



**Research Publishing
Academy (RPA)**
London, United Kingdom (UK)

ITHJ

International Tourism and Hospitality Journal (ITHJ)
Journal Homepage: <https://rpajournals.com/ithj>

Resilience and Exhaustion in Egyptian Hospitality: The Effects of Fear and Job Insecurity During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ahmed E. Baiomy ¹

Ahmed Abd El Maksoud ²

Hotel Management Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management
Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt^{1,2}

Abstract

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has had a profound and lasting impact on the hospitality sector worldwide, particularly in developing economies such as Egypt. This study examines the relationships between Egyptian restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19, job insecurity, and emotional exhaustion, offering insights into the pandemic's impact on occupational stress and employee well-being. Drawing upon the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this research examines how fear of COVID-19 directly and indirectly influences emotional exhaustion through job insecurity, and the moderating role of perceived organizational support (POS). Data were collected from 171 restaurant employees working in five-star hotels in Cairo using a structured questionnaire. Confirmatory factor analysis and PROCESS macro analyses were used to test the proposed model. Results revealed that fear of COVID-19 significantly increased job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, while job insecurity mediated this relationship. Moreover, POS was found to moderate the link between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. The findings contribute to theoretical and practical understanding of crisis management in hospitality by highlighting the enduring psychological consequences of pandemic-related fear and insecurity. The study remains relevant beyond 2021, offering guidance for managing employee well-being during future crises and disruptions.

Keywords: Egyptian Hospitality, Job Insecurity, Fear of Covid-19, Emotional Exhaustion

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37227/ithj-2025-10-138/>

Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a highly contagious illness believed to spread primarily through direct contact between individuals (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a). The WHO officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, due to its high transmission rate and relatively elevated mortality rate (Baud et al., 2020; WHO, 2020b). On February 14, 2020, Egypt reported the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Africa. The country required approximately three months to accumulate 10,000 cases, a duration nearly twice that of Italy and the United States in reaching the exact case count. By mid-March, the increase in COVID-19 cases to over 100 led the Egyptian government to enforce stricter measures (Medhat & El Kassas, 2020). Schools and universities were

suspended for a month, with a transition to electronic distance learning. A curfew was imposed from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., during which shops and restaurants closed by 5 p.m. and remained shut on Fridays and Saturdays (Gaye et al., 2021). Public and private transportation services were halted during curfew hours, and flights were suspended to reduce the spread of imported infections. Additionally, all sports and social activities were banned to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Medhat & El Kassas, 2020; Gaye et al., 2021).

Similar to other emerging markets, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant shock to Egypt's economy. The impact was immediately evident with the abrupt halt in tourism, which at the start of the crisis contributed approximately 12% to GDP, 10% to employment, and 4% to foreign currency earnings (International Monetary Fund, 2021; Elnaggar, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Egypt's restaurant sector encountered significant hurdles. The government implemented strict measures, including a lockdown, which restricted in-person dining and pushed restaurants to focus on alternatives such as takeout, delivery, and outdoor seating. The adoption of contactless payments and mobile ordering systems became critical for businesses to operate safely. Economic difficulties were exacerbated by reduced consumer spending as many people faced job losses and financial uncertainty. Although Egypt's economy showed signs of recovery, the hospitality and restaurant industries, heavily dependent on tourism, continued to face difficulties due to reduced customer numbers and health concerns (Beschel, 2021; National Restaurant Association, 2021; Elnaggar, 2020).

According to Choi et al. (2014) and Han et al. (2016), the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate the stress and emotional exhaustion experienced by restaurant frontline workers, who already face higher levels of these issues compared to workers in other sectors, due to their long working hours and constant interaction with customers. The experience of being laid off during the COVID-19 shutdown, along with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the future of the restaurant industry, has heightened feelings of job insecurity among workers. Job insecurity refers to the fear of losing one's job and facing unemployment (De Witte, 1999). Research has shown that job insecurity acts as a work stressor, leading to adverse outcomes, including decreased psychological well-being, lower job satisfaction, reduced commitment, and poorer performance (Darvishmotevali et al., 2017; Han et al., 2022). It is also associated with increased emotional exhaustion and higher turnover intentions (Akgunduz & Eryilmaz, 2018; Schumacher et al., 2016; Hasan et al., 2023).

