Is there any relationship between loneliness, job satisfaction and organizational commitment of migrant workers?

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IS THERE ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LONELINESS, JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS?

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between loneliness, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of migrant workers. 213 migrant workers participated in the survey. This study found that migrant workers are not lonely, are satisfied with their job and are committed to their organization. Age and gender do not have influence on loneliness or organizational commitment. Single migrant workers feel lonelier than the married migrant workers. Married and longer tenured migrant workers are more committed to the organization. There is no significant correlation between loneliness and organizational commitment. This research indicates that lonelier migrant workers have higher job satisfaction while job satisfaction has significant positive correlation with organization commitment. Implications and recommendations are provided.

Keywords: human resource management, human resource management policy, job satisfaction, commitment, migrant workers

Most models of turnover assumed that greater job satisfaction leads to greater organizational commitment (Bluedorn, 1982; Marsh & Mannari 1977; Price & Mueller, 1981). Job satisfaction has also been positively correlated with organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1979). While the three concepts on job satisfaction, commitment, and loneliness were largely studied by scholars, no researchers study them together. Furthermore, studies about loneliness have largely been conducted with elders, children, and university students (Maroldo, 1981; Ouellet & Joshi, 1986; Booth, 1985). Migrant workers may be prone to feelings of loneliness. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the extent of loneliness, job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the migrant workers in China and the relationship between the three concepts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

China has a migrant population of over 130 million (China Labour Bulletin, 2008). Most migrants are surplus rural laborers gravitating to towns and cities in search of jobs. Until the 1990s, they were known in the cities as the "Three Have-nots" - lacking identity cards, temporary residence cards and work approval cards (China Daily, 2004a). They face loneliness and depression (China Daily, 2004b), and usually get poorly paid and arduous jobs considered as dirty, demanding physically, dangerous, and “bitter” in Chinese (China Labour Bulletin, 2008).

Loneliness

Studies on loneliness have largely focused on the factors that will result in loneliness (Maroldo,
1981; Ouellet & Joshi, 1986; Anderson et al., 1983; Cheek & Busch, 1981) and the personal behavior resulting from loneliness (Levin & Stokes, 1986; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Jones, 1982; Diamant & Windholz, 1981; Hojat, 1983; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). Ernst and Cacioppo (1999) concludes that loneliness was associated with a variety of individual differences including depression, hostility, pessimism, social withdrawal, alienation, shyness and low positive affect.

Loneliness is a multifaceted phenomenon (Ponzetti, 1990), often characterized by an unpleasant, painful, anxious yearning for another person or persons (Hartog et. al., 1980). Peplau and Perlman (1982) presented a dozen different definitions of loneliness offered by various investigators. Despite the many definitions of loneliness, there are some underlying assumptions common to most of these definitions. First, loneliness is thought to result from perceived deficiencies in one’s social world. Second, loneliness is though to be a subjective state experienced by the individual, rather than some objective feature in the individual’s social world. Third, it is fundamentally an aversive and distressing experience (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Perlman, 1983; Weiss, 1987).

Two main conceptualizations of loneliness have evolved from past research; loneliness as a unitary (Russell et. al, 1980) and loneliness as multidimensional and domain specific (Weiss, 1998). Weiss (1973) first described the multidimensional nature of loneliness by proposing two distinct types: the experience of emotional isolation (emotional loneliness), and social isolation (social loneliness). Emotional loneliness is the absence of a close emotional relationship while social loneliness is the lack of integration into a social network. Clinton and Anderson (1999) described affiliations as social relationships. A perceived lack of these types of relationships would be reflected in feelings of social loneliness. Weiss (1973) also suggested that one also needs to be a part of a meaningful social group.

Loneliness is higher in collective cultures (Anderson, 1999). It is linked to high scores on pessimism, and is negatively correlated with happiness and life-satisfaction (Rokach et al., 2002). Loneliness reflects an interpersonal deficit that exists as a result of fewer or less satisfying personal relationships than a person desires (Ponzetti, 1990). Lonely people are less happy, less satisfied, more pessimistic, and suffer from more depressive symptoms than people who are not lonely (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). They also reported negative behaviors and affective states when experiencing loneliness, including feelings of tenseness, restlessness, and boredom (Park, 2004).
Males are lonelier than females (Avery, 1982; Booth, 1983; Davis & Franzoi, 1986; Russell et al., 1980). However, a recent study conducted in China revealed that loneliness was relatively prevalent among females and those living in rural areas (Yang & Victor, 2008). According to Bell (1991) and Aukett et al. (1988), women’s relationships depend on emotional closeness, while men’s relationships focus on shared activities. Other research suggests that women give and receive more emotional support than do men. Men are unlikely to receive emotional support from male friends and are unlikely to have many female friends (Booth, 1983). Indeed, many males rely on female family members for emotional support (Wellman & Wortley, 1989).

