa et al., 2008). This study posits the hypothesis that employees who fear losing their jobs may adopt UPB as a coping mechanism.

Due to economic recessions, advancements in information technology, industrial restructuring, and the relentless acceleration of global competition, working life and the nature of organizations have undergone significant changes in recent years. Numerous organizations have implemented large-scale workforce reductions (such as downsizing, mergers, and acquisitions) to reduce costs and enhance organizational effectiveness and competitiveness. However, for employees, this situation has created an increased sense of JI (Hellgren et al., 1999). JI, as extensively examined by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), refers to the perceived powerlessness individuals' experience regarding the continuity of their employment when they feel their job is under threat. Heaney et al. (1994) also discussed perception in their definition of JI, describing it as the perceived potential threat to the continuity of current employment. JI can also be defined as a general concern about the future existence of a job (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996).

JI can be expressed as perceived threats or dangers that employees associate with potential negative impacts on their employment, such as being laid off or dismissed, which can adversely affect their working life. It also encompasses concerns related to the potential loss of a job in the short or long term and the limitation of career and job opportunities. Overall, JI can be described as a combination of these threats and concerns, resulting in a sense of powerlessness that individuals experience in such circumstances (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). In this context, there is a distinction between JI and actual job loss. Job loss occurs immediately, whereas JI is a long-term experience characterized by uncertainty about the future. Furthermore, the perception of JI can vary among employees, even if they hold the same status or are exposed to similar conditions (Sverke et al., 2002). Therefore, JI represents a phenomenon that includes subjective experiences (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002).

When employees experience the above-mentioned dangers, anxieties, and threats, they may lose self-confidence, feel powerless, and develop a fear of losing something. To avoid losing their positions, these employees may engage in UPB. Employees with a high JI perception may continue to exhibit such behaviors because of the belief that their supervisors or top management will consider them as productive. Indeed, Ghosh (2016) revealed a positive effect of JI on UPB. Furthermore, Ghosh noted that the moderating effect of job embeddedness exists in the relationship between JI and UPB. Lawrence and Kacmar (2017) stated in their study that employees experiencing JI were more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and subsequently engage in UPB. Additionally, in their research, they examined employees' adaptability to changes and found that employees with low levels of adaptability tended to exhibit UPB instead of adjusting and exploring alternative solutions or opportunities in the face of JI. According to Xu et al. (2022), JI has a positive effect on UPB. In addition, the authors stated that employees experiencing JI increase their UPB with their motivation to provide a good impression on their leaders. Wang, Weng et al. (2022) indicated in their study that proactive personality strengthens the positive link between JI and UPB, whereas moral identity weakens it. Additionally, they discovered that individuals with proactive personality and high moral identity exhibit a weaker positive link between JI and UPB than those with high proactive personality but low moral identity. Zhang et al. (2023) demonstrated that JI among subordinates mediates the positive association between supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality (BML) and subordinate UPB. Moreover, they stated that supervisory power has a positive effect on moderating the indirect effect of JI on the link between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB. The indirect effect is amplified as supervisory power increases. Based on literature and conceptual basis, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₁: JI has a positive effect on UPB.

JI is considered a significant source of stress. The evaluation of JI as a stressor stems from its uncertainty. Uncertainty, characterized by unpredictability and uncontrollability, leads to stress. Indeed, JI indicates a situation in which the continuity of work cannot be predicted (De Witte, 1999). In other words, facing JI results in the loss of an individual's ability to plan and control their life, increasing

tension. Uncertainty about the future, anxiety, and worry about the possibility of job loss reduce a person's ability to cope with their job and workload and increase JS (Strazdins et al., 2004). Consequently, JI is recognized as a significant work stressor that hinders employees' functionality (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). Soelton et al. (2020) noted that JI has a significant positive effect on JS. Similarly, Tu et al. (2020) found that quantitative JI is associated with the employee's physical and behavioral stress symptoms. Peng and Potipiroon (2022) indicated that the perception of JI has a positive effect on JS. They also found that psychological capital significantly reduced the perceptions of JI and JS. Based on the literature the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: JI has a positive effect on JS.

