

The Paradoxical Influence of Job Insecurity on Workplace Satisfaction: Evidence from Indonesian Migrant Workers in Sarawak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This investigation addresses a critical gap in understanding how employment uncertainty influences job contentment among cross-border laborers. Conventional wisdom suggests that feelings of workplace instability diminish employee satisfaction; however, preliminary observations among Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Sarawak reveal a counterintuitive pattern. The primary objective examines whether employment precariousness paradoxically enhances occupational fulfillment within this unique demographic context.

Methodology: A sequential explanatory mixed-method framework was implemented. Initially, quantitative data from 207 Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak underwent structural equation modeling analysis using PLS-SEM techniques. Subsequently, qualitative validation occurred through in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected informants, exploring psychological mechanisms underlying the observed statistical relationships. The integration triangulated numerical evidence with contextual narratives.

Finding: Statistical analysis revealed an unexpected positive correlation ($\beta=0.161$, $p=0.009$) between employment insecurity and job satisfaction, contradicting mainstream theoretical predictions. Four distinct psychological mechanisms emerged through qualitative analysis: gratitude amplification (30% of informants), comparative advantage recognition (30%), motivational intensification (20%), and existential meaning reinforcement (20%). Work-related factors demonstrated the strongest predictive power ($\beta=0.655$, $p<0.001$), while fear of social judgment exhibited dual pathways, directly influencing satisfaction ($\beta=0.133$, $p=0.026$) and indirectly through insecurity perceptions. The integrated model explained 85.2% variance in job satisfaction.

Conclusion: Employment uncertainty operates paradoxically among migrant populations, transforming potential stressors into satisfaction enhancers through context-specific psychological adaptations. This challenges universalist assumptions in job insecurity theory and demonstrates the necessity for culturally situated frameworks when examining transnational labor dynamics. Practical implications suggest that policies addressing migrant worker welfare should prioritize tangible workplace conditions over exclusively targeting security perceptions, as insecurity may function protectively within constrained opportunity structures.

Keywords: Job Insecurity Paradox; Migrant Worker Satisfaction; Cross-border Employment; Psychological Mechanisms; Indonesian Workers Malaysia.

Submitted: 12-01-2026

Revised: 23-06-2026

Accepted: 25-06-2026

Article Doi:

http://dx.doi.org/10.22441/jurnal_mix.2026.v16i2.005

INTRODUCTION

Global labor migration involves approximately 169 million workers (Bureau international du travail, 2021). Indonesian nationals constitute Malaysia's largest foreign workforce, particularly in Sarawak's plantation, construction, and service sectors. Understanding workplace satisfaction carries profound policy and development implications.

Job insecurity—perceived powerlessness to maintain employment (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984)—typically reduces satisfaction through resource depletion (Sverke et al., 2019). However, preliminary observations revealed paradoxical patterns: many Indonesian workers expressing high insecurity simultaneously reported substantial satisfaction, challenging mainstream assumptions.

Research gaps include: (1) limited investigation of Indonesian workers in Malaysia, (2) theoretical frameworks predominantly from Western contexts examining native populations, and (3) minimal attention to paradoxical relationships. This mixed-methods study investigates whether job insecurity paradoxically enhances satisfaction while identifying underlying psychological mechanisms, contributing context-dependent theoretical understanding and evidence-based policy guidance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Satisfaction: Theoretical Foundations and Migrant Context

Job satisfaction, conceptualized as an individual's affective orientation toward their employment role, has occupied central position within organizational behavior scholarship for over eight decades. Herzberg (2003) Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivators and extrinsic hygiene factors, suggesting that satisfaction emerges from achievement, recognition, and growth opportunities, while dissatisfaction primarily stems from inadequate working conditions, compensation, or interpersonal relationships. This framework, though subject to various critiques and refinements, continues informing contemporary investigations into workplace attitudes and behaviors.

Within migrant worker populations, job satisfaction assumes particular salience given its associations with contract completion, remittance consistency, and potential exploitation vulnerability. Research examining satisfaction among migrant populations has identified several distinctive characteristics distinguishing their experiences from native workers. Migrant employees frequently evaluate their employment situations through comparative lenses, weighing current conditions against limited alternatives in origin countries rather than against ideal standards or peer experiences in destination locations (Han et al., 2015; Farris, 2020). This comparative reference point fundamentally alters satisfaction formation processes, potentially enabling contentment despite objectively challenging circumstances.