While people may experience various degree of loneliness from time to time and the prevalence and types of loneliness (emotional or social) may differ by age, Wenger and Burholt (2004) found an age-related increase in loneliness. Van et al. (2004) found that emotional, but not social, loneliness increased with age. Holmen et al. (2000) showed no age differences in emotional loneliness, but age was related to greater social isolation. In China, loneliness was relatively prevalent among older people (65 and above) (Yang & Victor, 2008). Jylha (2004:166) also found evidence that loneliness increases with age.

Various studies show married individuals are less lonely than unmarried individuals (Perlman & Peplau, 1998). Rands (1988) indicated men and women are likely to find an intimate attachment in marriage. Marriage serves to protect individuals from emotional loneliness and makes them less vulnerable to social loneliness. Marriage provides access to a wider circle of family members and friends and more social activity takes place on a couple-companionate basis (Weiss, 1973). Since migrant workers may have less satisfying relationships in the new environment, the first four hypotheses are

Hypothesis 1. The migrant workers are lonely.

Hypothesis 2. The male migrant workers are lonelier than the female migrant workers.

Hypothesis 3. The older migrant workers are lonelier than the younger migrant workers.

Hypothesis 4. The single migrant workers are lonelier than the married migrant workers.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction as an index of the affective responses of employees to the work setting has
been a variable of interest to administrators and researchers (Sekaran, 1989). Job satisfaction is related to variables such as absenteeism and turnover (Sekaran, 1989), is thought to play a key role in the turnover process (Bluedorn, 1982), and is the most frequently studied psychological variable in the satisfaction-turnover relationship (Mobley et al., 1979). Job satisfaction in this study refers to the “positive emotional state resulting form the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976).

Satisfaction results from perceptions that the job allows the attainment of valued goals (Locke, 1969). Two-way communication (Bateman, 1977) and participation in making job-related decisions (White & Ruh, 1973) have a positive effect on job satisfaction. Stress has a negative effect on job satisfaction (Bhagat, 1982). While satisfied workers, at all organizational levels, are thought to be important contributors to an organization’s effectiveness and ultimately to long-term success, dissatisfied workers are thought to make less contribution to the organization (Naumaun, 1993).

Bhagat (1982) indicates that loneliness and isolation was the single greatest predictor of overall job dissatisfaction. He found that generally, those reporting the highest levels of loneliness were the most likely to be dissatisfied in their job, while those who reported little or no loneliness had the highest levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, the costs of loneliness include personal anguish and disrupted familial and other interpersonal relationships (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999). To determine whether migrant workers are satisfied with their job and whether loneliness influence job satisfaction, the fifth and sixth hypothesis are

*Hypothesis 5. The migrant workers are satisfied with their job.*

*Hypothesis 6. The loneliness of the migrant workers has significant negative correlation with their job satisfaction.*

**Organizational commitment**

The nature of employee’s commitment to their employing organization has been a topic of great interest to organizational researchers (Roger & Schoorman, 1998) because both managers and organizational analysts seek ways to increase employee retention and performance (Richard, 1977). Mowday et al. (1979) defined organizational commitment as (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goal and values, (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (3) a strong desire to remain a member of the organization.
Mowday et al. (1974) suggests that highly committed employees may perform better than less committed ones. Commitment is often a better predictor of turnover than job satisfaction (Porter et al., 1974). Commitment is significantly, negatively associated with turnover and, to a lesser extent with other withdrawal behaviors such as decreased performance and increased absenteeism and tardiness (Mowday et al., 1974) and positively related to participation, power, teamwork and professionalism (Welsch & LaVan, 1981).

Chan (2006) suggests that female members’ commitment towards the organization is closely related to how they value the group and interpersonal relationship. Other studies revealed women with less autonomy, closer supervision, and more limited promotional opportunities than men (Richard, 1977). Female workers were assumed to be less committed to their organization due to familial responsibilities (Marsh & Mannari, 1977). However, they may not necessarily show less commitment to their organization since their employers “may provide some kinds of work arrangements and supports which make the work-family conflict less intense for them” (Ngo & Tsang, 1998:255).

