

# The Effect of Job Insecurity of Airline Crew Members on Their Psychological Contract Violation and Job Satisfaction

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## 항공사승무원의 고용불안정이 심리적계약 위반과 직무만족에 미치는 영향

고선희

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**Abstract** This study was to examine the effect of job insecurity on their psychological contract violation and job satisfaction among airline crew members. Also, this study intended to give meaningful hint in reducing job insecurity crew members feel, and, by examining ways to relieve psychological contract violation, give theoretical and practical suggestions on human resource management of airlines. The findings from empirical analysis are as follows. First, H 1-1 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their transactional psychological contract violation was adopted. Second, H 1-2 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their relational psychological contract violation was adopted. Third, H 2-1 that transactional psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was adopted. In contrast, H 2-2 that relational psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was rejected. Finally, H 3 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was adopted.

**Key Words** : Airline Crew Members, Job Insecurity, Transactional Psychological Contract Violation, Relational Psychological Contract Violation, Job Satisfaction

**요약** 본 연구는 항공사 승무원의 고용불안이 심리적계약위반과 직무에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지 파악하기 위하여 가설을 설정하였다. 항공사 승무원이 느끼는 고용불안을 감소시키는데 유의미한 시사점을 제공하고자하였으며, 심리적계약위반을 완화시킬 수 있는 방안을 검토하여 항공사의 인적자원관리에 이론적 실무적 시사점을 제공하고자 하였다. 실증분석결과는 아래와 같다. 먼저 “항공사승무원이 지각하는 고용불안정은 거래 심리적 계약위반에 정의 영향을 미칠 것이다”는 가설 1-1은 채택되었다. 둘째, “항공사승무원이 지각하는 고용불안정은 관계 심리적 계약 위반에 정의 영향을 미칠 것이다”는 가설 1-2는 채택되었다. 셋째, “항공사승무원이 지각하는 거래 심리적 계약 위반은 직무만족에 부의 영향을 미칠 것이다”는 H 2-1는 채택되었다. 반면 충분한 교육훈련이나 경력개발기회 등의 관계 심리적 계약위반을 높게 지각할수록 직무만족에는 영향을 미치지 않는 것으로 나타나 가설 2-2는 기각되었다. 마지막으로 “항공사승무원이 지각하는 고용불안정은 직무만족에 부의 영향을 미칠 것이다”는 가설 3은 채택되었다. 즉 위협적인 상황으로 인해 자신의 직무가 없어질 지도 모른다는 무력감을 느낄수록 직무만족은 저하 되는 것으로 나타났다.

**Key Words** : 항공사승무원, 고용불안정, 거래 심리적 계약위반, 관계 심리적 계약위반, 직무만족

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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world to experience serious economic depression. The world GDP recorded the annual growth rates of -4.5 ~ -3.5%, lower than those in the global economic crisis in the late 2000s[1]. In particular, airline industry is one of the industries which have suffered direct impacts from the protraction of the pandemic. In 2020, all the statistics related with global airline industry recorded unprecedented reduction from the previous year: the volume of global passenger transportation was reduced by over 60% (ICAO); airport sales were reduced by 111.8 billion dollars (ACI); paid passenger kms were reduced by 65.9% (IATA). In addition, sales in tourism and trade which are directly related with the airline industry suffered reduction of sales by 60~78% (150 billion dollars → 33~59 billion dollars, UNWTO), and 9.2% (WTO), respectively[2].

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic drastically reduced the demand of international movement, and, as most of the countries strengthened entry restriction, international airline markets actually entered into shutdown. The Korean airline industry have experienced unprecedented difficulties and pains. Korean airlines are restructuring their organizations such as rotational temporary retirement and advice to resign to their employees, making them feel job insecurity.

Job insecurity is the concept implying that employee is aware of the possibility of losing his or her job and has emotional fear of it[3], and is regarded as 'an element which reduces employee's wellbeing, increases one's physical tension, and seriously affects one's productivity[4]. Job insecurity negatively affects not only human relations in organization, but relations with customers, and the stress from it

affects emotional exhaust[3]. In particular, as cabin crew members meet with customers in the limited space called airplane, job insecurity felt by crew members affect their customer service. Thus, it is very important to examine job insecurity of crew members and solve the problems related with it.

Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984)[5] who began to examine job insecurity in full scale defined it as the amount of fear an individual feels regarding his or her job. Ashford, Lee & Bobko (1989)[6] defined it more extensively as the possibility of losing work characteristics, and work itself, and powerlessness. That is, job insecurity means the possibility of losing work where one cannot continue to perform the work.

While organization expects its members to be loyal to, and obey it, and fulfill their duties to obey and make their best to it, the members of organization expect the organization to secure employment and provide opportunities to promote and develop their careers. That is, organizational members have vague expectations about the organization even before they enter it, and they work hard expecting explicit and implicit compensation of the organization. In the perspective of organizational members, it is called psychological contract[7]. That is, psychological contract is contract conditions on the duties the subject of the contract and contracting parties should perform. Contract conditions are determined by the agreement between the subject of the contract and contracting parties. By the contract, employees have the duty to create profits and achieve performance goals, and the organization has the duty to provide employees with rational salaries, comfortable working conditions and welfare benefits. When employees feel that the organization does not perform its duty as the employer, they feel

psychological contract violation[8-11].

In general, psychological contract violation is the response of employees when they feel that their psychological contract with the organization was violated, which can be an important element in forming negative attitudes toward the organization. In particular, environmental changes like closure of flight routes and rapid reduction of flight numbers caused by the COVID-19 can bring about psychological contract violation, affecting attitudes and behaviors of employees.

MacNeil (1985)[12] divided the types of contract into transactional contract and relational contract. Rousseau (1990)[7] further developed the above division, and tested types of psychological contract. First, transactional contract is the type of contract where organization and individual mutually exchange material duties, and, as it has strong economic aspect, the contract is concrete, and parties can easily and clearly judge how the contract is performed. However, as transactional contract focuses only on mutual duties and compensations, it can be not desirable if the relationship between contract parties are close. In contrast, relational contract is the type of contract which emphasizes psychological duties such as provision of opportunities for employees to develop, acceptance of opinions of employees, transfer of rights, and recognition and compensation, etc. between organization and employees. Compared with transactional contract, the period of relational contract is longer, and exchange contents include socio-psychological elements which can be identified through continuous relationships[8].

Restructuring in all airlines in Korea has heightened job insecurity of cabin crew members who provide man-to-man service to passengers. In general, employees tend to have

psychological contracts with their employers as well as explicit contracts with them[7]. When they experience accidents like changes of working characteristics and fire, they think that their employers violated psychological contracts with them[13]. When employees think the organization violated the psychological contract, they feel angry and betrayed, and commit stronger retaliatory acts than when they think that the organization did not satisfy their expectations[14]. Such a psychological contract violation can be perceived not only through objective threat, but through subjective threat like job insecurity[15]. In the research on job insecurity and psychological contract violation among office workers, King (2000)[16] found that the higher job insecurity workers feel, the bigger they feel the organization violates psychological contract. Consequently, the higher job insecurity crew members feel, the higher psychological contract violation they feel.

Psychological contract is a strong determinant affecting attitude and behavior of employees[9,13], and, in particular, employees committed to relational psychological contracts go beyond required works in the organization, and participate in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) expressing high involvement in the organization[17]. When an organization fails to satisfy what employees expect about the original duties of it, psychological contract is violated. Robinson and Rousseau (1994)[15] found that when employees perceive that psychological contract with the organization is violated, their job satisfaction is lowered, and, thus, psychological contract violation and job satisfaction are negatively correlated.

Contents of psychological contract the organization should fulfill work as elements determining job satisfaction of employees, and employees who perceive that the organization

violated psychological contract build negative emotion toward the organization and job dissatisfaction. Pearcy (1997)[18] found that those who perceive psychological contract violation tend to have lower their job satisfaction. Consequently, the more highly employees perceive psychological contract violation, the lower their job satisfaction gets. Based on the above findings, this study set the following hypotheses.

H 1-1: Job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their transactional psychological contract violation.

H 1-2: Job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their relational psychological contract violation.

H 2-1: Transactional psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction.

H 2-2: Relational psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction.

H 3: Job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction.

