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Job Insecurity during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Teachers' Psychological Wellbeing, and Job Attitudes: Organizational Compassion as a Buffer

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Abstract

The heightened employment uncertainty during the peak of COVID-19 due to the forced closure of work places and the slump in economic activities exacerbated the stress occasioned by the pandemic situation. Based on the Event System Theory and job insecurity literature, the current study investigates organizational compassion as a buffer against the effects of job insecurity during COVID-19 on teachers' psychological wellbeing and job attitudes after the reopening of schools. Data was obtained from 470 primary and secondary school teachers across Uganda. Using psychological wellbeing as a mediator and organizational compassion as a moderator, the moderated mediation hypothesis was supported for all job attitudes except normative commitment. Our findings suggest that organizational compassion is essential in alleviating employees' suffering during time of need. However, it should be offered to employees in a way that does not foster less desired employee attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords COVID-19 pandemic · Employee engagement · Job insecurity · Job satisfaction · Organizational commitment · Organizational compassion · Psychological wellbeing · Teachers

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic generally affected how people live and work. The pandemic-related economic lockdowns resulted in economic paralysis in many places causing job insecurity (Ahmad et al., 2020; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2023). In the Ugandan context, teachers are among the employee categories that

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experienced enormous employment uncertainty due to the prolonged closure of schools, lasting nearly two years (Sandefur, 2022). Despite the desire for teaching and learning to continue, opening schools was considered risky during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, given inadequate access to online teaching and learning platforms, many teachers could not work for the entire period schools were locked down. In line with the EST proposition that prolonged critical events are more likely to trigger new behaviors or features than events that last a short duration (Morgeson et al., 2015), prolonged lockdowns could have heightened job insecurity.

Job insecurity involves qualitative (worry about losing some aspects of the job) and quantitative (fear of losing the job) aspects (Vander Elst et al., 2014). In line with this conceptualization, employment uncertainty for teachers during COVID-19 manifested in different forms. Many teachers as well as employees especially in the private sector, did not receive salary or other benefits during the lockdown, while others received only half of their wages (Mwesigwa, 2021). Some owners of private schools transformed them into other profitable businesses at the time of the lockdown; for example, some turned into farms (Michael, 2021). These situations outline that teachers were faced with challenges relating to the possibilities of job loss.

In addition, there were several changes in work arrangements for schools that were able to operate during the lockdown. For example, very few schools were able to venture into online classes, which has led to the promotion of blended teaching and learning even after the reopening of schools. Previous research has shown that work arrangements have tremendously changed, specifically from traditional teaching in the classroom to online and blended modes of teaching (Dayagbil et al., 2021; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2023). These changes are often accompanied by new work demands requiring special skills, knowledge, and abilities, including developing new teaching materials, transitioning to working from home, adapting to unique teaching and assessment modes, inability to address student needs, and reorganizing the teaching and learning process (Baker et al., 2021; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2023). These stressors for teachers during COVID-19 had negative implications for teachers' wellbeing and work outcomes (Aktan & Toraman, 2022; Blanuša et al., 2021).

Besides the psychological health challenges, job insecurity is also associated with negative changes in employees' job attitudes (Hellgren et al., 1999). For example, job insecurity has been found to lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hellgren et al., 1999; Silla et al., 2010) and employee engagement (Wang et al., 2021). Similar outcomes have been observed in studies related to COVID-19 (e.g., Aktan & Toraman, 2022; Jung et al., 2021). Whereas the link between job insecurity and workers' attitudes is well researched, the present study examines whether organizational compassion moderates this relationship. Literature on organizational compassion shows that responding to an employee's agony is related to wellbeing and positive employee behavior (Simpson & Berti, 2020). The subsequent section of the paper presents the theory and conceptualization of organizational compassion and how it relates to employee wellbeing and work attitudes.

2 Theory and Hypothesis Development

The study examines the interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion during the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' psychological wellbeing and job attitudes based on the Event System Theory "EST" (Morgeson et al., 2015) and organizational compassion literature. The EST posits that novel, disruptive, and critical events are more likely to change or lead to the emergence of new behaviors and events in organizations (Morgeson et al., 2015). In this direction, the disruptive nature of COVID-19 and the intensity of those disruptions triggered job insecurity (Alcover et al., 2020; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2023; Unur et al., 2022) and induced organizational compassion to ease the impact of the disruptions on employees (Ahmed et al., 2022; Lemos Lourenço et al., 2022). COVID-19 has been described as a macro event that has changed how people live, which has implications for wellbeing and quality of life (Aqeel et al., 2022; Baluku, 2023). In the work context, this macro event has grossly affected the functioning of both individuals and groups in organizations (Klonek et al., 2022). With a focus on teachers, we propose that this chain of events has consequences for employees' psychological wellbeing and their work attitudes. Worldwide, some teachers, like several other professionals, became jobless. At the same time, many were forced to modify their work arrangements (e.g., Ritchie et al., 2021), which could have connotations for their work attitudes and behaviors in the aftermath of the pandemic.