Age is another personal variable that can affect perceived alternatives in organization (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). Age has been positively related to commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Younger workers who have not invested a great deal in their careers are not as committed to their organization as older workers whose careers are more fully developed (Richard, 1977). The positive relationship between age and commitment might be due to older employees having more rewarding jobs (Sikorska-Simmons, 2005). These findings are inconsistent as other researchers found either no relationship or negative relationship between age and commitment (e.g. Arnold & Feldman, 1982).

Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) shows that single employees are more likely than married employees to be positively disposed toward attractive employment alternatives. John and Taylor (1999) and Tsui et al. (1994) indicated that married people were more committed to their organization than unmarried people. Because married people have more family responsibilities, they are likely to be more committed to their organization than their unmarried counterparts.

Research also indicates that organizational tenure is positively related to organizational commitment (Somers, 1995). The greater the experience or seniority, the less is the expressed desire to leave the employing system (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Meyer and Allen (1997) also suggests that the
positive relationship between tenure and organizational commitment might be a simple reflection of the fact that uncommitted employees leave an organization, and only those with a high level of commitment remain. In light of the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 7. The migrant workers are committed to their organization.

Hypothesis 8. The male migrant workers have higher commitment to their organization than female migrant workers.

Hypothesis 9. The older migrant workers have more commitment to their organization than the younger migrant workers.

Hypothesis 10. The married migrant workers have higher commitment to their organization than single migrant workers.

Hypothesis 11. There is a significant positive correlation between migrant workers tenure and their commitment to organization.

Job dissatisfaction had an indirect effect on turnover through its direct effect on formation of intent to leave (Price and Mueller, 1981). Williams and Hazer (1986) reported that job satisfaction is an antecedent to organizational commitment in an investigation employing structural equation methodology. Satisfaction and commitment have invariably been reported to be negatively related to turnover and intent to leave (Hollenbeck & Williams, 1986), and positively correlated with one another (Bluedorn, 1982). Wells (2003) also found a strong link between loneliness and clergy dropout. Ex-Catholic priests who had left the priesthood within five years of ordination revealed in interviews that isolation and a lack of close friendships were one of the most important reasons cited for quitting the ministry, second only to celibacy. In order to determine whether loneliness might influence the migrant workers organizational commitment and whether job satisfaction is an important factor for the migrant worker’s commitment toward their organization, the twelfth and thirteenth hypothesis are

Hypothesis 12. The loneliness of the migrant worker has significant negative correlation with their commitment to the organization.

Hypothesis 13. The job satisfaction of migrant workers has significant positive correlation with their commitment toward their organization.

The conceptual model for the study is shown in Figure 1.
METHODS

Participants and research site

Respondents from six garment factories participated in this study. Questionnaires were distributed to 386 randomly selected participants from a list of potential participants provided by the factories earlier. To assure participants understood their job and organization enough, only participants who had worked uninterruptedly for more than one year were selected. Respondents were given a questionnaire with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, informed to fill the questionnaire anonymously during their leisure time, and to return the completed questionnaire the next day through a collection box placed in the workshop area. Interviews with the migrant workers were conducted to explain the effects of loneliness on their job satisfaction and their organizational commitment. The interviewees were recruited through an advertisement posted near the factories. The interview lasted between 30 minutes to 70 minutes. An MP3 recorder was used to record the conversations for later data analysis.

Data was collection from Shishi, a coastal city of Fujian province with resident population of 305,000. Shishi contributed to 25% production of the Chinese made casual clothing and was awarded “the city of casual clothing” in 2002. Approximately 80% of the 30,000 migrant workers in Shishi work in clothing factories.

Measurement

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part one collects demographic data. Part two measured loneliness using the Chinese version of the Revised UCLA loneliness scale developed by Russell et al. (1980). The Chinese version of the short form of the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) developed by Weiss et al. (1967) was used to measure job satisfaction while the Chinese version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday et al. (1979) was used to measure organizational commitment.

Data analysis

Statistical software SPSS 11.0 was used to analyze the data collected. Descriptive statistics was used to count the mean value and standard deviation of each item of the questionnaire. T-test was
used to examine the degree of loneliness, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment while Pearson correlation was used to test the relationship between loneliness, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The recorded conversations were transcribed from Mandarin into English. Extensive notes were taken when listening to the recorded interviews. The particularly important comments were transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was thoroughly examined to identify the respondents’ experience in the organization. The recordings were retained for reference.