## 2. Study Design

### 2.1 Sample design and research method

To examine the effect of job insecurity on psychological contract violation and job satisfaction among crew members in airlines in Korea, this study performed a survey. The respondents of the survey were asked to fill out the questionnaire, and survey period was from August 10 to August 30 in 2020. 150 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 143 copies were collected. Excluding 12 copies which had many missing values, 131 copies were used for final analysis. The data were analysed using the SPSS18.0/WIN and the AMOS

22.0 programs. To examine characteristics of respondents, this study did frequency analysis, and, to test validity and reliability on job insecurity, psychological contract violation, and job satisfaction, this study did factor analysis and reliability test. Finally, to test hypotheses, it did path analysis.

## 3. Empirical Analysis

### 3.1 Demographic characteristics

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics**

Distinction		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	92	70.2
	Male	39	29.8
Age	20-29	39	29.8
	30-39	48	36.6
	40-49	32	24.4
	more than 50	12	9.2
Employment Period (year)	less than 5	49	37.4
	5-10	36	27.5
	11-15	25	19.1
Education	more than 16	21	16.0
	2-year college graduates	39	29.8
	Undergraduate school graduates	80	61.0
Rank	Graduate school graduates	12	9.2
	flight attendant	45	34.4
	Senior flight attendant	62	47.3
	manager	24	18.3
Total		131	100

Demographic characteristics of the respondents are as follows Table 1. In gender distribution, the number of females (92, 70.2%) was larger than that of males (39, 29.8%); in age distribution, the largest group was those in their 20s (39, 29.8%) followed by those in their 30s (48, 36.6%), those in their 40s (32, 24.4%), and those in their 50s and over (12, 9.2%); In the proportion of years they have worked continuously, the largest proportion of them was those who worked for less than 5 years (49, 37.4%), followed by those who worked from 5 years to 10 years (36, 27.5%), those who worked from 11 years

to 15 years (25, 19.1%), and those who worked over 16 years. In their schooling levels, the largest proportion of them graduated from 4-year college (80, 61.0%), followed by those who graduated from technical college (39, 29.8%), and those who graduated from graduate school and over(12, 9.2%); in their working positions, the largest proportion of them is senior flight attendant(62, 47.3%), followed by flight attendant(45, 34.4%) and managers (24, 18.3%).

### 3.2 Reliability and Validity of Variables

To choose and elaborate measurement items, this study did reliability test through construct reliability using AMOS 22.0. If the score of construct reliability of an item is 0.7 or above, it is considered as reliable[19]. All the construct reliabilities of the factors used in this study are over 0.9, proving that they are highly reliable. The construct reliability values of all the factors are shown in Table 2.

Next, to test validity of measurement items, this study did confirmatory factor analysis. If

the goodness of fit criteria are strictly applied, RMR should be 0.05 or or less, and GFI, NFI, and CFI should be 0.9 or above, and AGFI should be 0.8 above[20]. Goodness of fit index of confirmatory factor analysis suggested in Table 3 shows the model suitability index after deleting items undermining validity. The goodness of fit index were shown as  $\chi^2=368.423(df=139, p=0.000)$ ,  $\chi^2/df=2.651$ , RMR=0.040, GFI=0.876, AGFI=0.839, NFI=0.906, IFI=0.939, CFI=0.915.

It is recommended that SMC (special multi-cue) should be 0.5 or above. The items which did not satisfy this criterion were deleted after doing convergent validity tests. Standardized loading values linking measurement items and related factors are all 0.5 and over. AVEs (average variance extracted), the amount variance is explained by research unit is also 0.50 or over. t values are also greater than  $\pm 1.96$ , the threshold for acceptance, confirming convergent validity of measurement items[21].

**Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the measurement model**

Factor	Measurement Category	Std. Factor loading	t Value	SMC
Job Insecurity	JI 1	.874	---	.559
	JI 2	.521	12.102**	.790
	JI 3	.731	12.233**	.674
	JI 4	.599	11.191**	.548
Transactional Psychological Contract Violation	TC 1	.576	11.218**	.574
	TC 2	.612	---	.844
	TC 3	.608	13.765**	.611
	TC 4	.615	13.404**	.707
Relational Psychological Contract Violation	PC 1	.701	---	.756
	PC 2	.714	14.044**	.587
	PC 3	.888	14.497**	.722
	PC 4	.550	14.341**	.866
Job Satisfaction	JS 1	.715	---	.771
	JS 2	.708	15.821**	.732
	JS 3	.647	11.773**	.510
	JS 4	.570	11.335**	.531
$\chi^2=405.123(p=.000)$ , CMIN/DF=2.225, GFI=.899, AGFI=.889, CFI=.901, RMSEA=.058, NFI=.913, and IFI=.901, **:P<.01				
AVE: Job Insecurity 0.576, Transactional Psychological Contract Violation 0.777, Relational Psychological Contract Violation: 0.703, Job Satisfaction: 0.802,				
Construct reliability: Job Insecurity 0.716, Transactional Psychological Contract Violation 0.807, Relational Psychological Contract Violation: 0.801, Job Satisfaction: 0.881				

Discriminant validity means that correlation coefficients between values of different concepts should be low. As shown in Table 3, to examine discriminant validity of the measurement model, this study compared square root AVE values and correlation coefficients of research units. If AVE value between two factors is larger than squared value of correlation coefficient, that is, coefficient of determination, discriminant validity is secured. Through the above analyses, reliability of the model, convergent validity and discriminant validity were secured[21].

### 3.3 Analyzing Structural Equation Model

The test of the overall structural model of the research model resulted in the model with  $\chi^2=368.423(p=0.000)$ , GFI=0.881, AGFI=0.848, NFI=0.906, RMR=0.040. And  $\chi^2/df=2.65$ , which is a proper level. Criteria of goodness of fit for structural equation model are as follows: RMR = 0.05 or below; GFI, NFI, and CFI are 0.9 or over; AGFI is 0.8 or over[19]. The results of path analysis of the structural model are shown in Table 4.

The results of hypothesis tests are as follows. H 1-1 was that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their transactional psychological contract violation. Empirical analysis showed that job insecurity

had path coefficient 0.811 ( $t=1.997$ ) on transactional psychological contract violation. Here, as t value was significant ( $t \geq \pm 1.96$ ), H 1-1 was adopted. H 1-2 was that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their relational psychological contract violation. It was found that job insecurity had path coefficient 0.431 ( $t=4.003$ ) on relational psychological contract violation. As t value was significant, H 1-2 was adopted. H 2-1 was that transactional psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction. It was found that transactional psychological contract violation had path coefficient -0.411 ( $t=-4.131$ ), and t value was significant, H 2-1 was adopted. H 2-2 was that relational psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction. It was found that relational psychological contract violation had path coefficient -0.018 ( $t=-0.151$ ) on job satisfaction. As t value was not significant, H 2-2 was rejected. H 3 was that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction. It was found that job insecurity had path coefficient -1.097 ( $t=-2.031$ ) on job satisfaction. As t value was significant, H 3 was adopted.

**Table 3. Correlation Matrix**

	A	B	C	D
Job Insecurity : A	.758			
Transactional Psychological Contract Violation : B	.431	.881		
Relational Psychological Contract Violation : C	.330	.391	.838	
Job Satisfaction : D	-.255	-.153	-.298	.895

all correlations are significant at  $p(0.01(2\text{-tailed}))$ , diagonal value: square root AVE

**Table 4. Structure model path analysis**

H	Path	Estimate	S.E	C.R	p value
1-1	Job Insecurity--> Transactional Psychological Contract Violation	.811	0.42	1.997**	.000
1-2	Job Insecurity--> Relational Psychological Contract Violation	.431	0.11	4.003**	.000
2-1	Transactional Psychological Contract Violation--> Job Satisfaction	-.411	0.09	-4.131**	.000
2-2	Relational Psychological Contract Violation--> Job Satisfaction	-0.018	0.18	-0.151	.470
3	Job Insecurity--> Job Satisfaction	-1.097	0.54	-2.031**	.000

\*:t-statistic ( $\geq 1.96$ ) sig. level of  $p(0.05)$

#### 4. Conclusion

This study was to examine the effect of job insecurity on their psychological contract violation and job satisfaction among airline crew members. Also, this study intended to give meaningful hint in reducing job insecurity crew members feel, and, by examining ways to relieve psychological contract violation, give theoretical and practical suggestions on human resource management of airlines.