Additionally, migrant satisfaction frequently reflects complex negotiations between economic imperatives and personal wellbeing concerns. Many international workers accept conditions that native populations would reject, not due to lower standards but because migration represents strategic decisions to maximize familial economic security. This instrumental orientation toward employment—wherein work functions primarily as income generation mechanism rather than identity expression avenue—shapes satisfaction formation through different psychological pathways than those operating among permanent residents pursuing career advancement (Friberg, 2012).

Yet the empirical record on job insecurity and job satisfaction is far from uniform. While the dominant strand of research documents a negative association between the two constructs

(Sverke et al., 2019), a closer reading of the literature reveals meaningful inconsistencies that have too often been dismissed as methodological noise rather than treated as substantively informative. Studies conducted outside Western organizational contexts—particularly those focusing on migrant and informal workers in Southeast Asia—frequently yield patterns that resist straightforward interpretation within frameworks built for stable, opportunity-rich labor markets. These inconsistencies are not incidental; they signal the presence of contextual moderators that existing theory has yet to adequately theorize. It is precisely this empirical tension—between the near-universal expectation of a negative relationship and the recurring anomalies documented among constrained populations—that motivates the paradoxical hypothesis at the center of this study. Rather than treating inconsistent findings as exceptions to be explained away, this research takes them seriously as evidence that the insecurity–satisfaction relationship is neither linear nor universal, but fundamentally conditioned by the structural and cultural circumstances in which workers are embedded.

Alternative Theoretical Lenses: Toward a Contextually Situated Framework

Although Conservation of Resources Theory has long anchored scholarly discussions of job insecurity, it was not developed with migrant populations in mind, nor does it account for the radically constrained opportunity structures within which many transnational workers operate. Three complementary theoretical perspectives offer a more contextually sensitive foundation for understanding the paradox documented in this study.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) holds that psychological responses to potential stressors are not determined by the objective nature of those stressors but by how individuals interpret and evaluate them in relation to their own resources and goals. Within this framework, job insecurity does not carry a fixed emotional valence; its meaning is constructed through a process of cognitive appraisal that is deeply shaped by personal history, available alternatives, and the standards against which current conditions are measured. For Indonesian migrant workers whose realistic alternatives are substantially worse than their present circumstances, the very same uncertainty that generates distress among workers with richer opportunity portfolios may instead trigger appreciation, heightened effort, and a protective sense of purpose. This appraisal-centered lens helps explain why mechanisms such as gratitude amplification and comparative advantage recognition emerged so prominently in the qualitative data: they are, in essence, adaptive reappraisals of a situation that COR Theory would categorically code as threatening.

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) provides a second analytical layer by drawing attention to the reference groups that workers use when evaluating their own situation. Satisfaction is never assessed in absolute terms; it is always relational, always produced through comparison. The critical question is: compared to what? Native workers and highly skilled professionals typically benchmark their conditions against peers in equivalent or superior positions within the same labor market—a comparison set that makes insecurity salient and costly. Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak, by contrast, tend to engage in downward social comparisons, measuring their current situation against the limited formal employment prospects they would face upon return to their regions of origin. Within this comparative logic, even a structurally precarious position in Malaysia may yield a genuinely favorable evaluation, because the relevant benchmark is not an idealized standard but a concrete and considerably less attractive alternative.

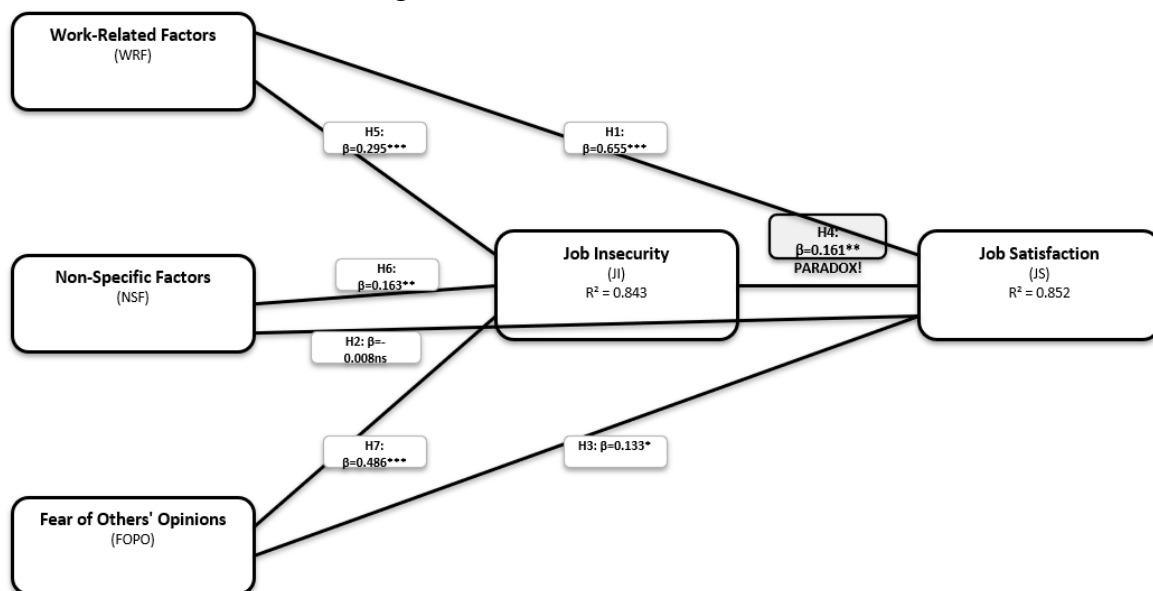
Meaningful Work Theory (Rosso et al., 2010) offers a third perspective by foregrounding the role of purpose and significance in shaping how individuals relate to their work. Research in this tradition consistently demonstrates that when employment is experienced as

meaningful—when it connects to something valued beyond the immediate task—workers exhibit greater satisfaction, resilience, and commitment even under objectively demanding conditions. For migrant workers whose primary migration motivation is the welfare of dependent family members, work is rarely experienced as merely instrumental; it carries the weight of parental duty, filial obligation, and collective aspiration. In such contexts, the awareness of potential job loss does not simply generate anxiety; it can simultaneously deepen the perceived significance of the work itself, activating what this study later identifies as existential meaning reinforcement. Taken together, these three theoretical frameworks converge on a central insight that COR Theory alone cannot provide: satisfaction formation among constrained populations is mediated by cognitive appraisals, shaped by comparative reference frames, and animated by the meaning that workers attach to their labor. It is this integration—which we term a context-sensitive satisfaction formation framework—that provides the conceptual foundation for understanding why job insecurity may operate paradoxically among Indonesian migrant workers in Sarawak.

Hypothesis Development

Hypotheses: H1: Work-related factors positively influence satisfaction. H2: Non-specific factors don't significantly influence satisfaction directly. H3: FOPO positively influences satisfaction. H4: Job insecurity positively influences satisfaction (paradox). H5-H7: Work-related factors, non-specific factors, and FOPO positively influence insecurity. H8: FOPO influences satisfaction directly and indirectly through insecurity.

Figure 1. Framework of Research



METHOD

Research Design and Philosophical Positioning

Sequential mixed-methods design: PLS-SEM ($n=207$ Indonesian workers, March-August 2024, snowball sampling) followed by qualitative interviews ($n=10$). Demographics: mean age 32.4, 58% male, diverse sectors (plantation 34%, construction 28%, manufacturing 22%, service 16%), mean tenure 4.2 years.

Instruments (5-point Likert): Work-related factors (12 items, $\alpha=0.89$, Han et al., 2015),

Non-specific factors (7 items, $\alpha=0.85$, Black et al., 1991), FOPO (7 items, $\alpha=0.87$, Leary, 1983), Job insecurity (5 items, $\alpha=0.91$, De Witte, 2005), Job satisfaction (6 items, $\alpha=0.88$, Locke, 1976). Translation via back-translation, pilot-tested (n=30).