2.2. Mediating Role of Job Stress

One of the factors that creates tension and increases distress in the workplace is JS. JS is defined as the individual response exhibited by employees toward the characteristics of the work environment that lead to physical and psychological discomfort. (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Jamal, 2005). The increasing expectations of organizations from employees, excessive workload, and performance pressures are some reasons that contribute to work-related stress experienced by employees. In today's working life, numerous organizations anticipate that their employees will strive to achieve objectives, regardless of any obstacles that may arise. From this perspective, employees who seek long-term relationships with their organizations or want to avoid negative consequences such as unemployment due to their inability to meet organizational needs may engage in ethically questionable behavior and exhibit UPB (Chen & Chen, 2021; Tian & Peterson, 2016; Wang et al., 2019). Additionally, a work environment with the risk of unemployment and the resulting anxiety, uncertainty, and pressure can increase employees' stress levels. As a result, employees may exhibit UPB to protect their current jobs and cope with stress. In line with this, Shaw and Liao (2018) found that JS has a positive effect on UPB, and they also noted that authoritarian leadership can predict employees' UPB through JS and moral disengagement. Similarly, Xu and Wang (2020) found in their study that JS affects UPB. They also indicated that JS exerts a positive effect on UPB with anxiety and anger serving as mediating factors. Chen et al. (2022) found that engagement in UPB is positively associated with stress at work, and they demonstrated that performing tensions moderates the positive relationship between UPB and JS. Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: JS has a positive effect on UPB.

To summarize all the opinions mentioned so far, in today's working life, where competition is felt too much, costs are increased in the markets, and instability is experienced, companies are downsizing and laying off their employees. This scenario leads to JI, which is the anxiety felt by employees about the possibility of losing their jobs and being unemployed. Such an uncertain working environment also creates stress on employees. Critical situations like stress can also lead employees to

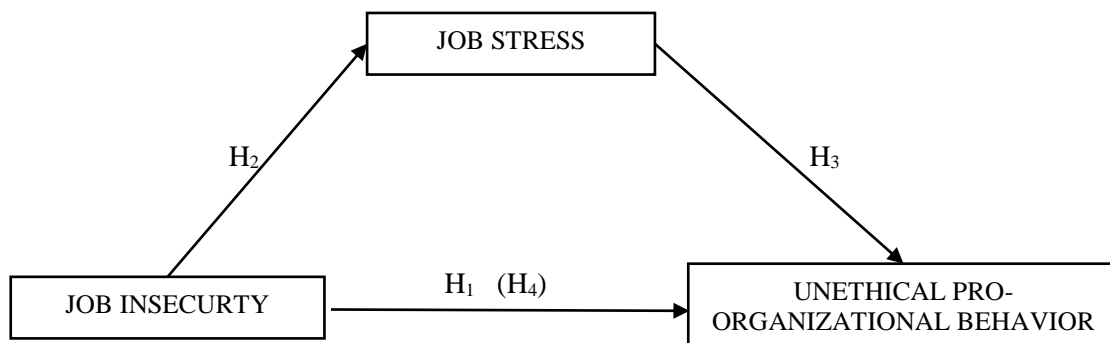
misbehave. As a result, employees who experience both JI and JS may exhibit UPB to maintain their current job. Based on the concern, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₄: JS mediates the relationship between JI and UPB.

2.3. Research Model

This research model is presented in Figure 1. According to the model, the independent variable of the research is JI, the dependent variable is UPB, and the mediator variable is JS.

Figure 1. Research Model



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The sample of this study consists of sales and marketing personnel employed in commercial companies operating in Kocaeli. Sales and marketing departments interact directly with customers and competitors. Especially in a highly industrialized and competitive region like Kocaeli, employees in these departments experience market competition most directly. They are typically subject to numerical and time-pressured performance metrics such as sales quotas, increasing market share, and customer acquisition. For these reasons, they were deemed worthy of examination. This study employed a quantitative research method using a convenience sampling method.

For this research, a Gpower analysis was done a priori to establish a rigorous sample size (Power= .80; effect size= .15; α = .05). The results from Gpower indicated a minimum sample size of 85. Approximately 250 people were reached, and face-to-face questionnaires were administered to the participants. Forms filled incompletely and carelessly were excluded from the data set. When these forms were removed, 202 forms were considered for analyses. The participants in this study were informed about the research purpose, and their consent to participate was obtained.

3.2. Scales

Initially, the participants provided information about their demographic characteristics. Subsequently the participants completed the Job Stress Scale, Job Insecurity Scale, and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior Scale. All measurements were analyzed using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Totally Agree).