The findings from empirical analysis are as follows. First, H 1-1 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their transactional psychological contract violation was adopted. That is, the more crew members perceive that they may leave the company regardless of their intentions, the more highly they perceive that transactional psychological contract is violated. The more they perceive that they may be fired in the near future, the more they perceive their transactional psychological contract with the company is violated.

Second, H 1-2 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have positive effect on their relational psychological contract violation was adopted. It means that the more highly crew members perceive job insecurity, the more they may be disappointed about their opportunities on career development, sufficient educational training, and support of the company on their personal problems.

Third, H 2-1 that transactional psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was adopted. It means that the more crew members perceive that their transactional contract with the company that the company will provide them with fair recruitment and evaluation, promotion management, and high payment responding to their efforts and

performance is violated, the lower their job satisfaction will get. In contrast, H 2-2 that relational psychological contract violation of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was rejected. It means that 'sufficient educational training' and 'opportunity to develop career' do not significantly lower their job satisfaction. It seems that the finding does not mean that relational psychological contract violation they perceive is not precondition of lowering job satisfaction, but that they do not perceive relational psychological contract violation is as important as visible transactional psychological contract violation. Relational psychological contract is about the perception of employees on whether the company provides them with 'sufficient educational training', 'opportunity to develop career', and 'support of the company for their personal problems'. It seems that crew members do not perceive that such relational psychological contract is as important as direct and visible transactional psychological contract such as salary or promotion.

Finally, H 3 that job insecurity of airline cabin crew members will have negative effect on their job satisfaction was adopted. That is, the more crew members perceive that they are powerless about losing their jobs caused by threatening situation, the lower their job satisfaction gets.

Recently, the accident where a airline crew member died during the coerced layoff caused by the COVID-19 was recognized as industrial disaster. It was found that job insecurity causes them to feel psychological contract violation, leading to lowering of job satisfaction. Transactional psychological contract violation among psychological contract violation was found to have negative effect on job satisfaction, but relational psychological contract violation did not have significant effect

on job satisfaction. Thus, transactional psychological contract such as promotion or compensation should be managed more seriously than relational psychological contract. Empirical analyses of this study imply the followings. First, to minimize perception of crew members on psychological contract violation, airlines should manage expectation levels of crew members. It is necessary for airlines to figure out psychological contract violation perceived by expectation of crew members rather than unfulfillment of promises of the organizations, and take care not to make it affect negatively job satisfaction of them. Like the case where contract contents are not fulfilled, performance of contract contents which do not satisfy expectation of crew members can negatively affect job satisfaction of them, causing leakage of human resources by stimulating them to leave the job. In particular, as human resources are the sources of competition for service firms like airlines, it is necessary for the company to manage and support expectations of members on financial and non-financial compensation levels. As the external management environments change, attitudes of employees, internal customers, on their jobs and work places are changing. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze their attitudes and manage their expectations on contract contents through interviews and surveys.

Second, to manage crew members of airlines, those companies should establish the management system to guarantee performance of contract contents signed by the company and employees. The company should establish and implement clear standards and periods in educational promotion from economy class crew members, to business class crew members, to first class crew members. As whether transactional contract contents are implemented

or not can be clearly identifiable, it is necessary to form organizational culture where employees can actually experience whether contract contents are implemented or not. Transactional contract contents such as proper payments compared with those of competitors, rational compensation reflecting performance, fair promotion opportunities directly affect job satisfaction of crew members. If job insecurity is eased, and psychological contract violation is managed, the elements hampering job satisfaction can be minimized, ultimately maximizing management performance of airlines.

To concretely and accurately examine the relationships between preceding and resulting variables on contract violation, this study divided psychological contract violation into two dimensions: transactional contract violation and relational contract violation. In particular, there are not sufficient researches examining the relationship between psychological contract violation and job satisfaction by dividing psychological contract violation into sub-dimensions of it. This study is meaningful in the sense that it sought to find ways to minimize negative effects of job insecurity by analyzing job insecurity of crew members to strengthen competitiveness of human resource management of airlines. It is expected that this study will play an important role in understanding the results of job insecurity and finding ways to minimize negative effects of it.

This study has some limitations as follows. To exactly measure job insecurity of crew members, this study selected only regular crew members as survey respondents. Currently, airline crew members should go through 2-year internship period to become regular members. Consequently, it seems necessary in future researches to examine job insecurity of irregular crew members.



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