2.1 Job Insecurity and Job Attitudes

Researchers have argued that job insecurity is a stressor, hence an antecedent of undesirable reactions from employees (Kottwitz et al., 2021; Stankevičiūtė et al., 2021), a process that leads to poor work attitudes and lowered effort (Stankevičiūtė et al., 2021). The lockdown of workplaces and increased job loss during the pandemic created a climate of job insecurity worldwide. Moreover, an environment of job insecurity has been found to be harmful to work attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement (Mauno et al., 2021; Sora et al., 2009, 2013; Stankevičiūtė et al., 2021). The perception of a threat to one's job can trigger anxiety, which harms employees' health and the way they see the organization and their jobs (Sora et al., 2010). Such negative affective responses to job insecurity can result in negative work attitudes and behaviors (Probst, 2002). We focus on three major work attitudes: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee engagement.

An immediate likely outcome of job insecurity is lowered job satisfaction, yet this is the most focal work attitude (Saari & Judge, 2004). Job satisfaction reflects employees' positive and negative judgments about their work arising from the characteristics of the job (Aziri, 2011; Saari & Judge, 2004; Salas-Vallina et al., 2017). The level of job security is one of the characteristics that strongly influence performance (Aziri, 2011; Corneliben, 2006). However, job insecurity

is likely to lead to lowered satisfaction with some aspects of the job, such as pay and promotion, although some aspects of satisfaction, such as satisfaction with colleagues and work itself, may not be a direct function of the level of insecurity (Probst, 2002). The effect of job insecurity on satisfaction also tends to vary according to tenure, whether permanent or fixed term (Mauno et al., 2005). Previous empirical studies have revealed that higher job security is associated with job satisfaction, while higher job insecurity is associated with lowered job satisfaction (Hellgren et al., 1999; Silla et al., 2010; Stankevičiūtė et al., 2021). Considering this literature, we presume that job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic is negatively related to teachers' job satisfaction.

Besides job satisfaction, job insecurity also has negative connotations for other job attitudes. In the current study, we focus on organizational commitment and engagement. It has been observed that affective reactions to workplace events tend to result in withdrawal behaviors (Probst, 2002), signifying lowered organizational commitment. Employees who feel strongly uncertain about their jobs are more likely to have withdrawal intentions (Lee & Jeong, 2017). Previous research shows that organizational commitment tends to be stronger in cultural contexts that emphasize job security (Yousef, 1998). In this direction, Hur & Perry, (2020) observe that laws or policies that negatively affect job security also tend to be associated with lowered organizational commitment. This suggests that contexts or events that heighten job insecurity will likely result in decreased organizational commitment. In line with the EST assumptions, Anand et al., (2023) findings revealed that job insecurity resulting from COVID-19 was likely to diminish organizational commitment. In this direction, we hypothesize that job insecurity during COVID-19 is negatively related to teachers' organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment comprises the affective, continuance, and normative facets (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Alien, 1991). Extant research on the association between job insecurity and commitment has rarely differentiated the impact at the facet level. The affective dimension concerns the employees' emotional attachment, involvement, and identification with the organization. On the other hand, the continuance dimension represents commitment based on the costs of leaving or due to a lack of alternatives. In contrast, the normative facet represents commitment based on feelings of obligation to stay in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Previous research has mainly focused on the affective dimension, revealing a negative association with job insecurity (e.g., Stankevičiūtė et al., 2021). There were limited job openings during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is also possible that job insecurity experienced during COVID-19 could have ramifications for continuous and normative commitment, given the unique and intense nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerning the relationship between job insecurity and employee engagement, it has been proposed that engagement is likely to occur in conditions of safety where one's image, status, and career are not threatened (Kahn, 1990). However, job insecurity is a potential threat to career progress (Koen & van Bezouw, 2021) and career commitment (Huang et al., 2021). Yet lowered career commitment mediates

the effects of particularly qualitative job insecurity on employees' proactivity, which signifies lowered employee engagement. Previous research has found a negative association between perceived job insecurity and employee engagement during the recent economic crisis (Getahun Asfaw & Chang, 2019). Similar findings have been revealed in studies of hotel industry during the COVID-19 (e.g., Jung et al., 2021). In line with the assumptions of the EST, we presuppose that the job insecurity resulting from COVID-19 crisis could have triggered lowered employee engagement.

2.2 The Moderating Role of Organizational Compassion

Extant research evidence shows that positive psychological interventions helped boost the wellbeing of individuals within the school context during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Lambert et al., 2022). We propose that organizational compassion could be an important factor in the association between job insecurity and wellbeing and work attitudes. Organizational compassion refers to the attention and support of the organization, and its members toward an employee's distressing challenges or pain through collective recognition, understanding, and empathic concern (Lown et al., 2020). Compassion involves noticing, feeling, sense-making, and taking action to ease the agony of an employee (Dutton et al., 2014; Simpson & Farr-Wharton, 2017). Responding to employees' suffering and pain is linked to positive outcomes for organizations and employees, such as fostering healing, organizational trust, motivation, and commitment (Simpson & Berti, 2020).

Regarding employee psychological health, organizational compassion is essential in healing from distress and enhances individuals' strengths (Guinot et al., 2020; Lilius et al., 2008). Receiving compassion from the organization and colleagues helps reduce anxiety and burnout among suffering employees while, on the other hand, demonstrates one's value to the organization and colleagues, thereby steering positive work attitudes and behavior (Dutton et al., 2014; Guo & Zhu, 2021). Organizational compassion is a way of interrelating in the work context between employees who are offering and those receiving the compassion (Dutton et al., 2014; Guinot et al., 2020), which could foster positive work attitudes and outcomes.

Concerning specific job attitudes, extant literature suggests that organizational compassion is positively associated with engagement (Guinot et al., 2020; Nadim & Zafar, 2021) and commitment (Madden et al., 2012). However, there seems to be limited research linking job satisfaction to organizational compassion. In relation to organizational commitment, the role of organizational compassion could differ among the three commitment types. Literature shows that organizational compassion strengthens affective commitment (Madden et al., 2012). With the widespread job insecurity in the context of COVID-19, when job openings were few, job insecurity likely reduced affective commitment but increased continuance and normative commitment, where people stayed for extrinsic rather than intrinsic motives, especially in the presence of organizational compassion.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Psychological Wellbeing

Previous research has not considered psychological wellbeing as a possible mediating link between one's job situation and job attitudes. In the current study, we postulate that psychological wellbeing mediates the relationship between job insecurity during COVID-19 and teachers' job attitudes and mediates the interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on teachers' job attitudes. The literature reviewed above shows that job insecurity is associated a decline in wellbeing and work attitudes. There is also extensive literature suggesting that psychological wellbeing positively determines work attitudes, including organizational commitment and job satisfaction (e.g., Kundi et al., 2020; Limbert, 2004). In addition, it has been observed that promoting wellbeing in job attitudes interventions will likely lead to more sustainable benefits for employees and organizations (Robertson & Cooper, 2010). Hence, psychological wellbeing could be a mediating link through which job insecurity and organizational compassion relate with work attitudes.

Overall, based on the above literature, we hypothesize as follows:

H1. Job insecurity was negatively associated with (a) psychological wellbeing, (b) job satisfaction, (c) affective commitment, and (d) engagement but positively associated with (e) continuance commitment and (f) normative commitment.

H2. Organizational compassion was positively associated with (a) psychological wellbeing, (b) job satisfaction, (c) affective commitment, (d) continuance commitment, (e) normative commitment, and (f) engagement.

H3. The psychological wellbeing was positively correlated to (a) job satisfaction, (b) affective commitment, (c) continuance commitment, (d) normative commitment, and (e) engagement.

H4. Organizational compassion moderated the direct effects of job insecurity on (a) psychological wellbeing, (b) job satisfaction, (c) affective commitment, and (d) engagement but positively predicted (e) continuance commitment and (f) normative commitment.

H5. Psychological wellbeing mediated the interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion (a) job satisfaction, (b) affective commitment, (c) continuance commitment, (d) normative commitment, and (e) engagement were.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The data was collected from public and private primary and secondary school teachers in Uganda using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire link was shared through WhatsApp groups of different schools and teacher associations. Data collection started during the partial opening of schools (February 2021)

when schools were reopened for candidate classes only. It continued until the end of the first term after the full reopening of the schools (April 2022). This process yielded 476 complete responses (52.9% men, 76.5% secondary school teachers, and 68.7% teachers in private schools). The average age of participants was 33.81 years ($SD = 8.18$, Range $= 20 – 65$ years). Participants had worked in the schools for an average of 5.64 years ($SD = 5.20$).

3.2 Instruments and Measurement

Job insecurity was assessed using the Job Insecurity Scale (JIS) (Vander Elst et al., 2014) for the quantitative dimension and the Qualitative Job Insecurity Measure (QJIM) (Blotenberg & Richter, 2020) for the qualitative dimension. The JIS comprises four (4) items, and the QJIM contains 11 items. The items required participants to reflect on their jobs during the pandemic: "Looking at your situation during COVID-19, to what extent do you agree with the following statements. Sample items are "… there were chances that I would lose my job" (for quantitative job insecurity) and " … I was afraid that my work would change for the worse" (for qualitative job insecurity). All items were measured on a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The total scores were used for this study to assess overall job insecurity. The combined questionnaire showed satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90$ for overall job insecurity, $\alpha = 0.74$ for the quantitative dimension, and $\alpha = 0.88$ for the qualitative dimension).

Organizational Compassion was assessed using The NEAR Organizational Compassion Scale (Simpson & Farr-Wharton, 2017). The questionnaire comprises four factors: noticing, empathizing, assessing, and responding. The questionnaire includes 21 items measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items are: When a staff member is suffering in this school, others tend to …. "recognize the distress" (for noticing), "become emotionally invested" (for empathizing, "seek to understand if the co-worker is able to help themselves" (for assessing, and "address the distress" (for responding). We used the aggregate score to assess the overall organizational compassion. The questionnaire had high internal consistency for the overall questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.92$) and the facets ($\alpha = 0.84$ for noticing, 0.83 for empathizing, 0.80 for assessing, and 0.88 for responding).

Psychological Wellbeing was assessed using the 18-item version of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). A sample item is "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out." Items were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale's internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.69$) was just below the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Job satisfaction was measured using five items of the Brayfield-Rothe job satisfaction questionnaire (Judge et al., 1998). The items were assessed on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A sample item is "I find real enjoyment in my work." The questionnaire had acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.74$).

Organizational Commitment was assessed using the Allen & Meyer, (1990) questionnaire, which focuses on three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Each facet is measured using eight items. Sample items are "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" for affective commitment, "too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now" for continuance commitment, and "I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization" for continuance commitment. All items were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The items showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$ for affective commitment, 0.84 for continuance commitment, and 0.71 for normative commitment).

Employee engagement was assessed using the ISA (Intellectual, Social, Affective) engagement scale (Soane et al., 2012). The ISA Engagement Scale comprises nine items measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A sample item is "I am enthusiastic about my work." The items showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.94$) in the present study.

3.3 Analytic Approach

To test our hypotheses, we used a moderated mediation analysis in PROCESS Macro for SPSS v4.2 model 8 (Hayes, 2022), which tests for the mediation and moderation effects simultaneously. In the regression models, 5,000 bootstrap samples were analyzed at the 95% confidence intervals. Participants' background characteristics, including sex, age, type of school ownership (public or private), years taught in the schools (years in the current job), and level of school (primary or secondary), were included in the regression analyses as control variables. Personal characteristics such as sex have been found to account for differences in psychological outcomes and labor and work outcomes during COVID-19 (Feng & Savani, 2020; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020; Lathabhavan, 2023).

4 Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. The moderated mediation regression findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Some important observations are made concerning the control variables. Sex had significant effects on affective commitment ($b = -0.18$, $p = 0.044$) and continuous commitment ($b = -0.24$, $p = 0.023$), indicating that men had higher affective and continuous commitment. The type of school ownership was strongly related to affective commitment ($b = -0.23$, $p = 0.025$), indicating that teachers in public schools reported higher affective commitment. Level of school was related with psychological wellbeing ($b = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$), job satisfaction ($b = -0.32$, $p = 0.007$), continuous commitment ($b = -0.44$, $p = 0.001$), and engagement ($b = -0.22$, $p = 0.039$), suggesting that primary school teachers reported higher psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, continuous commitment, and engagement

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex	–												
2. Age	-.24***	–											
3. Years in current job	-.15**	.55***	–										
4. Type of ownership	.18***	-.26***	-.13**	–									
5. Level	.01	.06	.04	-.27***	–								
6. Job insecurity	.15**	-.20***	-.12**	.10*	.02	–							
7. Organ compassion	-.001	-.06	-.07	-.01	-.10*	-.06	–						
8. PWB	-.07	.05	.11*	-.06	-.20***	-.34***	.23***	–					
9. Job satisfaction	.003	-.06	-.12**	.03	-.20***	-.21***	.35***	.33***	–				
10. Affective commitment	-.10*	-.06	-.08	.08	-.17***	-.38***	.23***	.47***	.39***	–			
11. Continuous commitment	.15**	-.20***	-.13**	.05	-.19***	.21***	.16**	.15**	.33***	.24***	–		
12. Normative commitment	.03	-.10*	-.11*	.09	-.07	.13**	.19***	.19***	.36***	.30***	.45***	–	
13. Engagement	.01	-.05	-.04	.05	-.21***	-.22***	.47***	.51***	.65***	.36***	.35***	.34***	–
M	–	33.81	5.64	–	–	3.03	4.02	4.13	4.20	4.22	3.76	3.87	4.77
SD	–	8.18	5.20	–	–	1.16	.97	.66	1.17	1.14	1.21	.99	1.17
α	–	–	–	–	–	.90	.92	.71	.74	.80	.84	.71	.94

Table 2 Regression results of the moderated mediation analysis

	Psychological wellbeing			Job satisfaction			Affective commitment			Continuous commitment			Normative commitment			Engagement		
	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p	b	SE	p
Sex	-0.003	.06	.952	0.05	.09	.649	-0.18	.09	.044	0.24	.11	.023	-0.03	.09	.753	0.07	.09	.384
Age	-0.01	.01	.060	0.003	.01	.737	-0.01	.01	.416	-0.02	.01	.060	0.003	.01	.623	<-0.001	.01	.979
Years worked at school	0.02	.01	.007	-0.03	.01	.004	-0.03	.01	.007	-0.01	.01	.420	-0.02	.01	.034	-0.01	.01	.251
Type of ownership	-0.11	.06	.098	0.02	.11	.859	-0.23	.10	.025	-0.17	.12	.171	0.14	.10	.152	0.10	.10	.312
Level of school	-0.31	.07	<.001	-0.32	.12	.007	-0.13	.11	.246	-0.44	.13	.001	-0.04	.11	.687	-0.22	.11	.039
Job insecurity	-0.17	.02	<.001	-0.13	.05	.003	-0.27	.04	<.001	0.25	.05	<.001	0.17	.04	<.001	-0.08	.04	.041
Compassion	0.13	.03	<.001	0.32	.05	<.001	0.13	.05	.004	0.13	.05	.022	0.13	.05	.004	0.43	.04	<.001
Psychological wellbeing				0.40	.09	<.001	0.64	.07	<.001	0.36	.08	<.001	0.41	.07	<.001	0.72	.07	<.001
Interaction effects	-0.07	.02	.004	-0.04	.04	.296	0.09	.04	.021	0.08	.05	.085	0.14	.04	<.001	0.09	.04	.014
R^2	.22		<.001	.24		<.001	.34		<.001	.17		<.001	.14		<.001	.41		<.001
R^2 change[†]	.01		.004	.002		.296	.01		.021	.01		.085	.03		<.001	.01		.014
Conditional direct effects of job insecurity at the levels of compassion																		
Mean -1 SD	-0.11	.04	.002	-0.18	.06	.005	-0.35	.06	<.001	0.17	.07	.010	0.03	.06	.593	-0.17	.05	.002
Mean	-0.17	.02	<.001	-0.13	.05	.003	-0.27	.04	<.001	0.25	.05	<.001	0.17	.04	<.001	-0.08	.04	.041
Mean +1SD	-0.24	.03	<.001	-0.09	.06	.124	-0.18	.05	<.001	0.32	.06	<.001	0.31	.05	<.001	0.01	.05	.886

$*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$, $N = 476$, b = Unstandardized regression coefficients, [†] R^2 increase as a result of the interaction effects

Type of ownership (1 = public, 2 = private), Level (1 = Primary, 2 = secondary), Sex (1 = Men, 2 = women)

Table 3 Conditional indirect effects of job insecurity at the levels of organizational compassion

Levels of compassion	Job satisfaction			Affective commitment			Continuous commitment			Normative commitment			Engagement		
	b	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	b	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	b	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	b	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI	b	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI
Mean -1 SD	-0.04	.02	[-.08, -.01]	-0.07	.03	[-.12, -.02]	-0.04	.02	[-.08 -.01]	-0.04	.02	[-.08, -.01]	-0.08	.03	[-.14, -.03]
Mean	-0.07	.02	[-.11, -.04]	-0.11	.02	[-.15, -.08]	-0.06	.02	[-.10, -.03]	-0.07	.02	[-.11, -.04]	-0.13	.02	[-.17, -.08]
Mean +1SD	-0.10	.03	[-.15, -.05]	-0.15	.03	[-.21,-.10]	-0.09	.03	[-.15, -.04]	-0.10	.03	[-.15, -.05]	-0.17	.03	[-.24, -.11]
Index of moderated mediation	-0.03	.01	[-.06, -.01]	-0.04	.02	[-.08, -.01]	-0.03	.01	[-.05, -.01]	-0.03	.01	[-.06, -.01]	-0.05	.02	[-.09, -.01]

b = Unstandardized effects
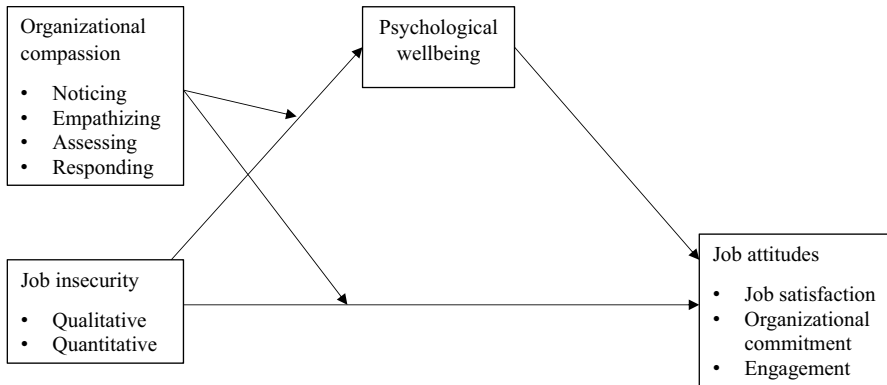
Fig. 1 Conceptual model

Fig. 2 Interaction effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on psychological wellbeing
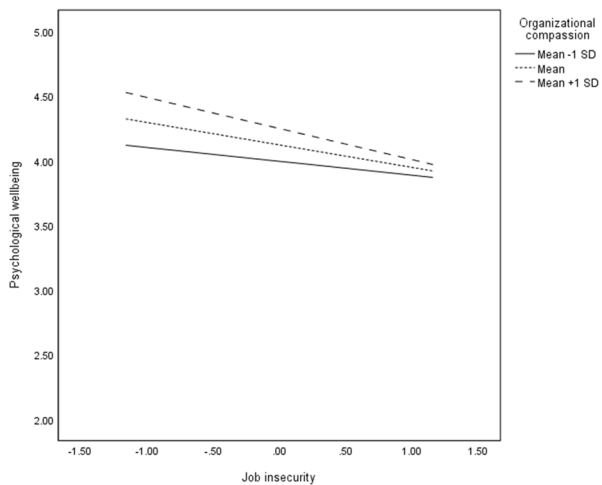
than the secondary school teachers. Years worked in the school also significantly positively correlated with psychological wellbeing, but was negatively related to job satisfaction, affective and normative commitment.

Concerning the direct effects, regression results in Table 2 show that job insecurity was directly negatively related to psychological wellbeing ($b=-0.17$, $p<0.001$), job satisfaction ($b=-0.13$, $p=0.003$), affective commitment ($b=-0.27$, $p<0.001$), and engagement ($b=-0.08$, $p=0.041$). On the other hand, we found positive relationships with continuous commitment ($b=0.25$, $p<0.001$) and normative commitment ($b=0.17$, $p<0.001$). These findings support H1. In line with our assumptions in H2, organizational compassion was positively related to job satisfaction ($b=0.32$, $p<0.001$), affective commitment ($b=0.13$, $p=0.004$), continuous commitment ($b=0.13$, $p=0.022$), normative commitment ($b=0.13$, $p=0.004$), and engagement ($b=0.43$, $p<0.001$). Moreover, organizational

compassion was also positively related to psychological wellbeing ($b=0.13$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, results also show that psychological wellbeing was positively associated with all job attitudes, that is, job satisfaction ($b=0.40$, $p<0.001$), affective commitment ($b=0.64$, $p<0.001$), continuous commitment ($b=0.36$, $p<0.01$), normative commitment ($b=0.41$, $p<0.001$), and engagement ($b=0.72$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, H3 is supported (Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