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Measurement Indicators of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Sample Indicators	Source
Work-Related Factors (WRF) 12 items	Compensation (2) Working Conditions (3) Work Relationships (3) Autonomy (2) Development (2)	Adequate compensation for living needs; Timely monthly salary payment; Safe and comfortable work environment; Appropriate work hours; Clear supervisor communication; Strong peer support; Fair workplace treatment; Sufficient task autonomy; Involvement in work decisions; Skill development opportunities; Manager support for capability development	(Ahmad & Munir, 2023; Berber et al., 2023; Han et al., 2015; Wang & Jing, 2018)
Non-Specific Factors (NSF) 7 items	Personal Readiness (3) Cultural Adaptation (2) Social-Emotional (2)	Age supports workplace adaptation; Education helps job understanding; Adequate language proficiency; Understanding Malaysian culture; Social norm adaptation ability; Emotional control under pressure; Separation from family management	(Black et al., 1991)
Fear of Others' Opinions (FOPO) 7 items	Fear of Failure (3) Social Evaluation (2) Rejection Concerns (2)	Fear of being labeled failure; Worry about family disappointment; Concern about community judgment; Fear of negative family assessment; Worry about neighbor gossip; Fear of inability to meet expectations; Concern about rejection upon return	(Leary, 2011)
Job Insecurity (JI) 5 items	Policy Uncertainty (2) Employment Threat (1) Financial Concerns (1) Adaptation Worry (1)	Uncertainty about policy changes affecting employment; Threat of job termination; Financial security concerns; Worry about adapting to workplace changes; Threat to position or salary	(De Witte, 2005; Sverke et al., 2019)
Job Satisfaction (JS) 6 items	Intrinsic Satisfaction (3) Motivation & Performance (2) Recognition (1)	Genuine enjoyment in work; Pride in job accomplishments; Meaningful work contribution; Motivation for optimal performance; Satisfaction with task achievement; Work provides desired status	(Balasubramanian et al., 2016; Itzhaki et al., 2013; Locke, 1976)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation: Establishing Psychometric Adequacy

Hypothesis testing revealed multiple significant relationships with varying theoretical implications. H1 received strong support as work-related factors powerfully influenced job satisfaction ($\beta=0.655$, $p<0.001$, $f^2=0.596$), explaining 59.6% variance and confirming that

tangible workplace conditions—fair compensation, safety, respectful treatment, autonomy, development—remain paramount despite migrants' unique circumstances, suggesting employers cannot justify substandard conditions and policymakers should prioritize workplace regulations over psychological interventions. H2 was supported through non-significant effects ($\beta=-0.008$, $p=0.454$), confirming general personal readiness and cultural adaptation don't directly determine job-specific satisfaction once workplace conditions are controlled, illustrating that domain-specific factors predict domain-specific outcomes. H3 showed FOPO positively affected satisfaction ($\beta=0.133$, $p=0.026$, $f^2=0.090$) by motivating achievement to meet family expectations, generating competence feelings and social approval, with collectivist cultural contexts enabling genuine satisfaction from fulfilling social expectations rather than experiencing them as burdens. Most critically, H4 confirmed the paradox: job insecurity positively influenced satisfaction ($\beta=0.161$, $p=0.009$, $f^2=0.136$), contradicting four decades of mainstream predictions, with validity supported by statistical significance beyond conventional thresholds, bootstrapping stability (95% CI [0.045, 0.277]), substantive effect size explaining 13.6% additional variance, and strong qualitative corroboration from informants describing mechanisms through which insecurity enhanced satisfaction, with convergence across methods confirming genuine phenomenon rather than statistical artifact.

Table 2. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β Coefficient	p-value	f^2 Effect Size	Decision
H1	WRF → JS	0.655***	<0.001	0.596 (Large)	Supported
H2	NSF → JS	-0.008	0.454	0.001 (None)	Not Supported
H3	FOPO → JS (Direct)	0.133*	0.026	0.090 (Small)	Supported
H4	JI → JS (Paradox)	0.161**	0.009	0.136 (Small-Medium)	Supported
H5	WRF → JI	0.295***	<0.001	0.135 (Small-Medium)	Supported
H6	NSF → JI	0.163**	0.008	0.041 (Small)	Supported
H7	FOPO → JI	0.486***	<0.001	0.309 (Medium)	Supported
H8	FOPO → JI → JS (Mediation)	0.078*	0.012	VAF = 37%	Supported (Partial Mediation)

Regarding insecurity's antecedents, H5-H7 received support with varying magnitudes and surprising implications. H5 confirmed work-related factors positively influenced insecurity ($\beta=0.295$, $p<0.001$, $f^2=0.135$), paradoxically showing better conditions heightened concerns as workers perceived greater loss potential and increased attachment ("I have more to lose"), suggesting insecurity involves complex cognitive appraisals beyond objective precariousness. H6 showed non-specific factors increased insecurity ($\beta=0.163$, $p=0.008$, $f^2=0.041$), with better-adapted workers possessing greater awareness of labor market realities and immigration uncertainties while less adapted workers experienced less insecurity through ignorance. H7 received strongest support as FOPO powerfully predicted insecurity ($\beta=0.486$, $p<0.001$, $f^2=0.309$), with social pressures substantially amplifying employment uncertainty beyond objective precariousness. H8 confirmed partial mediation with FOPO influencing satisfaction both directly (63% of effect) and indirectly through insecurity ($\beta=0.078$, $p=0.012$, $VAF=37\%$), revealing dual mechanisms where social pressure simultaneously motivates achievement and intensifies anxiety, both ultimately enhancing satisfaction through different routes. Model evaluation confirmed exceptional explanatory power: $R^2=0.852$ for satisfaction

and $R^2=0.843$ for insecurity, substantially exceeding typical research (30-50% variance), with Stone-Geisser Q^2 values (0.746, 0.701) validating predictive relevance beyond sample data, indicating robust, replicable patterns rather than sample-specific idiosyncrasies.

Qualitative Findings: Illuminating Paradox Mechanisms Through Lived Experience

In-depth interviews provided rich contextual understanding of the psychological mechanisms transforming job insecurity from threat into satisfaction enhancer, moving beyond statistical confirmation of the paradox to illuminate how and why it operates. Thematic analysis identified four distinct but interrelated mechanisms operating across the sample, with individual informants typically emphasizing one or two primary processes while acknowledging others' relevance. Importantly, these mechanisms weren't researcher-imposed interpretations but rather emerged from informants' own words as they described their experiences navigating employment uncertainty. The following table summarizes these mechanisms before detailed discussion:

Table 3. Four Psychological Mechanisms Underlying the Job Insecurity Paradox			
Mechanism	Prevalence	Psychological Process	Representative Evidence
Gratitude Amplification	30% (n=3)	Threat of job loss heightens appreciation for current employment, transforming potential anxiety into thankfulness and enhanced satisfaction	<i>"When I think I might lose this job, I realize how much it means. Before worrying about losing it, I sometimes complained. But now I understand this job is precious. I feel thankful rather than stressed"</i>
Comparative Advantage Recognition	30% (n=3)	Workers evaluate current uncertain position against realistic alternatives in origin country, maintaining satisfaction through favorable comparison	<i>"Yes, maybe I lose this job someday. But what would I do in Indonesia? At least here, even temporary, I earn five times more. So even with uncertainty, I'm satisfied because this is my best option"</i>
Motivational Intensification	20% (n=2)	Insecurity triggers enhanced work effort and performance, generating recognition and achievement satisfaction that outweighs uncertainty concerns	<i>"Knowing I might lose this job makes me work harder to prove my value. When I work harder, my boss notices and praises me. That recognition makes me proud and satisfied despite the fear"</i>
Existential Meaning Reinforcement	20% (n=2)	Uncertainty awareness connects workers to deeper employment purpose (family support, obligations), amplifying work significance and consequent satisfaction	<i>"When I worry about losing my job, I remember why I'm here—my children's education, my parents' care. This makes my work feel meaningful and important, giving me satisfaction despite uncertainty"</i>

Qualitative analysis revealed four mechanisms. Gratitude amplification (30%): "When I think I might lose this job, I realize how much it means...I feel thankful rather than stressed." Comparative advantage (30%): "Even with uncertainty, this is my best option compared to Indonesia." Motivational intensification (20%): "Knowing I might lose my job makes me work harder...That recognition makes me satisfied." Existential meaning (20%): "When I worry, I remember why I'm here—my children's education. This makes work meaningful."

Findings challenge Conservation of Resources theory's universality, demonstrating context-dependent effects. Critical factor: opportunity structure constraint—migrants face severely limited alternatives, making even insecure employment superior to realistic options. Work-related factors' dominance ($\beta=0.655$) confirms tangible conditions remain paramount, suggesting policies should prioritize workplace improvements over psychological interventions. FOPO's dual pathways reveal collectivist cultural factors' complexity—creating pressure while providing meaning. The paradox reveals resilience but doesn't justify continued uncertainty; policy should address root causes through structural reforms.

Discussion

The convergence between quantitative patterns ($\beta=0.161$, $p=0.009$) and qualitative mechanisms provides robust evidence for the job insecurity paradox among Indonesian migrant workers. Statistical demonstration establishes pattern prevalence across substantial sample proportions—this isn't idiosyncratic experience but systematic relationship. However, correlation alone cannot illuminate why relationships exist or through what processes they operate. Qualitative findings address this limitation by revealing four discrete psychological mechanisms through which workers transform potential threats into satisfaction sources: gratitude amplification, comparative advantage recognition, motivational intensification, and existential meaning reinforcement. Informants' own words describing cognitive reappraisals, emotional regulations, and meaning-making processes generated counterintuitive outcomes. This convergence offers complementary insights wherein each method addresses the other's inherent limitations, collectively yielding understanding neither could achieve independently.

Theoretically, these findings fundamentally challenge core assumptions embedded within dominant perspectives. Conservation of Resources theory assumes employment uncertainty invariably threatens valued resources—income, status, control, future planning—thereby triggering resource protection mechanisms and psychological distress. This theory doesn't acknowledge circumstances under which insecurity might enhance rather than threaten wellbeing, nor recognize potential for threat awareness to amplify appreciation rather than merely generating anxiety. Current findings demonstrate these unexpected patterns. Does this invalidate COR theory entirely? No—but it suggests boundary conditions requiring specification. When do negative relationships hold? Under what structural and cultural circumstances might they weaken, disappear, or reverse? These questions cannot be answered by assuming established relationships replicate universally without investigating potential moderators and contextual contingencies.

The critical contextual factor enabling paradox emergence appears to be opportunity structure constraint combined with collectivist cultural orientation. Migrant workers face severely limited alternatives—returning to Indonesia offers minimal formal employment prospects given educational backgrounds, geographic origins, and economic conditions, while remaining in Malaysia without current employment provides few alternative positions given legal restrictions, language barriers, and skill limitations. Within such constrained circumstances, even insecure employment represents substantial improvement over realistic alternatives, fundamentally altering comparative evaluations underlying satisfaction

formation. This contrasts sharply with native populations or highly skilled professionals enjoying broader opportunity portfolios, where insecurity genuinely threatens access to comparable alternatives. For these advantaged groups, COR theory's negative predictions likely hold—they have resources to lose and alternatives to pursue. But for constrained populations lacking equivalent alternatives, the same objective insecurity generates different subjective experiences because loss implications differ fundamentally.

Cultural factors matter, though their operation requires careful specification to avoid stereotyping. The four paradox mechanisms—particularly gratitude amplification and meaning reinforcement—may operate more powerfully within collectivist societies emphasizing interdependence, family obligations, and meaning derived from fulfilling social roles rather than individual achievement. Western individualist contexts might privilege autonomy and self-actualization, making employment uncertainty more threatening to identity because work functions as self-expression avenue rather than merely income generation. Indonesian migrants' strong family orientation and collective identity facilitate paradox mechanisms by providing external meaning sources (family welfare, parental duty fulfillment, children's future) transcending individual employment security. However, this doesn't mean collectivism automatically generates paradoxes—collectivist workers in different structural circumstances might exhibit standard negative relationships. Culture matters, but its effects depend on interaction with structural opportunities rather than operating independently.

Work-related factors demonstrating strongest satisfaction influence ($\beta=0.655$, explaining 59.6% variance) confirms tangible workplace conditions remain primary satisfaction determinants regardless of psychological mechanisms' theoretical interest. This pragmatic finding holds crucial practical implications: interventions should prioritize improving actual employment conditions—fair compensation, safe environments, respectful treatment, reasonable workloads, development opportunities—rather than exclusively focusing on psychological resilience building or cultural orientation programs. While psychological preparation facilitates adaptation and might activate beneficial coping mechanisms, data unambiguously demonstrate that improving objective conditions yields greater satisfaction returns than enhancing subjective coping capacities. Organizations and policymakers cannot justify inadequate conditions by assuming workers' psychological resilience will compensate; good conditions matter tremendously regardless of adaptive capabilities.