While the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, its effects on employment, worker well-being, and organizational practices have continued to shape hospitality labor markets and managerial responses through 2024–2025 (Ma et al., 2024; Fraser, 2024). Recent empirical research suggests that the perceived health risks and job insecurity associated with the pandemic continue to have a strong correlation with emotional exhaustion and reduced intentions to retain employees in hospitality settings (Han et al., 2022). This highlights the enduring impact of these factors beyond the initial phase of the pandemic. Additionally, evidence suggests that organizational support and psychosocial resources, such as mindfulness training and support from managers and colleagues, play a crucial role in moderating pandemic-related stressors. These elements can significantly influence recovery trajectories for both businesses and employees. These contemporary findings confirm that analyses based on data collected in 2021 continue to provide valuable insights for current management practices and academic discussions on workforce resilience (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). They also highlight the importance of integrating recent empirical insights into ongoing dialogues (Datlko, 2025).

However, it is unclear how the fear of COVID-19 affects Egyptian restaurant workers' perceptions of job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Existing research suggests that perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived manager support can help reduce emotional exhaustion among hospitality employees (Karatepe & Kilic, 2015). However, there is limited knowledge on how POS might reduce job insecurity and emotional exhaustion for restaurant workers during the pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to explore how restaurant employees' fear of COVID-19 impacts their job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. It will also investigate whether POS can moderate these effects. The results will provide valuable insights into the factors affecting the emotional well-being of restaurant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and offer guidance for HR management during future crises.

Literature Review

Fear of COVID-19 and Emotional Exhaustion

For frontline workers, research has shown that the fear of COVID-19 can lower job satisfaction, increase psychological distress, and lead to greater organizational and professional turnover intentions, especially among nurses (Labrague & De los Santos, 2020). However, little is known about how this fear impacts the psychological health of frontline restaurant workers despite the restaurant industry being one of the hardest-hit sectors during the pandemic.

Restaurant employees frequently encounter emotionally charged situations and are expected to manage their emotions as part of their daily tasks (Hülshager et al., 2013). This constant emotional labor can lead to burnout. As defined by Maslach and Leiter (2008), burnout comprises three key components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. This study focuses on emotional exhaustion, the central element of burnout (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005), which occurs when a person feels fatigued, emotionally drained, and physically exhausted due to high job or personal demands (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is associated with various adverse outcomes, including mental and physical health issues (Tokunaga, 2011). Research in the hospitality industry has shown that emotional exhaustion in employees can lead to lower job satisfaction, diminished job performance, reduced organizational commitment, and a higher likelihood of turnover (Rathi & Lee, 2016).

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) can help explain the relationship between restaurant frontline workers' fear of COVID-19 and emotional exhaustion. The COR theory suggests that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect resources that they value, aiming to minimize the threat of losing these resources (Hobfoll, 1998). Emotional exhaustion can occur when people either perceive a threat of resource loss, experience actual resource loss, or fail to regain resources after investing them (Hobfoll, 2001). Resources, as defined by the COR theory, encompass "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies valued by the individual" (Hobfoll, 1989). During the pandemic, frontline restaurant workers may need to expend both physical and psychological resources to cope with the fear of COVID-19, which can deplete their resources and make it difficult for them to manage stress at work. Studies have shown that resource loss can lead to emotional exhaustion when individuals feel they no longer have enough resources to handle the stress they face (Rathi & Lee, 2016). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 is positively related to their emotional exhaustion.

Fear of COVID-19 and Job Insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented human, economic, and health crises. According to a study by Frone (2018), even employees who retain their jobs during economic downturns may experience job insecurity due to factors such as salary reductions, decreased working hours, poor physical and mental health, prolonged furloughs, and adverse working conditions. Job insecurity, defined as the fear of losing one's job (Grunberg et al., 2006; Leka & Jain, 2010), is widely regarded as a stressor that can lead to psychological and physical health issues, negative job-related attitudes, depression, and functional impairments (Thompson et al., 2017; Unguren & Arslan, 2022).

The Psychological Contract Theory, often used to explain job insecurity, highlights the informal expectations between employees and employers beyond the formal employment contract (Smithson & Lewis, 2000). A robust psychological contract can provide employees with a sense of control, fair wages, and benefits, thereby reducing job insecurity (Ashford et al., 1989; Keim et al., 2014). However, any factors that threaten this sense of control, such as personality traits like an external locus of control or role ambiguity, can increase perceptions of job insecurity (Pienaar & De Witte, 2016). Organizational changes and poor communication within organizations also contribute to heightened job insecurity (Keim et al., 2014), as do external factors like high national unemployment rates (Debus et al., 2012).

A study examining the impact of COVID-19 on employment found that 21.1% of participants feared job loss, and 51.9% believed their future job opportunities would be negatively affected (Baert et al., 2020). In the U.S., pandemic-related measures such as closing non-essential businesses and enforcing stay-at-home orders caused a surge in unemployment, with 41 million people filing for unemployment in the early stages (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This economic uncertainty has intensified feelings of job insecurity (Spurk & Straub, 2020). Sun et al. (2022) found that COVID-19 fear has a positive and significant impact on job insecurity. Moreover, frontline restaurant employees may face additional fears related to contracting COVID-19, which could further exacerbate financial instability and job loss. Such concerns are expected to heighten their perceptions of job insecurity during the crisis. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 is positively associated with their job insecurity.

The Mediating Role of Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is widely recognized as a job stressor that negatively impacts employee job performance, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and turnover intentions (De Witte et al., 2016). According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), emotional exhaustion arises when individuals perceive a threat of resource loss and lack sufficient resource gain. Given that job loss can lead to severe consequences such as depression (Kessler et al., 1988), restaurant frontline workers' perceptions of job insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a threat to their resources, potentially intensifying emotional exhaustion.

Previous research supports this link, showing that job insecurity leads to resource depletion, feelings of exhaustion, burnout, job tension, and reduced well-being (Ismail, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2022; Cheong et al., 2023). Workers who feel at risk of losing their jobs tend to experience higher levels of negative emotions, such as stress and exhaustion, compared to those who do not perceive such threats (Kerse et al., 2018; Smit et al., 2016).

Piccoli et al. (2017) also confirmed the positive correlation between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

Moreover, the fear of COVID-19 exacerbates job insecurity for frontline workers, as concerns about contagion and the uncertain economic future may increase the risk of furloughs or layoffs. In response, employees may invest extra effort at work to secure their positions, but this additional exertion can worsen their emotional, psychological, and behavioral well-being, intensifying emotional exhaustion. Given this relationship, it is reasonable to propose that the fear of COVID-19 indirectly affects emotional exhaustion through job insecurity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Job insecurity mediates the relationship between restaurant frontline employees' fear of COVID-19 and their emotional exhaustion.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support refers to employees' perception of how much their employer values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS fosters a sense of obligation in employees, prompting them to reciprocate by working towards the organization's goals. Research has shown that POS is linked to numerous positive outcomes, including improved job satisfaction, creativity, performance, and reduced turnover intentions (Vatankhah et al., 2017).

According to Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, organizational support is a valuable resource that helps employees develop personal resources, such as intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion (Karatepe, 2015; Michel et al., 2013). POS also strengthens employees' sense of control, which can mitigate job insecurity (Bal et al., 2010; Bohle et al., 2018). By offering emotional support, affirmation, and a sense of belonging, POS helps employees feel cared for, which reduces the risk of burnout and emotional exhaustion (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). Thus, POS can buffer the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, weakening this connection for employees who perceive higher levels of organizational support. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: POS moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and restaurant frontline employees' emotional exhaustion, weakening the relationship for those with higher POS compared to those with lower perceived support.

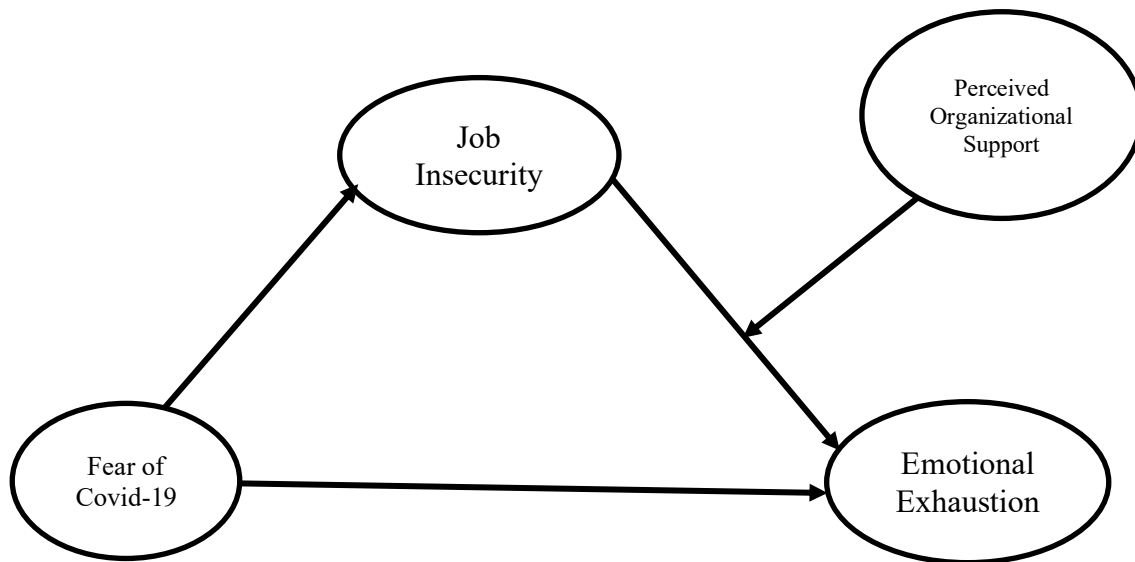


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Methodology

Sample and data collection

The survey comprised two main sections. The first section captured demographic information, including gender, age, education, and employment status during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 1). The second section measured five key constructs: fear of COVID-19, job insecurity, perceived organizational support (POS), and emotional exhaustion (see Table 2). **Fear of COVID-19** was assessed using a seven-item scale adapted from Ahorsu et al. (2020). A representative item includes, “*I am most afraid of COVID-19.*” **Job insecurity** was measured using the four-item scale developed by De Witte et al. (2000), such as “*I am afraid that I may not be able to keep my job.*” **Emotional exhaustion** was measured with nine items from Maslach and Jackson (1981), for example, “*I feel emotionally drained from my work.*” **Perceived organizational support (POS)** was evaluated using eight items from Eisenberger et al. (1986), including “*My restaurant considers my goals and values.*”

All items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The survey instruments were translated and back-translated to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. Data were analyzed using **SPSS version 22.0** and **AMOS**. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics, while reliability and validity were examined through Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The dataset was tested for normality, skewness, kurtosis, and outliers; no violations of assumptions were detected.

Results

Demographic Profile

A total of 171 valid responses were analyzed. The sample predominantly comprised male employees (65.5%), most of whom were aged between 25 and 34 years (56.7%). Approximately 71.9% were married, and 64.3% held a bachelor’s degree. Regarding employment status during the COVID-19 pandemic, 50.3% were furloughed, 18.7% were laid off, and 31.0% remained employed. Detailed demographic characteristics are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Demographic Profile (N=171)			
Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–24	11	6.4
	25–34	97	56.7
	35–44	43	25.1
	45–54	15	8.8
	55 or above	5	2.9
Gender	Male	112	65.5
	Female	59	34.5
Marital Status	Single	24	14.0
	Married	123	71.9
	Other	24	14.0
Occupation	Professional	56	32.7
	Student	9	5.3
	Self-employed	99	57.9
	Other	7	4.1
Education	High School	9	5.3
	College degree	22	12.9
	Bachelor's degree	110	64.3
	Other	30	17.5
Employment during Covid-19	Furloughed	86	50.3
	Laid off	32	18.7
	Employed	53	31.0

Reliability and Validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) demonstrated an excellent model fit (χ^2 (171) = 889.36, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.01$; CFI = .98; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .07). Discriminant validity was confirmed since the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its inter-construct correlations (see Table 2). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values ranged from .92 to .96, exceeding the recommended .70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Convergent validity was established, as all standardized factor loadings exceeded .70 and were statistically significant ($p < .05$), while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from .72 to .84 (See Table 3).

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlation Coefficients (N = 171)						
Measure	1	2	3	4	AVE	√AVE
1. Fear of COVID-19	1				.73	.85
2. Job Insecurity	.53**	1			.85	.92
3. Emotional Exhaustion	.47**	.59**	1		.75	.87
4. POS	.28**	.06	-.18*	1	.73	.85
Means	4.17	4.17	4.29	4.96		
SDs	1.72	1.80	1.67	1.41		
Cronbach's α :	.94	.95	.96	.95		