In H4, we hypothesized that organizational compassion moderates the direct effects of job insecurity on teachers' psychological wellbeing and job attitudes. The conditional analysis revealed significant interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on psychological wellbeing ($b=-0.07$, $p=0.004$), affective commitment ($b=0.09$, $p=0.021$), normative commitment ($b=0.14$, $p<0.05$), and engagement ($b=0.09$, $p=0.014$). Therefore, hypotheses 4a, 4c, 4d, and 4f are supported. However, (Hayes, 2018) suggests that in examining the moderation of direct or indirect effects, analysis and interpretation should be based on conditional direct or conditional indirect effects. The conditional direct effects show that the negative effects of job insecurity on job satisfaction ($b=-0.18$, $p=0.005$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=-0.09$, $p=0.124$ at Mean +1 SD), affective commitment ($b=-0.35$, $p<0.001$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=-0.18$, $p<0.001$ at Mean +1 SD), and engagement ($b=-0.17$, $p=0.002$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=0.01$, $p=0.886$ at Mean +1 SD) tend to be low at high levels of compassion. This is reflected in the regression plots. Figure 4 shows that affective commitment was lowest for participants reporting low organizational compassion, especially at a high level of job insecurity. A similar trend can be seen for job satisfaction (Fig. 3) engagement (Fig. 7).

On the other hand, the positive effects of job insecurity on continuous commitment ($b=0.17$, $p=0.010$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=0.32$, $p<0.001$ at Mean +1 SD) and normative commitment ($b=0.03$, $p=0.593$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=0.31$, $p<0.001$ at Mean +1 SD) tend to be high at high levels of compassion. The level of continuous commitment (Fig. 5) and normative commitment (Figs. 6 and 7) did not vary at low levels of job insecurity for participants reporting low and those reporting high
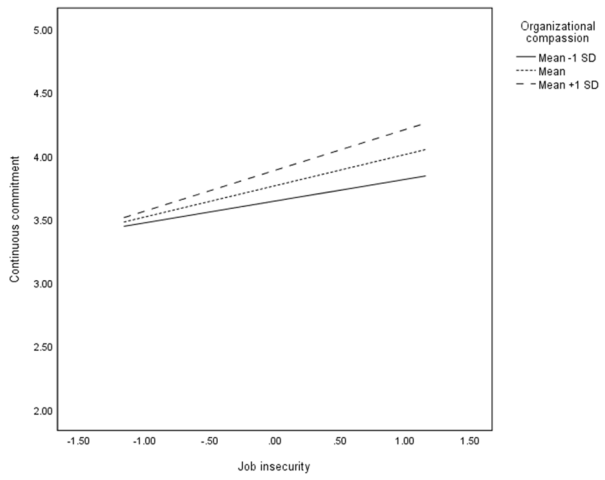

Fig. 3 Interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on job satisfaction
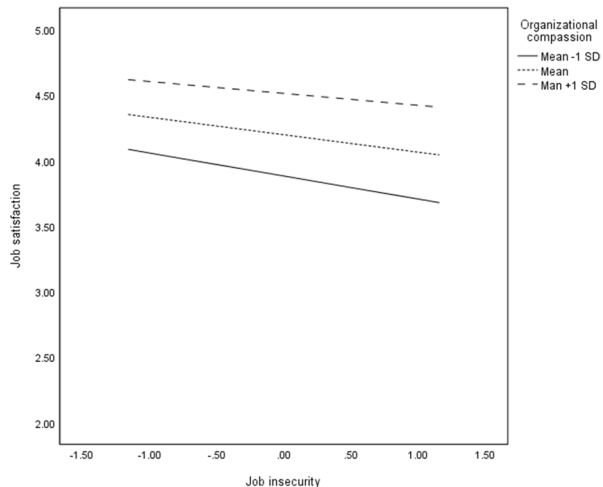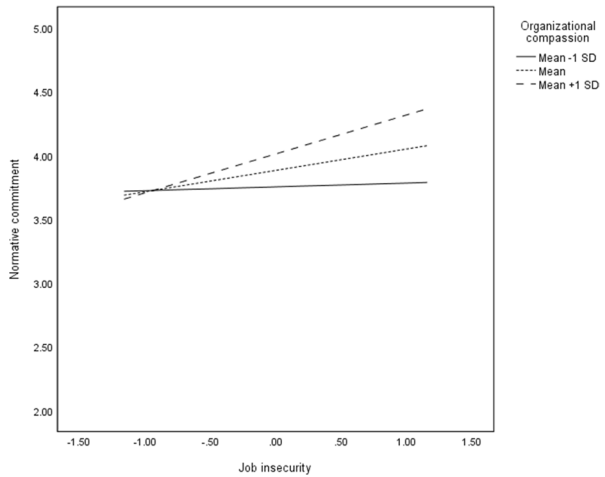
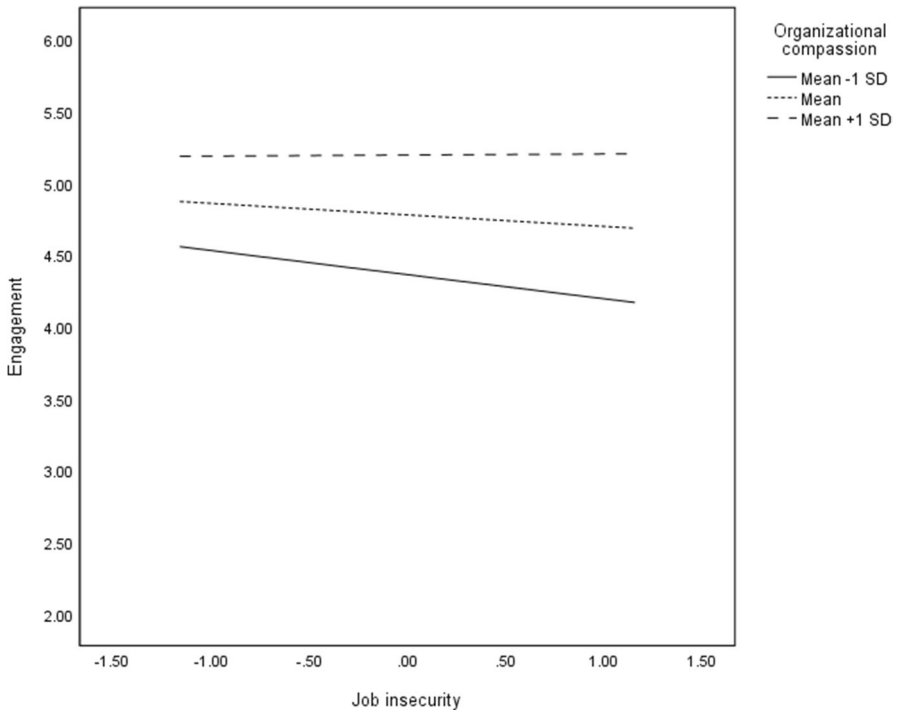**Fig. 4** Interaction effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on affective commitment
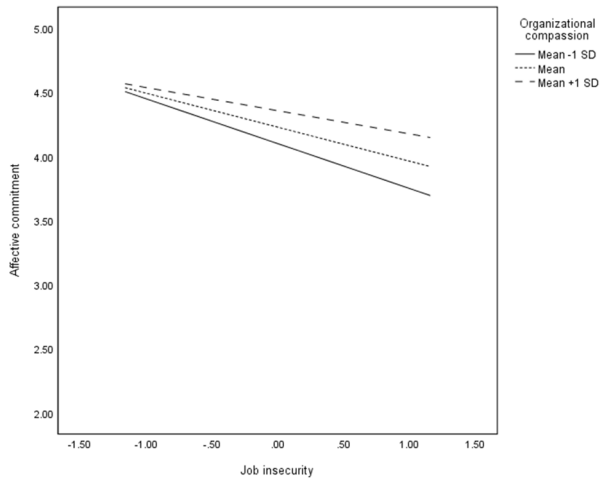
Fig. 5 Interaction effects job insecurity and organizational compassion on continuous commitment

Fig. 6 Interaction effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on normative commitment

Fig. 7 Interactive effects of job insecurity and organizational compassion on engagement

compassion. However, continuous and normative commitment scores tended to be higher for participants reporting high organizational compassion than those reporting low organizational compassion at higher levels of job insecurity. Surprisingly, the negative effects of job insecurity on psychological wellbeing ($b=-0.11$, $p=0.002$ at Mean -1 SD, and $b=-0.24$, $p<0.001$ at Mean $+1$ SD) were found to be high at high levels of compassion. Figure 2 shows that the level of psychological wellbeing tended to be quite similar at higher levels of job insecurity for teachers reporting low and those reporting high organizational compassion.

In H5, we hypothesized that psychological wellbeing mediates the interactive effects of job insecurity during COVID-19 and organizational compassion on teachers' job attitudes. The indices of moderated mediation are significant for all attitudes; that is, job satisfaction ($b=-0.03$, *Boot CI*$=[-0.06, -0.01]$), affective commitment ($b=-0.04$, *Boot CI*$=[-0.08, -0.01]$), continuous commitment ($b=-0.03$, *Boot CI*$=[-0.05, -0.01]$), normative commitment ($b=-0.03$, *Boot CI*$=[-0.06, -0.01]$), and engagement ($b=-0.05$, *Boot CI*$=[-0.09, -0.01]$). These indices confirm that mediation effects of psychological wellbeing in the relationship between job insecurity and job attitudes vary at the different levels of organizational compassion. The negative conditional indirect effects of job insecurity on all the job attitudes were higher at high levels (mean $+1$ SD) of organizational compassion.

5 Discussion

Studies of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees and work outcomes have found job insecurity or employment uncertainty and employees' wellbeing to be among the major concerns for organizations and employees during the pandemic (Alcover et al., 2020; Blanuša et al., 2021; Ritchie et al., 2021). Yet these concerns have implications for employees' attitudes and behavior. In this direction, the findings of the present study show significant negative associations of job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic and teachers' self-reported psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and engagement. Therefore, teachers who experienced heightened job insecurity during the pandemic were less likely to have strong psychological wellbeing, were more likely to exhibit lowered job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and engagement in their work. However, our findings also show that job insecurity was positively associated with continuous commitment and normative commitment. This suggests that teachers who experienced heightened job insecurity were more likely to stay committed to the organization for extrinsic rather than intrinsic motives. Such commitment would be highly plausible, especially due to the unprecedented economic changes experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when infection and death rates were high, accompanied by stringent economic lockdowns, there were widespread reports of employment uncertainty and poor psychological wellbeing (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2020; Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2023; Paredes et al., 2021). This was more for teachers in primary schools where the pay is low and for teachers in private schools who did not receive salaries during the lockdown because their schools rely on student fees. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic caused abrupt halt or reduction in earnings, hence financial stress. This can lower psychological wellbeing and job attitudes. However, some organizations were able to support their employees in different ways, such as food supplies, which could have made a difference in the way employees feel about their jobs and the organization in general. In line with EST, our findings show that such organizational compassion acts were essential for teachers in maintaining good psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement.