**RESULTS**

**Response rate and demographic information**

- Table 1 approximately here –

The total valid response rate was 55.2%. Table 1 showed the demographic information of the respondents. The proportions of male-female respondents were approximately fifty-fifty. None of the respondents were less than sixteen years old, the minimum age required to work in China. A majority of respondents were junior high school graduates (73.2%), have worked in other clothing factories (85%), and worked in the factory between 1 and 3 years (79.3%) when the study was conducted. Slightly more than half of the respondents were unmarried (58.2%). One third of the respondents (33.3%) were from age group between 21-25 years. This suggests a relatively young group of migrant workers seeking opportunities outside of their hometown. Approximately 97% of the respondents were migrant workers and have relatives in Shishi (82.2%).

Interviewees comprised of five migrant workers, 4 males and 1 female. Their age ranges from 25 to 35 years old. Three were married and have graduated from the junior high school. Their working experience in clothing factories in Shishi ranges from 7 year to 15 years. Their average monthly income ranges from 1200RMB to 2500RMB. Four respondents had worked in other industries.

**Hypothesis testing**

H1 tested whether the migrant workers are lonely. Although, the migrant workers felt a slight degree of loneliness, it was not significant (p=0.895). Therefore, H1 was rejected. H2 hypothesized that the male migrant workers are lonelier than the female migrant workers. The t-test value showed the mean difference was not significant (t=1.478, p=0.141). Thus, H2 was rejected. H3 hypothesized that the older migrant workers are lonelier than the younger migrant workers. There was no significant
correlation between age and loneliness for the migrant workers (p=0.082). Thus, H3 was rejected.

H4 hypothesized that the single migrant workers are lonelier than the married migrant workers. The mean loneliness for single workers (50.825) was higher than male workers (48.954). The difference was significant (t=2.004, p=0.046). Thus, H4 was accepted. H5 tested whether the migrant workers are satisfied with their job. The mean for job satisfaction for all respondents was 67.188. There was significant difference with the middle score (60) (t=13.336, p=0.000). Thus, the migrant workers have job satisfaction at work. Therefore H5 was accepted. H6 determined whether the loneliness of the migrant workers has negative significant correlation with their job satisfaction. The coefficient of correlation between loneliness and job satisfaction is positive 0.139 at 0.05 significant levels. Figure 2 showed that the more lonely the workers, the more likely they are to get satisfaction from the job. However, this was not equivalent to the direction of H6. Thus, H6 was rejected.

H7 tested whether the migrant workers are committed to their organization. The mean for organization commitment for all respondents is 51.099. There was significant difference with the middle score (45) (t=15.594, p=0.000). Therefore, H7 was accepted. H8 hypothesized that the male migrant workers have higher commitment to their organization than female migrant workers. The mean difference was not significant (T-value is 0.639, p=0.524). Thus, H8 was not supported. H9 hypothesized that the older migrant workers have more commitment to their organization than younger migrant workers. There was no significant correlation between age and commitment for the migrant workers (p=0.411). So, H9 was rejected. H10 hypothesized the married migrant worker has more commitment to their organization than single migrant worker. The mean difference was significant (t=-2.533, p=0.012). Therefore, H10 was accepted. H11 hypothesized that there was a significant positive correlation between migrant workers tenure and their commitment to the organization. The coefficient of tenure and organizational commitment was positive 0.161 and significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed). Thus, H11 was accepted.

H12 hypothesized that the loneliness of the migrant workers has significant negative correlation with their commitment to the organization. There was no significant correlation between loneliness and organizational commitment (p=0.277). Thus, H12 was rejected. H13 hypothesized that
the job satisfaction of migrant workers has significant positive correlation with their commitment toward their organization. The coefficient of correlation between job satisfaction and organization commitment was positive 0.488 at 0.01 significant levels. The correlation was shown in Figure 3. Therefore, H13 was accepted.

- Figure 3 approximately here –

**DISCUSSIONS**

In this study, the migrant workers felt a slight degree of loneliness. However, the degree of loneliness was not significant. A major reason for this may perhaps be attributed to the emotional support from their relatives or friends who are in Shishi. Although Goodwin et al., (2001) suggested that when activities available at home cannot be found in the host city, there may be feelings of loneliness, isolation and frustration, the finding here is not consistent with the earlier study. Another reason could be the long working hours which left the migrant workers feeling exhausted at the end of the day that they have no time to feel lonely. As one respondent said, “The working hour is a little bit long, but I have been working here for eight years. I got used it.” To them, “the working hour is fair, because we are paid by piece-rate. We can earn more if we work longer hours. My boss never forced us to work… But we came out from our hometown for money.” Although money is important, the migrant workers are also concerned about the boss’s manner which is an important criterion for them to choose where to work.