Job Stress Scale: The participants' JS level was measured using a 7-item, unidimensional scale developed by House and Rizzo (1972) and adapted for the Turkish language by Efeoğlu (2006). A sample item is “I work under a great deal of tension.”

Job Insecurity Scale: The participants' JI level was measured using a 4-item, unidimensional scale developed by De Witte (2000), validated by Vander Elst et al. (2014) and adapted for the Turkish language by Pelenk (2020). A sample item is “I think I might lose my job in the near future.”

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior: The participants' tendency to exhibit UPB was measured using a 6-item, unidimensional scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010) and adapted for the Turkish language by Aksoy Kürü (2022). A sample item is “If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good.”

4. FINDINGS

In this study, the data obtained from the survey method were analyzed using the SPSS 21 package program and structural equation modeling (SEM)-AMOS 24. In this context, descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants was performed using SPSS 21. The hypotheses developed within the scope of the research were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM)-AMOS 24.

4.1. Respondent Demographics

In total; 73.3% of the respondents were male ($n=148$), 26.7% were female ($n=54$), 84.1% were under 40 years ($n=170$), 60.9% had a college/university degree ($n=123$), 70.8% were single ($n=143$), 64.3% were in the sector for more than five years ($n=130$) and 52% worked for the organization for more than five years ($n=105$).

Prior to the analysis of the data, the normality of the distribution of the data was checked. The normality of the distribution was confirmed through the assessment of skewness and kurtosis values, which were found to range between +1 and -1. The skewness coefficients in all variables were between -0.21 and 0.81, while the kurtosis coefficients were between -0.07 and -0.75. Consequently, the distribution was accepted as normal (Hair et al., 2017). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations between the study variables. When examining the correlations between study variables, it is observed that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the independent variable JI and the dependent variable UPB ($r=0.322$), as well as between the mediating variable JS ($r=0.589$). Additionally, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between JS and UPB ($r=0.543$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among the Study Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
1) Job Insecurity	2.64	1.336	1		
2) Job Stress	2.88	1.178	0.589**	1	
3) Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior (UPB)	2.44	1.210	0.322**	0.543**	1

**Correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

4.2. Measurement Model and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To assess the measurement model's validity and reliability, a CFA was conducted that incorporated the constructs of Job Insecurity, Job Stress, and UPB. Scale items were utilized as reflective indicators. Fit statistics demonstrated a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 421.734$; $df = 96.000$; $CMIN/DF = 4.393$; $CFI = 0.935$; $SRMR = 0.043$; $RMSEA = 0.130$; $PClose = 0.000$. The scale items exhibited high standardized factor loadings (ranging from 0.883 to 0.961) and reliability statistics (Table 3).

Table 2 illustrates Composite Reliability (CR) to assess the construct reliability of the model, Average Variance Explained (AVE) to evaluate the convergent validity, and maximum shared variance (MSV). Additionally, it presents the correlation matrix of latent variables for discriminant validity. (Henseler et al., 2015). All constructs have CR values that are above acceptable limit of 0.7, thereby indicating their reliability (Hair et al, 2010). The strong standardized factor loadings (ranging between 0.883 and 0.961) of indicators to respective constructs (Table 3) and all AVE values that exceed 0.5 threshold demonstrate that convergent validity has been achieved. The square of all MSV values is lower than AVE values and the square roots of AVE values are greater than the correlations between factors. This shows that discriminant validity is also achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Upon evaluation of all these results, it can be concluded that the measurement model is valid and reliable (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Indicators

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	JI	JS	UPB
JOB INSECURITY	0.968	0.884	0.359	0.971	0.940		
JOB STRESS	0.972	0.834	0.359	0.976	0.599***	0.913	
UPB	0.973	0.856	0.329	0.975	0.333***	0.574***	0.925

JI: Job Insecurity; JS: Job Stress; UPB: Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability; MSV: Maximum Shared Variance.

***Correlations are significant at the 0.001 level.

4.3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Tests

Following the determination of the structural model's overall fit as satisfactory, the direct and indirect causal relationships between the structures were subjected to testing. Figure 1 shows the path diagram along with the standardized estimates.

Figure 2. Structural Model

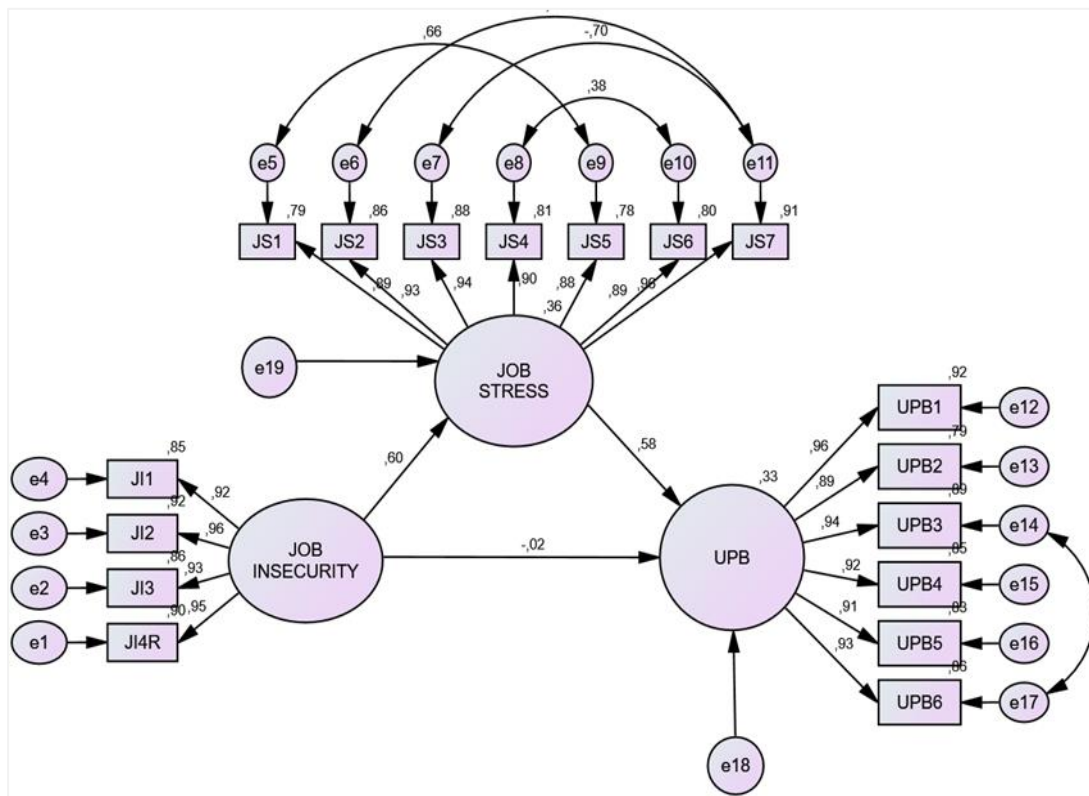


Table 3 presents the path of the coefficients and corresponding level of statistical significance, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, and coefficients of determination.

Table 3. Direct, Indirect and Total Effects (Mediated Model)

Regression Path	Unstd. Estimates (t-values)	p	Std. Estimates	95% bias- corrected CI (LL-UL)		Variance Explained (R ²)
JI ---> JS	0.469 (9.434)	< 0.001	0.599 ***	0.510	0.683	0.359
JI ---> UPB (Direct Effect)	-0.016. (-0.223)	0.823	-0.017	-0.157	0.120	
JS ---> UPB	0.714 (7.461)	< 0.001	0.584 ***	0.459	0.697	
JI ---> JS ---> UPB (Indirect Effect)	0.335	< 0.001	0.350***	0.267	0.446	
JI ---> UPB (Total Effect)	0.571	< 0.001	0.333**	0.213	0.436	0.329

A bootstrap test with 5,000 resamples (Preacher et al., 2007) revealed that JI had a significantly positive total effect on UPB ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.001$) and JI also demonstrated a significantly positive effect on JS ($\beta = 0.599$; $p < 0.001$). These findings provide evidence to support H₁ and H₂.

In accordance with H₃; JS demonstrated a significantly positive effect on UPB ($\beta = 0.584$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the results indicated that JS acted as a mediator in the relationship between JI and UPB. The results of the path analysis indicated a statistically significant indirect effect of JI and UPB ($\beta = 0.350$; $p < 0.01$) through JS. The 95% bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals (lower and upper levels) did not contain zero which provides additional support for this finding. Finally, the direct

effect of JI on UPB was examined, and when the mediating variable of JS was included in the analysis, the effect of JI on UPB became insignificant ($\beta = -0.017$; $p = 0.823$). Based on these findings, JS plays a full mediating role on the effect of JI on UPB. Thus, H_4 was also supported.

5. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Although UPB has been a subject frequently examined in recent research by organizational behavior researchers, the relationships between JI, JS, and UPB have not been thoroughly examined. JI and JS may lead employees to engage in UPB, but it is necessary to fully understand the boundary conditions. One of the important questions that needs to be answered is who, when, and under what conditions may tend to exceed ethical boundaries to benefit the organization. This study examines the mediating role of JS in the relationship between JI and UPB. Within the scope of the research, data were collected from sales and marketing professionals through a survey. Path analyses using SEM revealed that JI and JS positively influence UPB. In addition, JS exerts a full mediation on the relationship between JI and UPB. Several studies have examined JI (Ghosh, 2016; Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017; Wang, Weng et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023) and JS (Chen et al., 2022; Shaw & Liao, 2018; Xu & Wang, 2020) as important antecedents of UPB, but little is known about the interactive effects of both JI and JS on UPB.

The findings of this research offer a new perspective on coping with JS. Previous studies have found that employees who work harder, perform better, and avoid counterproductive behaviors can more easily cope with JI (Armstrong-Stassen, 2006; Gilboa et al., 2008; Probst et al., 2007; Sverke et al., 2002). However, this study demonstrated that employees who experience both JI and JS engage in UPB to retain their current jobs. In other words, employees display UPB as a coping mechanism for JI and JS. Furthermore, most studies on UPB have focused on its relationship or effect with positive variables (organizational identification, organizational commitment, leadership, job satisfaction, organizational support, etc.). However, this study investigated UPB with negative variables such as JI and JS. In future studies, literature could be expanded to include other negative variables such as performance pressure, risk of exclusion, Machiavellian personality, feelings of anxiety, and organizational cynicism.

According to the results of this study, managers should be aware that employees who suffer from JI may be inclined to exhibit UPB. In addition to this situation, a stressful work environment may affect employees' UPB. Managers should be concerned about employees who are at risk of losing their jobs and experiencing stress. This is because such employees can quickly adopt unethical behaviors that can help them secure their jobs. Therefore, managers should be careful about using language that motivates their employees when dealing with sensitive issues. Even in critical and stressful situations, managers should not demonstrate an approach that encourages unethical behavior. In essence, managers should be mindful of their words, the manner in which they express themselves, and role modeling in the context of their professional relationships with employees. It is of greater importance that managers

foster an environment that emphasizes moral standards. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to incorporate moral issues into training programs, with the aim of enhancing the moral awareness of employees (Ji et al., 2024).

Although such unethical behaviors are for the benefit of the organization, they can harm the organization in long run, and therefore managers should take precautions to discourage such behaviors. If they succeed in creating ethical awareness among their employees by highlighting ethical issues, they can reduce unethical behavior. In addition, clear standards should be established to prevent UPB. Even if it is intended to benefit the organization, unethical behavior should not be left unpunished. These standards should be included in the code of ethics. In this context, an ethics brochure should be prepared, and training on ethics should be organized. Only with such a structure can ethics permeate the entire organization and become permanent.

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research data were obtained from participants who were employed in a particular industry in a specific cultural environment. There is a need to gather data from diverse sources that employ larger and more representative samples from various industries. In addition, this study examined only JI and JS as antecedents of UPB. For future studies, it is recommended to use different variables such as organizational justice, leadership, organizational identification, job performance, ethical climate, and intention to leave as mediator and/or moderator variables. This may lead to different results, which can be further supported by qualitative research. Finally, research data is cross-sectional and data was collected from a convenient sample of sales and marketing professionals. As data is collected exclusively from accessible individuals, its capacity to represent the universe is limited. Using more representative samples from different industries and respondents holding different organizational roles can enhance the validity of the research findings.

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from the Kocaeli University Ethics Committee on April 23, 2022, with decision number E-10017888-100-222313.

The author declares that the study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics.

The author confirms that no part of the study was generated, either wholly or in part, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

The author declares that there are no financial conflicts of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual associated with this article.

The author affirms that the entire research process was performed by the sole declared author of the study.

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