We examined whether organizational compassion moderated the relationship between job insecurity during COVID-19 and teachers' wellbeing and job attitudes. Our results indicate that organizational compassion could be a buffered against the negative effects of job insecurity on psychological wellbeing. Organizational compassion also significantly moderated the direct effects of job insecurity on affective commitment and work engagement. However, the increases in R^2 as a result of the interaction effects were quite small. Nonetheless, the significant moderation effects imply that the organization (school) and its members' compassion towards needy colleagues during the pandemic was essential for psychological wellbeing and health, even when their jobs might not have been secure. Organizational compassion affirms to employees that they are recognized and valued (Lown et al., 2020; Slatten et al., 2011). Amid the job uncertainty during COVID-19, compassion could have been useful in reducing the feelings of insecurity concerning the job, thereby minimizing the negative impact of the insecurity on psychological wellbeing and work attitudes.

Whereas organizational compassion could have reduced the negative effects of job insecurity during COVID-19 on teachers' wellbeing, affective commitment, and work engagement, the results suggest that organizational compassion could have strengthened the positive association between job insecurity and continuous commitment and normative commitment. These results suggest that organizational compassion has the potential to strengthen unintended attitudes and behaviors. When compassion is offered to individuals who are experiencing heightened job insecurity, there are likelihoods that they will be committed to the organization only for the benefits that accrue from the job or some moral and ethical reasons that are not necessarily of their intrinsic interest.

Our findings regarding mediated moderation hypothesis indicate that psychological wellbeing mediated the conditional effects of job insecurity among teachers and organizational compassion during COVID-19 on their job attitudes. In the context of crises and disasters, this finding suggests that it is essential to be concerned about employees' psychological health and wellbeing. Therefore, despite the job insecurity that might be felt during a crisis, employees can be satisfied with their jobs, stay committed to the organization, and be engaged in their work if their psychological wellbeing is sustained at high levels. Hence, psychological wellbeing can suppress the negative effects of job insecurity on desirable job attitudes; as well as the positive effects on less desirable job attitudes such as continuous and normative commitment. Psychological wellbeing can dwindle commitment to the organization for extrinsic goals that accompany job insecurity. Therefore, as has been suggested for student populations (Schwartz et al., 2021), targeted strategies to strengthen the psychological health of teachers can be beneficial. Our findings indicate that organizational compassion can be a useful strategy in improving employees' wellbeing, or at least reduce the effects of job insecurity on wellbeing, and consequently on job attitudes. Whereas the interactive effects of job insecurity during COVID-19 and organizational compassion were not significant for job satisfaction and continuous commitment, the indices of moderated mediation for these attitudes were significant, implying that even when organizational compassion has minimal buffering effects of against the undesired impact of job insecurity employees' job attitude, those minimal effects are still essential for psychological wellbeing, and consequently for the job attitudes.

Our findings must be understood and used in the context of certain limitations. First, we collected that data using an online survey questionnaire. Internet access in Uganda is quite limited, especially outside the major cities. Therefore, teachers who do not have internet access were not able to participate, which limits the representativeness of the sample. Relatedly, some teachers, especially in private schools who did not receive salaries during the lockdown, left their teaching jobs to find other sources of income. Such teachers might not have returned to teaching after the lockdown and might not have participated in the study, affecting the representativeness of the private school teachers' sample. Secondly, the paper uses self-report data, which might have been affected by self-report bias, and common methods bias cannot be ruled out. Third, the study used cross-sectional data, which does not allow for causal conclusions. Therefore, longitudinal studies might be useful in understanding how COVID-19-related job insecurity has affected the wellbeing, work attitudes, and behaviors of teachers over the different phases of the pandemic.

Despite these limitations, this study highlights the essentiality of organizational compassion and psychological wellbeing in the association between COVID-19-related job insecurity and teachers' work attitudes. The study findings suggest that teachers, or employees generally, can have high psychological wellbeing in turbulent times if the organization and its members are compassionate towards the suffering colleague(s). This translates into maintaining positive work attitudes and can reduce the likelihood of job insecurity resulting in undesired work attitudes and behaviors.

There are three major implications. First, schools (and organizations generally) should have compassion strategies to support employees during crisis or times of need. This is not only essential for the wellbeing of employees, but they reciprocate compassion with desirable work attitudes. Second, the compassion strategy should be carefully designed to foster desirable attitudes such as satisfaction, engagement, and affective commitment; and to minimize attitudes and behaviors that are driven by the extrinsic benefits that come with compassion. Third, there is a need for policies at the organizational level but also policies by governments to address the job security and compensation concerns during turbulent times. This may be particularly important for employees in private organizations and schools where employees are not guaranteed continued employment or pay during or after the crisis.

Declarations

Ethics Approval Ethical clearance was not sought for this study. As a master's student research project, the study was approved by the Makerere University School of Psychology Higher Degrees Committee, which confirmed that no ethical approval was required.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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