Several studies showed that males are lonelier than females (Avery, 1982; Davis & Franzoi, 1986; Russell et al., 1980). Gender difference did not influence the migrant workers’ loneliness in this study perhaps because the men are actively participating in social activities organized by the “laoxianghui” (an association for migrant worker who are from the same province or area) while the female workers are likely to be receiving emotional support from their friends or relatives. A respondent said, “I never feel lonely. My sister, brother and many relatives are here. Though we are not working in the same factory and are seldom together, we are in the same city. Furthermore, most my co-workers are from my hometown. We talked in our local dialect and listen to our hometown broadcast, which is fun.”

Age does not influence loneliness and organizational commitment. This finding is inconsistent
with earlier studies where loneliness increased with age, and is inconsistent with the study by Richard (1977) where commitment is positively related to age. As most respondents are relatively young (age ranges from 16 to 30), no significant difference of age in loneliness and commitment were found.

Single migrant workers are lonelier than married migrant workers. While consistent with earlier studies, this finding suggests that marriage can provide intimate attachment to both the male and female migrant workers. Thus, when they work outside of their hometown, they are less likely to feel lonely if they have an intimate partner to share their happiness and unhappiness with.

Migrant workers are satisfied with their jobs. While working outside their hometown is the only way for them to support their family, it has also become fashionable to work in cities after graduating from the junior high school. In the process, their family has money to buy household appliances such as television, refrigerator, and household furniture through the money they sent home regularly. As one male respondent said, “working outside is my only choice. It would be considered lazy and incapable for young people like me to stay at home in my hometown. My parents said they will take care of my two children while my wife and I are working elsewhere, outside the province.”

In this study, lonelier migrant workers are more satisfied with their job. This contradicts Bhagat’s (1982) finding. This is unsurprising because migrant workers have a monthly income. Furthermore, the management in some factories realized the importance of retaining their workers and somewhat changed their attitude towards the migrant workers.

The migrant workers are committed to their organizations. Since they have been working in the factory for more than one year, they have adjusted to the working conditions. Moreover, some factories introduced incentives including giving an annual bonus and free return bus ticket during the Spring Festival to their workers. Still some respondents thought making clothes is not an ideal job but there are limited options.

In this study, most migrant workers live in or nearby the factory, not with their parents or children. As such, the female migrant workers do not need to take care of their family members. Therefore, they can focus on their job just as their male colleagues do. This contradicts Price and Mueller (1981) finding where women have weak and unstable commitment to the work role. Married workers have higher level of commitment. This can best be explained by the findings of Hrebiniai and
Alluto (1972) who suggests that married workers see greater costs attached to interorganizational mobility. Thus, married workers are less likely than single workers to consider employment alternatives.

Tenure significantly influences organizational commitment of the migrant workers. This result supports Meyer and Allen (1997) finding. The longer they work in the factory, the more likely they are to be familiar with the factory, coworkers, and get used to the policies and regulations. They also have opportunities to perform more important job function when other senior workers leave.

The finding that job satisfaction is significantly correlated with organizational commitment agrees with the finding of Bluedorn (1982) who argues that job satisfaction and organizational commitment positively correlated with one another. This suggests that when a migrant worker is satisfied with his/her job, other alternatives will become less attractive to him/her.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusions

The findings here reveal that the Chinese migrant workers are not lonely, are satisfied with their job and are committed to their organization. Age and gender do not have influence on loneliness or organizational commitment. The single migrant workers feel lonelier than married migrant workers while married and longer tenured migrant workers are more committed to the organization. There is no significant correlation between loneliness and organizational commitment. Lonelier migrant workers have higher job satisfaction than their counterparts. Additionally, findings reveal that job satisfaction has significant positive correlation with organization commitment.

Implications and limitations

The findings suggest that migrant workers’ turnover is not due to loneliness but the management’s attitude towards them. Management can enhance worker’s quality of life in general and organizational commitment in particular, by improving welfare and benefits including favorable living arrangements such as special lodging for couples instead of accommodation suitable only for single workers. Although this study did not set out to investigate whether migrant workers are forced to work more than 8 hours a day, or whether they get paid on time, anecdotal evidence suggests that migrant workers faced many difficulties including being signed up by their employers under oral contracts.
These findings suggest a need for regulations to safeguard the migrant workers labor rights and interests.

Future research may replicate the study to include migrant workers in public-owned enterprises and other industries in individualistic cultures to determine if cultural factors affect the loneliness and turnover intention. Comparisons between findings from individualistic and collectivistic culture can also be made. Future research should also delve deeper to determine the relationship between loneliness and turnover intention, apart from variables already covered in this study.

REFERENCES


### Table 1 Demographic Information

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Figure 2 Loneliness and Job Satisfaction

Figure 3 Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment