The Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Abusive Supervision on Employee's Turnover Intention: The Mediating Roles of Psychological Contract and Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract—Workers (especially, competent personnel) have been recognized as a core contributor to overall organizational effectiveness. Hence, verifying the determinants of turnover intention is one of the most important research issues. This study tested the influence of perceived organizational support and abusive supervision on employee's turnover intention. In addition, mediating roles of psychological contract and emotional exhaustion were examined. Data from 255 Korean employees supported all hypotheses Implications for research and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords—Abusive Supervision, Emotional Exhaustion, Perceived Organizational Support, Psychological Contract, Turnover Intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN today's increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment, organizations have become increasingly dependent on their highly-competent personnel to be successful in coping with unlimited competition. As a result, the retention of key members remains an important issue for various organizations [11]. Organizations spend considerable money, time and effort to retain competent workers, and researchers are absorbed in verifying which variables predict whether employees engage in the turnover process [1]. Chief of all, many scholars put forth a multilateral effort into proving what influences employee's turnover intention because it has been suggested as a most powerful predictor of real turnover behavior. Extant research has indicated the important role of social exchange relationship with organization and leader behavior in determining turnover intention [16], [44]. According to interactional psychology [27], individual's attitude and intention in organization are caused by interaction between the person and environment. Similarly, organization itself and direct supervisor are the most powerful precursors that would influence on employee's turnover intention.

Among numerous concepts of social exchange relationship or interaction with organization, perceived organization support (POS) is one of determinants that have attracted large amounts of research attention [20]. POS has been defined as "an individuals' perception concerning the degree to which an organization values their contributions and cares about their

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well-being" [18]. Previous studies have demonstrated that POS had quite consistently negative relationship with employee's turnover intention. In the case of leader behavior, abusive supervision (AS) has increasingly received a lot of research attentions [39]. Although, AS constitutes a low base-rate phenomenon in workplace; its harmful impacts are nothing to sneeze [3]. Over the past decade, scholars have indicated the positive effects of such behaviors on employee's turnover intention.

Although prior work has broadened our understanding of the POS-turnover intention relation, and the relationship between AS and turnover intention, there are several unexplored territories so far. First, on the basis of social exchange theory [5], POS and AS should play critical roles in determining employee's turnover intention. Although social exchange perspectives should be applied to diverse culture, a great deal of studies has been conducted in Western culture. Second, although knowledge regarding POS and AS as antecedents of turnover intention has been accumulated to this day, the puzzle of how, and why, turnover intention is influenced by good or bad treatment from their organization and supervisor is still far from solved. In other words, although we know that organizational support and destructive leader behavior are significantly associated with employee's turnover intention, we still do not fully understand the mechanism underlying these relations. The purpose of this paper is therefore twofold. First, we will investigate the relation between POS of employees and their intention to leave in Oriental culture. Likewise, we will explore the influence of AS on turnover intention in South Korea culture which is different from the West. By doing so, we will contribute to the expansion of generalizability of the prior findings in Western culture. Second, the present study aims to examine the some mediating variables between POS and turnover intention, and AS-intention to leave. In particular, we predict that the relationship between the independent variables and turnover intention can be explained by psychological contract and emotional exhaustion. Psychological contract was conceptualized as an individual beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal agreement between that focal person and another party or as individual beliefs in a reciprocal obligation between the individual and the organization [34]. According to previous research [26], [29], [36], [38], employee's reactions (e.g., turnover intention) are influenced quite significantly by an individual's perceptions of how well

the other party's obligations have been fulfilled. In addition, a variety of works have proved the positive treatment from organizations (e.g., POS) exerted powerful impact on the perception of psychological contract. Likewise, not a few researchers have suggested that leader's behavior may influence on employee's perception of their organization because supervisors act as agents of the organization. This logic enables us to link AS, psychological contract, and turnover intention. To date, however, insufficient attention has been paid the mediating roles of psychological contract between POS-turnover intention, and AS-intention to leave. In case of emotional exhaustion, previous research has demonstrated the alleviating effects which organizational support has on emotional exhaustion. In contrast, in the context of AS, employees feel mistreated by leader and the psychological resources may be gradually consumed and become exhausted [43]. Furthermore, considerable research has demonstrated that employees tend to leave from their organization when they feel emotionally exhausted [13], [17]. Nonetheless, little attention has been given to assessing the emotional exhaustion as mechanisms between POS-turnover intention, and AS-intention to leave. The second purpose of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the mediating roles of psychological contract and emotional exhaustion between independent and dependent variables considered in present study. By doing so, we will contribute not only to help researchers better understand the complex relationship between variables mentioned above, but also to aid managers in tailoring their effort to retain competent employees.

II. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

A. POS and Turnover Intention

Organizations are understandably concerned about maintaining good performers, and researchers and practitioners are immersed in finding which variables cause employee's turnover intention. Social exchange theorists have maintained that employment is the trade of loyalty and effort for rewards between organization and employees [8], [25]. POS is one of the main concepts to describe a global exchange relationship between the organization and employees [35]. Perceived organizational support researchers suggested that employees form a global belief concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and care about their well-being [18]. According to organizational support theory, perceived favorable treatment received from the organization should increase employee's various positive reactions toward organization. For instance, when organization treats employees well, employees feel obliged to make a return for favorable treatment [21]. In other words, POS should create a felt obligation to care about the organization's goal. The obligation to contribute should enhance employees' affection for organization. POS should also increase attachment to organization by fulfilling such socioemotional needs as affiliation and emotional support [2]. Such need fulfillment produces a strong sense of belonging to the organization. Additionally, POS has been hypothesized to have an impact to

employees' general job-related attitude, including job satisfaction. POS should contribute overall job-related attitude by meeting socioemotional needs. POS, also, may contribute to employees' feelings of competence and worth, thus enhancing positive mood [19]. When employee has a felt obligation to contribute, positive attitude toward his/her job, and positive mood, his/her desire to remain with the organization will increase.

Taken together, high levels of POS are thought to produce low levels of turnover intention. Previous research conducted in Western culture has confirmed our expectation [28], [41]. Thus, we expect that turnover intention is also likely to decrease when there is greater support from organization in Asian setting.

H1: POS has negative relationship with employee's turnover intention.

B. Abusive Supervision and Turnover Intention

The topic of leadership behavior holds an important position in the management-related literature. Much of the leadership research has concentrated on leader behaviors that are associated with favorable outcomes (e. g., positive mood, favorable attitudes, and high job performance). However, within the past 20 years, researchers have paid interest to the negative or destructive side of leader behavior. Even if several different concepts have been suggested to refer to these kinds of behaviors, most of the research has used the term AS [39]. AS is defined as subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior, excluding physical contact [39].

In recent years, AS has become as a non-trivial variable in understanding employees' attitudes and behaviors in organization. As previously noted, our focus in this study is to explore the positive effect of abusive supervision on turnover intention. Central to social exchange is the concept of reciprocity whereby individuals return the favor to equalize the exchange [21]. Thus, bad treatment an employee receives from his or her supervisor should increase the employee's negative attitude and emotion toward leader. In addition, because supervisors act as agents of the organization [19], employees would view their supervisor's unfavorable treatment toward them as an indicative of the organization's dealings with them.

For these reasons, targets of AS reported lower levels of affective commitment to their organization and experienced job dissatisfaction [39]. In considering the relationship between AS and turnover intention, aggression and retaliation research is perceived to be useful. This research argues that mistreatment from supervisor (e.g., AS) elevates retaliation and aggression displaced on other target. For example, [37] found that employee showed higher levels of retaliation toward organization. Individuals who become angry and frustrated by an inflictor may displace their aggression on other target such as organization because the victim may fear further retaliation from supervisor when they engaged in direct retaliation against harm doer. Also, employee think organization is responsible for supervisor wrongdoing. Turnover is one of the effective ways to retaliate against their organization.

Reactance theory, also, suggests that frustrated individuals

engage in behaviors designed to restore their sense of control [7]. One potential way to restore control perception is to engage in discretion in one's reaction [42]. Thus, in response to AS, employee might choose to turnover process over which he or she has discretion. Several studies verified abusive behaviors by supervisor increased subordinate's desire to remain with the organization [39]. Thus, we expect the following hypotheses:

H2: Abusive supervision has positive relationship with employee's turnover intention.

C. The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract

A psychological contract is an employee's beliefs regarding the mutual obligations between the employee and his/her organization [34]. When workers and the organization agree on the terms of the contract, their future exchanges develop into actions predictable by each party. A great deal of research has been conducted on employee response to psychological contract. There are two sides to the psychological contract; breach and fulfillment. The vast majority of research has explored contract breach and its associated outcomes [9], [29], [30], [32], [40]. When a psychological contract breach is occurred, employees may experience distrust of the organization, anger, diminished loyalty, and increased intention to leave the organization. On the contrary, when employees perceive that their organization has fulfilled one or more promised obligations, they are likely to reciprocate in a number of ways. As such, extant empirical studies demonstrate that contract fulfillment is related to higher organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intentions to remain with organization [32], [15], [40].

Advocates of psychological contracts theory have suggested that a high-quality social exchange relationship between employees and employer will reduce the possibility that the employee will perceive psychological contract violation or increase the likelihood the worker consider contract fulfillment [26], [33].

POS is one of the representative concepts to address a global exchange relationship between the organization and employees and positioned as key mean by which an employee globally evaluates the employment relationship with the organization. According to social exchange theorists, when worker receives favorable treatment from his/her organization, employees consider the employer has fulfilled various promised obligation. Favor and concern by organization is able to promote various psychological mechanisms in employees such as trust, loyalty, and desire to remain [6]. Thus, employees with high POS are expected to perceive their organization as having fulfilled its duties or obligations to them.

In contrast, AS is one of the powerful antecedents which decreases perceived psychological contract fulfillment because employees consider their supervisor as representative of organization. Social exchange theory [5], [16] provides useful logic for explaining the relationship between AS and psychological contract. One of the basic tenets of social exchange theory is reciprocity [21]. In particular, negative reciprocity, where negative treatment is returned or repaid with negative reaction [16], is perceived as useful lens for investigating the AS-psychological contract relationship. Thus, subordinates may think their organization to fail to fulfill promised duty and reduce their loyalty and felt obligation toward organization, resulting in higher turnover intention. Therefore, we offer the following hypotheses:

H3: Psychological contract fulfillment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee's turnover intention.

H4: Psychological contract fulfillment mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee's turnover intention.

D. The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

Employee's emotional state at work has been considered an important determinant of attitude toward organization. Emotionally exhausted employees are seen as having a feeling of helplessness that decreases their involvement in the organization's activities and their desire to remain with the organization [25]. Concerning antecedents of emotional exhaustion, some scholars argued that work experience such as organization's consideration, and favor and support from employer have demonstrated stronger association with emotional exhaustion than other structural feature of the organization.

According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory [22], individuals seek to obtain, retain, and protect their resources, including cognitive and emotional resources, and minimize the real and potential threat of resource loss [23]. As mentioned above, high levels of POS provide an aid to employees in terms of socioemotional needs. Organizational support also is expression of concerns and consideration. Thus, employees under high levels of POS are likely to conserve the emotional resources needed to survive and function at workplace. As a result, POS might reduce emotional exhaustion, resulting in low turnover intention according to the reciprocity norm.

In the case of AS, an opposite effect is expected. When employees work under stressful environments triggered by their supervisor, they may experience threat of resource and tiredness, resulting in high emotional exhaustion. That is to say, subordinates are likely to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion at workplace when they receive mistreatment from their supervisor [12]. Not a few studies have shown that AS positively related to psychological distress [39], [43]. Because supervisors act as organizational agents, the employees' receipt of unfavorable treatment from a supervisor (i.e., AS) should contribute to attitude toward the organization such as turnover intention. Thus, we expect that employees who are chronically mistreated by their supervisor are likely to report heightened emotional exhaustion. In short, it seems that POS should have a negative effect on employee's emotional exhaustion and AS might show a positive relationship with worker's emotional state at work, resulting in low or high desire to remain with the organization. Therefore, we offer the following hypotheses:

H5: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee's turnover intention.

H6: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and employee's turnover intention.

III. METHOD

A. Sample and Procedure

A self-completion questionnaire was distributed to full-time employees of companies located in South Korea. A cover letter attached to each of the questionnaires informed respondents the survey objectives and assured the confidentiality of their response. The questionnaires were returned directly to us, and 255 responses were received. Of the 255 respondents, 74% were men, average age was 34.72 years, and average tenure with organization was 6.55 years.

B. Measures

1. Perceived Organizational Support.

Following [14], we used seven items with the highest factor loadings from original 36-item scale [18]. Response options ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Sample items are "The organization cares about my well-being," and "The organization values my contributions to its wellbeing." The scale's alpha reliability is .94.

2. Abusive Supervision.

As previous research, the respondents completed 5-item scale of abusive supervision (along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*).This scale was a shortened version of 15-item scale developed by [39]. Sample items include "My supervisor ridicules me," and "My supervisor makes negative comments about me to others." The scale's alpha reliability is .95.

3. Psychological Contract Fulfillment.

An 6-item psychological contract scale [31] was used to measure employee's perception of psychological contract fulfillment (along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). Sample items are "The organization has done a good job of meeting its obligations to me," and "Almost all the promise made by employer during recruitment have been kept." Reliability coefficient for the psychological contract is .95.

4. Emotional Exhaustion.

To measure the emotional exhaustion, we used the nine items from Emotional Exhaustion subscale of burnout in [24].The measure assessed how often respondents feel the symptoms of emotional exhaustion at work (along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). A sample item is "I feel emotionally drained at work." The scale's alpha reliability is .92.

5. Turnover Intention.

We measured turnover intention using 3-item scale developed by [10]. Respondents reported their level of agreement using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "I often think of leaving the organization," and "It is very possible that I will look for a new job next year." Coefficient alpha is .82.

6. Control Variables.

According to prior research, we controlled for respondents' gender, age, education, and organizational tenure.

C. Data Analysis

We assessed discriminant validity of our constructs with confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS 19.0 software. We reduced the number of items by creating three indicators for each construct except turnover intention because the number of items was large relative to the sample size. This approach enhances the subject-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio. On the basis of factor analysis results, the items with the highest and lowest loadings for each construct were combined first, followed by items with the next highest and lowest loadings, until all the items for each construct had been assigned to one of the indicators. Scores for each indicator were then computed as the mean of the scores on the items that constituted each indicator. To assess model fit, we used the overall model chi-square measure, the comparative fit index (CFI), the goodness of fit index (GFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA).

As shown in Table I, our hypothesized five-factor model fit the data well (χ^2 =186.96, df = 80, p<.001; CFI = .97; GFI = .91; RMSEA = .07). We compared the fit of this five-factor model with a series of competing models: Model 1 was a four-factor model with POS merged with psychological contract fulfillment to form a single factor; Model 2 was a three-factor model, with AS merged with POS and psychological contract fulfillment; Model 3 was a two-factor model (POS, AS, psychological contract fulfillment, and emotional exhaustion combined); Model 4 was an one-factor model combining all variables into single factor. As Table I shows, the fit indexes supported the hypothesized five-factor model, providing evidence of the construct distinctiveness of the variables in this study.

TABLE I
RESULTS OF CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR MEASUREMENT MODELS

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Baseline model	186.96	80		.97	.91	.07
Model 1	463.84	84	276.88	.88	.78	.13
Model 2	1236.20	87	1049.24	.62	.62	.23
Model 3	1662.94	89	1475.98	.48	.54	.26
Model 4	1813.41	90	1626.45	.44	.51	.28

Note. N = 255. All χ^2 and $\Delta\chi^2$ values are significant at p<.001. CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness of fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

We analyzed hypotheses with hierarchical regression with SPSS 18.0. To test the mediation model (Hypothesis 3-6), we followed [4]'s three-step procedure. First, the independent variables should be related to the dependent variables; second, the independent variables should be significantly related to the mediating variable; and third, the mediating variables should be

related to the dependent variables when the independent variables are controlled for in the model. If the unstandardized beta weights of the independent variables are still significant in the last step, partial mediation is present. If the unstandardized beta weights of the independent variables are not significant, full mediation is present.

IV. RESULTS

Table II displays the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the study variables. Table III summarizes the regression results.

TABLE II
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.POS	4.12	1.09				
2. AS	1.99	1.07	-.16**			
3. PCF	4.42	1.14	.67***	-.27***		
4. EE	3.49	1.06	-.20***	.34***	-.28***	
5. TI	3.75	1.25	-.58***	.25***	-.49***	.35***

Note. N = 255. POS = perceived organizational support; AS = abusive supervision; PCF = psychological contract fulfillment; EE = emotional exhaustion; TI = turnover intention. ** $p<.01$.*** $p<.001$.

Four control variables were entered in all the equations (gender, age, education, and organizational tenure) to reduce the possibility of spurious relationships based on these types of personal characteristics. As shown in Table III, this supports Hypothesis 1 whereby POS has a negative effect on turnover intention (β = -.56, $p<.001$); likewise, support was found for Hypothesis 2, as the relationship between AS and turnover intention was significant (β = .18, $p<.001$). These results satisfied the first requirement of mediation.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, after entering all of the control variables in Step 1, we regressed the mediator (i. e., psychological contract fulfillment) on the independent variable (POS and AS) in Step 2. POS was found to be positively related to psychological contract fulfillment (β = .64, $p<.001$) and AS had negative relationship with psychological contract fulfillment (β = -.14, $p<.01$). These results met the second requirement of mediation. To test the third requirement of the mediation model, we regressed the dependent variable (turnover intention) on the mediating variable, with the independent variable (POS and AS) controlled for in Model 3 (Table III). As Table III shows, psychological contract fulfillment predict turnover intention (β = -.23, $p<.001$). In addition, POS and AS were also significant for dependent variable, respectively (β = -.41, $p<.001$; β = .15, $p<.001$). The results indicated that psychological contract fulfillment partially mediated the links between POS and turnover intention, and AS and turnover intention. A Sobel test showed that the indirect effects of POS and AS to turnover intention via psychological contract fulfillment were significant, respectively (z =-3.17, $p<.001$; z = .2.28, $p<.05$). Hypothesis 3 and 4 were, therefore, supported.

We then conducted another set of hierarchical regression to test Hypotheses 5 and 6, which proposed that emotional exhaustion play a role as a mediator. Consistent with mediator

psychological contract fulfillment testing procedure, we regressed the emotional exhaustion on POS and AS in Step 2. We found that POS was negatively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion (β = -.16, $p<.001$) and AS was also significant for emotional exhaustion (β = .32, $p<.001$), meeting the second requirement of mediation. Next, we regressed the turnover intention on the emotional exhaustion, with the POS and AS controlled for in Model 4. Results of the regression analysis showed that emotional exhaustion had positive relationship with turnover intention (β = .22, $p<.001$). Likewise, the effects of POS and AS on turnover intention still remained, respectively (β = -.52, $p<.001$; β = .11, $p<.001$). The results indicated that emotional exhaustion partially mediated the influence of POS and AS on turnover intention. Similarly, the indirect effects of POS and AS to turnover intention via emotional exhaustion were significant, respectively (z =-2.30, $p<.05$; z = 3.29, $p<.001$). Hypotheses 5 and 6 were, therefore, supported.

TABLE III
REGRESSION RESULTS FOR TURNOVER INTENTION

Variables	TURNOVER INTENTION			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Step 1: CV				
Gender	-.02	.00	.00	-.04
Age	-.11	-.12	-.16	-.11
Education	-.05	.01	.01	-.00
Org. tenure	-.02	-.04	-.06	-.06
Step 2: IV				
POS		-.56***	-.41***	-.52***
AS		.18***	.15**	.11***
Step 3: MV				
PCF			-.23***	
EE				.22***
Overall F	1.01	25.60***	24.28***	25.74***
R^2	.02	.38	.41	.42
F change	1.01	73.61***	10.49***	16.81***
R^2 change	.02	.37	.03	.04

Note. N = 255. Standardized regression coefficients are shown in columns. CV = control variables; IV = Independent variables; MV = mediating variables; POS = perceived organizational support; AS = abusive supervision; PCF = psychological contract fulfillment; EE = emotional exhaustion. * $p<.05$.** $p<.01$.*** $p<.001$.

V. DISCUSSION

The first key finding of this study is that POS also has negative relationship with turnover intention in Oriental culture as research conducted in the West. Likewise, AS is positively related to desire to leave in South Korea. This pattern of findings is backed up by social exchange perspectives [5] and the reciprocity norm [21]. According to these views, remaining with the organization can be considered as one of the best ways to reciprocate for those employees who have received favorable treatment from their organizations and supervisors. This result suggests that better POS encourages and AS discourage employees' membership of their organization. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature and practices by enlarging the universal usefulness of POS and maleficence of AS in organizations.

Second, our findings show that employees under high POS perceive their employer as having fulfilled its obligation, resulting in low turnover intention. In contrast, because supervisors act as agents of the organization [20], workers under high AS feel that the organization fails to carry out its responsibility for employees. By doing so, we find that psychological contact play a mediating role between POS-turnover intention and AS-desire to leave.

Third, this paper suggests that employee's emotional exhaustion plays a significant role in explaining the effects of POS or AS on turnover intention. This implies that employee with a high POS or low AS might have much less experience with emotional exhaustion, which reduce turnover intention.

The limitations of our study also point to possible directions for future research. First, causality is unclear because of a cross-sectional study. A longitudinal design would be needed for future studies. A second limitation in this paper is that we used self-report survey measures to collect data. Consequently, the observed relationships may have been artificially inflated as a result of common method variance. Third, we didn't consider the impact of potential moderators on hypothesized relationship in this study. Despite these limitations, this study had added to our understanding of how POS as social exchange concept with organization and AS as leader behavior variable affect the employee's turnover intention.

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