However, the paradoxical insecurity finding carries nuanced policy implications requiring careful interpretation to avoid misuse. The positive insecurity-satisfaction relationship does NOT suggest that perpetuating employment uncertainty benefits workers or that insecurity should be maintained or tolerated as acceptable. Such interpretation would constitute grievous misapplication of findings. Rather, the finding indicates that within current constrained circumstances—where structural reforms providing genuine security remain politically and economically distant—migrant workers have developed adaptive psychological mechanisms enabling satisfaction despite insecurity. These mechanisms represent resilience and agency, not justification for continued exploitation. Policy responses should address root causes—expanding legal work authorization pathways, improving contract permanence and enforceability, reducing exploitation vulnerability, strengthening legal protections—while recognizing that satisfaction can exist even under imperfect conditions due to workers' remarkable adaptive capacities. The paradox reveals human resilience under constraint, not acceptable employment models.

FOPO's dual pathway effects (direct $\beta=0.133$, indirect $\beta=0.078$) highlight cultural factors' complexity and bidirectionality. Social pressures simultaneously generate direct

satisfaction enhancement through motivation and cognitive dissonance reduction, while also intensifying insecurity subsequently transformed via paradox mechanisms into additional satisfaction. This reveals collectivist cultural norms and family obligations function as double-edged phenomena—creating pressure while simultaneously providing meaning structures, motivation sources, and purpose clarity facilitating satisfaction despite challenging circumstances. Interventions addressing migrant welfare shouldn't attempt eliminating social expectations or weakening family ties, as these constitute core identity elements and primary migration motivations. Instead, effective approaches should acknowledge cultural realities while ensuring workplace conditions enable realistic expectation fulfillment without requiring superhuman effort or accepting exploitative treatment.

Taken together, the findings of this study advance scholarship in three distinct but interrelated ways. At the empirical level, this research provides systematic, methodologically triangulated evidence that the insecurity–satisfaction relationship can be positive rather than negative—a pattern documented not merely as statistical noise but as a robust, replicable phenomenon supported by both quantitative path coefficients and richly textured qualitative accounts. At the explanatory level, the study moves beyond establishing that the paradox exists to illuminating how and through what psychological processes it operates, identifying four discrete mechanisms that together constitute a theoretically coherent account of adaptive satisfaction formation under constraint. At the theoretical level, the findings call for a deliberate shift away from universalist frameworks toward context-sensitive models that treat structural opportunity and cultural orientation not as background noise but as constitutive of the very relationship under investigation. The integration of Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Meaningful Work Theory into a unified context-sensitive satisfaction formation framework represents this study's principal conceptual contribution: it offers scholars and practitioners a more precise set of theoretical tools for anticipating when, among whom, and under what conditions the paradox is likely to emerge—and when it is not.

CONCLUSION

Job insecurity operates paradoxically among Indonesian migrant workers ($\beta=0.161$, $p=0.009$) through four mechanisms: gratitude amplification, comparative advantage recognition, motivational intensification, and existential meaning reinforcement. This challenges mainstream theory, demonstrating insecurity effects depend on opportunity constraints and cultural frameworks.

Work-related factors showed strongest influence ($\beta=0.655$, 59.6% variance), confirming tangible conditions remain primary determinants. Policy should prioritize workplace improvements—compensation, safety, treatment, autonomy—rather than exclusively targeting psychological interventions. The paradox reveals resilience but doesn't justify accepting precariousness.

Limitations: cross-sectional design, self-reported data, Sarawak sample restriction, snowball sampling biases. Future research: longitudinal designs, comparative populations, moderating factors investigation. Contributions include context-dependent theoretical understanding, mechanism identification, and evidence-based policy guidance emphasizing structural reforms over resilience exploitation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges Pusat Pembiayaan dan Asesmen Pendidikan Tinggi (PPAPT), Kemendikbudristek, for Beasiswa Penyelesaian Studi Program Doktor 2025 funding. Gratitude to participating workers, community organizations, and anonymous reviewers.

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