Note. Values on the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ = Square root of AVE. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results (N = 71)			
Construct / Item	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Fear of COVID-19			
I am most afraid of COVID-19.	.75	0.94	0.73
It makes me uncomfortable to think about COVID-19.	.78		
My hands become clammy when I think about COVID-19.	.93		
I am afraid of losing my life because of COVID-19.	.80		
When watching news and stories about COVID-19 on social media, I become anxious.	.85		
I cannot sleep because I'm worrying about getting COVID-19.	.91		
My heart races or palpitates when I think about getting COVID-19.	.94		
Job Insecurity			
Chances are, I will soon lose my job.	.90	0.95	0.84
I am afraid that I may not be able to keep my job.	.91		
I feel insecure about the future of my job.	.94		
I think I might lose my job in the near future.	.93		
Emotional Exhaustion			
I feel emotionally drained from my work.	.92	0.96	0.75
I feel used up at the end of the workday.	.86		
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning for another workday.	.89		
Working with people all day is really a strain for me.	.85		
I feel burned out from my work.	.93		
I feel frustrated by my job.	.87		
I feel I am working too hard on my job.	.74		
I feel like I am at the end of my rope.	.86		
Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.	.88		
Perceived Organizational Support			
My restaurant considers my goals and values.	.87	0.95	0.72
My restaurant really cares about my well-being.	.88		
My restaurant shows a lot of concern for me.	.92		
My restaurant would forgive an honest mistake on my part.	.65		
My restaurant cares about my opinion.	.89		
My restaurant would never take advantage of me.	.90		
Help is available from my restaurant when I have a problem.	.80		
My restaurant is willing to help me when I need a special favor.	.89		

Ave: Average Variance extracted

Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses were examined using **PROCESS Macro Model 4** (Hayes, 2013). Bootstrapping with 2,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals was employed to test mediation effects (See Table 4). Following Preacher and Hayes (2008), indirect effects were considered significant if zero was not included within the confidence interval. Results indicated that fear of COVID-19 significantly predicted job insecurity ($\beta = .51, p < .01$) and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .27, p < .01$). Job insecurity also positively influenced emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .44, p < .01$). The indirect effect of fear of COVID-19 on emotional exhaustion via job insecurity was significant ($\beta = .31, p < .01$), confirming partial mediation. To test moderation (Hypothesis 4), hierarchical regression was conducted using standardized values of job insecurity (JI) and perceived organizational support

(POS). The interaction term ($JI \times POS$) significantly predicted emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .06, p < .05$), explaining an additional 1% of variance ($\Delta R^2 = .01, p < .05$). The results indicate that while higher POS generally reduced emotional exhaustion, the positive association between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was stronger among employees perceiving higher POS.

Table 4: Path analysis Results (N = 71).		
Pathway	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>p</i>
Fear of COVID-19 → Job Insecurity	.51**	< .01
Fear of COVID-19 → Emotional Exhaustion	.27**	< .01
Job Insecurity → Emotional Exhaustion	.44**	< .01
Fear of COVID-19 → Job Insecurity → Emotional Exhaustion (Indirect Effect)	.31	< .01

Note. $N = 171$. $p < .01$ (two-tailed). All coefficients are standardized estimates.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined the relationships among fear of COVID-19, job insecurity, perceived organizational support (POS), and emotional exhaustion among restaurant employees in five-star hotels in Cairo, Egypt. The results revealed that fear of COVID-19 exerted both a direct and an indirect influence on emotional exhaustion, with job insecurity serving as a significant mediator. These findings highlight the significance of understanding how crisis-induced fear and perceived job instability impact the emotional well-being of frontline employees. Consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), fear of COVID-19 represents a psychological stressor that threatens employees' valuable resources, such as job security and emotional stability. When employees perceive a high likelihood of resource loss, whether in terms of job security or physical safety, they are more likely to experience emotional strain and depletion. The significant mediating role of job insecurity further supports the notion that the perception of potential resource loss can be as detrimental as actual resource loss. Consequently, fear-based stressors during crises must be addressed directly to safeguard employee well-being.

The moderating role of perceived organizational support (POS) provides an additional layer of insight. While employees who perceive higher levels of organizational support tend to report lower levels of emotional exhaustion overall, the study found that POS strengthened, rather than mitigated, the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. This unexpected outcome challenges the conventional assumption that POS uniformly acts as a buffering resource. One plausible explanation, in line with COR theory, is that employees may perceive POS as a valuable resource that is at risk of being lost if their job becomes insecure, thereby intensifying emotional strain.

These findings also align with emerging literature that highlights the complex and context-dependent role of organizational resources during crises (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018). They suggest that supportive practices may not uniformly buffer the effects of stressors; instead, their impact may vary depending on the perceived stability of the employment relationship and the broader crisis environment. Consequently, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how organizational and psychological resources interact under conditions of uncertainty. Furthermore, employees are more likely to perceive organizational support positively when they receive benefits and recognition aligned with their needs and values (Baiomy, Rahamat, & Ahmat, 2024). For instance, restaurant

managers can reinforce perceptions of care and support by sharing concrete examples of employees who were assisted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such practices strengthen the psychological contract between employees and employers, fostering trust and a sense of belonging even during challenging times.

Theoretical Implications

Although the data were collected in 2021, the findings remain relevant as restaurants worldwide continue to recover from the long-lasting consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how fear, job insecurity, and organizational support mechanisms influence frontline employees during crises, insights that are transferable to future disruptions in the hospitality industry (e.g., economic recessions, health crises, political instability). Studies focusing on Egyptian hotel restaurant employees are scarce, especially in the context of global crises. This dataset remains unique and relevant for understanding employee well-being in emerging markets, offering cross-cultural perspectives that remain important today.

This study makes several theoretical contributions by applying the COR theory to the restaurant industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While COR theory has been widely applied in organizational psychology and management research, its use with frontline restaurant employees during a global health crisis remains limited. By demonstrating that employees' fear of COVID-19 intensifies emotional exhaustion directly and indirectly through perceived job insecurity, the findings extend the theoretical understanding of how crises deplete personal and psychological resources in the hospitality sector. This provides an important addition to the literature on emotional exhaustion and job insecurity, illustrating the unique vulnerabilities faced by service workers when external shocks, such as pandemics, threaten both personal safety and job stability.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate regarding the role of perceived organizational support (POS). Traditionally, POS has been regarded as a resource that mitigates the adverse effects of stressors such as job insecurity and role conflict. However, the current findings challenge this assumption by revealing that while higher levels of POS are associated with lower overall emotional exhaustion, they also amplify the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. This counterintuitive result advances theoretical discourse by suggesting that, under crisis conditions, employees may view organizational support as a highly valued resource that is at risk of being lost if their job becomes insecure. Consequently, the perception of losing such an important resource may heighten stress and emotional exhaustion, aligning with COR theory's assertion that the threat of resource loss can be as damaging as actual loss.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for restaurant managers, human resource practitioners, and policymakers seeking to mitigate the adverse effects of crises on frontline employees. The results emphasize that emotional exhaustion stems not only from direct health threats but also from fear-driven perceptions of job insecurity and unstable support systems.

First, reducing employees' fear during crises should be a managerial priority. Restaurants can implement visible and consistent health and safety measures, including regular sanitization of high-touch surfaces, proper ventilation systems, and apparent compliance with public health guidelines. Providing timely information through credible sources such as the WHO or local health authorities can reduce uncertainty and build trust. Training programs and webinars on crisis management can further enhance employees' confidence in safety protocols and preparedness. Second, transparent communication and crisis preparedness are essential. Managers should develop structured crisis management

plans that include clear communication protocols, contingency staffing strategies, and well-defined policies regarding employee welfare. Establishing open communication channels and regular updates about organizational stability can reduce speculation, strengthen employee trust, and minimize job insecurity.

Third, since job insecurity mediates the relationship between fear and emotional exhaustion, management interventions should directly target employees' sense of job stability. Initiatives such as flexible scheduling, temporary wage protection, paid sick leave, and maintaining benefits during crises can significantly alleviate both psychological and financial stress. Cross-training employees to perform multiple functions enhances adaptability, reduces feelings of vulnerability, and strengthens perceptions of employability. Finally, organizations should foster a culture of genuine and consistent support. While POS can reduce overall exhaustion, it must be managed carefully to avoid creating unrealistic expectations that heighten stress during uncertain times. Managers can foster an authentic support culture by offering counseling services, creating confidential spaces for employees to express concerns, and publicly recognizing employee contributions. Posting well-being resources and coping strategies in staff areas and following up regularly on employee feedback demonstrates sustained care and support.

Finally, Organizations should prioritize the development and public disclosure of contingency plans that can be enacted in the event of future crises. These plans may encompass measures such as temporary wage protection, hardship funds, and furlough protocols. By making these policies transparent, organizations can help reduce uncertainty and mitigate perceived job insecurity following a disruptive event. To strengthen perceptions of organizational support (POS), it is essential to pair it with concrete job security measures. While POS is beneficial, it may seem fragile during crises. A dual approach that combines symbolic support, such as messages of encouragement and recognition, with tangible protections, including the continuation of benefits, sick pay, cross-training, and redeployment options, enhances the credibility of the support offered. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood that POS will become a source of anxiety when job security is threatened. Cross-training staff to facilitate their redeployment across different functions during a crisis (e.g., room service, call center support, delivery) can sustain income streams, minimize unemployment risk, and foster a sense of control that helps alleviate emotional exhaustion. Following any disruptive event, it is essential to conduct a structured after-action review (AAR) that incorporates input from all staff members. Documenting lessons learned and revising crisis Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) accordingly is essential.

Additionally, sharing a concise summary of these lessons with the team reinforces shared understanding and improvement. In summary, the practical implications of this study underscore the significance of an integrated approach that combines physical safety measures, psychological support, transparent communication, and job security initiatives. By fostering resilience and perceived control among employees, restaurant organizations can mitigate emotional exhaustion, sustain morale, and enhance long-term stability during crises and beyond.

Research Limitations

The current study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings of this study are specific to restaurant employees in five-star hotels in Egypt, limiting the generalizability of the results to other service sectors or cultural contexts. Conducting

qualitative studies would also provide deeper insights, especially regarding the role of POS in mitigating job insecurity and emotional exhaustion during crises. Additionally, extending research to hotel frontline employees, such as those in housekeeping and front-office roles, could help provide a more comprehensive understanding of COVID-19's impact across the hospitality industry. Finally, future research should explore factors such as prior furlough or layoff experiences and differences between types of restaurants (e.g., quick service versus fine dining), which may reveal further nuances.

Directions for Future Studies

Future research should extend beyond the immediate COVID-19 context to examine how employees recover from prolonged crises and how resilience mechanisms evolve. Comparative studies across different Egyptian hospitality sectors and cultural contexts would provide richer insights into the universality of these relationships. Furthermore, longitudinal designs could clarify the causal relationships between fear, insecurity, and exhaustion. Integrating digital transformation, remote work practices, and AI-driven management tools into future models may also reveal how technology mediates employee stress and resilience. Ultimately, future research should investigate interventions, such as mindfulness training and psychological safety programs, that can help maintain employee well-being during periods of ongoing uncertainty.

References

- Ahorsu, D. K., Lin, C. Y., Imani, V., Saffari, M., Griffiths, M. D., & Pakpour, A. H. (2020). The Fear of COVID-19 Scale: Development and initial validation. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00270-8>
- Akgunduz, Y., & Eryilmaz, G. (2018). Does turnover intention mediate the effects of job insecurity and co-worker support on social loafing? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 68, 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.09.010>
- Anomneze, E. A., Ugwu, D. I., Enwereuzor, I. K., & Ugwu, L. I. (2016). Teachers' emotional labour and burnout: Does perceived organizational support matter? *Asian Social Science*, 12(2), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v12n2p9>
- Ashford, S. J., Lee, C., & Bobko, P. (1989). Content, cause, and consequences of job insecurity: A theory-based measure and substantive test. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(4), 803–829. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256569>
- Baert, S., Lippens, L., Moens, E., Sterkens, P., & Weytjens, J. (2020). How do we think the COVID-19 crisis will affect our careers (if any remain)? *IZA Discussion Paper No. 13164*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3584927>
- Baiomy, A., Rahamat, S., & Ahmat, N. (2024). Job Crafting and Employees' Job Satisfaction During the COVID-19 Pandemic *International Tourism and Hospitality Journal*, 7(1), 1–14.
- Baud, D., Qi, X., Nielsen-Saines, K., Musso, D., Pomar, L., & Favre, G. (2020). Real estimates of mortality following COVID-19 infection. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 20(7), 773. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099\(20\)30195-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30195-X)
- Beschel, R. P., Jr. (2021). *Policy and institutional responses to COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa: Egypt*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/policy-and-institutional-responses-to-covid-19-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-egypt>
- Bogale Datiko, D. (2025). *Prevention is better than a cure: Fine-tuning the hospitality-sector human resource in the face of crisis*. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 1–28.

- Bohle, A. Z., Chambel, M. J., Medina, F. M., & Cunha, B. S. D. (2018). The role of perceived organizational support in job insecurity and performance. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 58(4), 393–404. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0034-759020180406>
- Chen, H., & Eyoun, K. (2021). Do mindfulness and perceived organizational support work? Fear of COVID-19 on restaurant frontline employees' job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94, 102850. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102850>
- Cheng, G. H. L., & Chan, D. K. S. (2008). Who suffers more from job insecurity? A meta-analytic review. *Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 272–303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2007.00312.x>
- Chiang, C. F., & Hsieh, T. S. (2012). The impacts of perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment on job performance: The mediating effects of organizational citizenship behavior. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(1), 180–190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2011.04.011>
- Chin Ann Chong, C. A., Ng, L. P., & Chen, I.-C. (2024). The impact of job insecurity on job burnout among hospitality employees during the COVID-19 pandemic: The moderating role of supervisor and co-worker support. *International Hospitality Review*, 38(1), 160–181. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IHR-08-2022-0034>
- Choi, C. H., Kim, T. T., Lee, G., & Lee, S. K. (2014). Testing the stressor–strain–outcome model of customer-related social stressors in predicting emotional exhaustion, customer orientation, and service recovery performance. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 272–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2012.09.009>
- Darvishmotevali, M., Arasli, H., & Kilic, H. (2017). Effect of job insecurity on frontline employees' performance. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(6), 1724–1744. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-12-2015-0698>
- De Witte, H. (1999). Job insecurity and psychological well-being: Review of the literature and exploration of some unresolved issues. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8(2), 155–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135943299398302>
- De Witte, H. (2000). Arbeidsethos en jobonzekerheid: Meting en gevolgen voor welzijn, tevredenheid en inzet op het werk. In R. Bouwen, K. De Witte, H. De Witte, & T. Tailleu (Eds.), *Van groep naar gemeenschap: Liber amicorum Prof. Dr. Leo Lagrou* (pp. 325–350). Garant.
- Debus, M. E., Probst, T. M., König, C. J., & Kleinmann, M. (2012). Catch me if I fall! Country-level resources in the job insecurity–job attitudes link. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(3), 690–698. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027832>
- Dekker, S. W. A., & Schaufeli, W. B. (1995). The effects of job insecurity on psychological health and withdrawal: A longitudinal study. *Australian Psychologist*, 30(1), 57–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00050069508259607>
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 500–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
- El Naggar, Y. (2020). *What does COVID-19 mean for Egypt's economy?* Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/what-does-covid-19-mean-egypts-economy>
- El Naggar, Y. (2020). *What does COVID-19 mean for Egypt's economy?* Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/what-does-covid-19-mean-egypts-economy>
- Fraser, G. (2024). Key takeaways from 2024 in hospitality: Lessons learned and what to expect in 2025. *Hotel Interactive*. Retrieved October 15, 2025, from <https://www.hotelinteractive.com/key-takeaways-from-2024-in-hospitality-lessons-learned-and-what-to-expect-in-2025/>
- Frone, M. R. (2018). What happened to the employed during the Great Recession? A U.S. population study of net change in employee insecurity, health, and organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 107, 246–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.05.001>

- Gaye, Y.-E., Agbajogu, C., & El Oakley, R. (2021). COVID-19 on the Nile: Review on the management and outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab Republic of Egypt from February to August 2020. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 1588. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041588>
- Grunberg, L., Moore, S., & Greenberg, E. S. (2006). Managers' reactions to implementing layoffs: Relationship to health problems and withdrawal behaviors. *Human Resource Management*, 45(2), 159–178. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20101>
- Han, S. J., Bonn, M. A., & Cho, M. (2016). The relationship between customer incivility, restaurant frontline service employee burnout, and turnover intention. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 52, 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.10.002>
- Han, S. J., Bonn, M. A., & Cho, M. (2016). The relationship between customer incivility, restaurant frontline service employee burnout, and turnover intention. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 52, 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.10.002>
- Han, X., Xue, M., Zhang, Q., & Dong, X. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 risk perception on emotional exhaustion among Chinese hospitality employees: The mediating effect of job insecurity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(22), 15146. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192215146>
- Hasan, N. (2023). Perceived organizational support and reduced job strain: Effects on job performance during the COVID-19 crisis. *Inquiry: A Journal of Medical Care Organization, Provision and Financing*, 60, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580231160908> SAGE Journals
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1998). *Stress, culture, and community: The psychology and philosophy of stress*. Plenum Press.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1998). *Stress, culture, and community: The psychology and philosophy of stress*. Plenum Press.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 50(3), 337–421. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00062>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2001). The influence of culture, community, and the nested self in the stress process: Advancing conservation of resources theory. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 50(3), 337–421. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00062>
- International Monetary Fund. (2021). *Egypt: Overcoming the COVID shock and maintaining growth*. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/07/14/na070621-egypt-overcoming-the-covid-shock-and-maintaining-growth>
- International Monetary Fund. (2021). *Egypt: Overcoming the COVID shock and maintaining growth*. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/07/14/na070621-egypt-overcoming-the-covid-shock-and-maintaining-growth>
- Ismail, H. (2015). Job insecurity, burnout, and intention to quit. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5(4), 310–324. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v5-i4/1559>
- Jawahar, I. M., Stone, T. H., & Kisamore, J. L. (2007). Role conflict and burnout: The direct and moderating effects of political skill and perceived organizational support on burnout dimensions. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 14(2), 142–159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.14.2.142>

- Karatepe, O. M., & Aleshinloye, K. D. (2009). Emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion among hotel employees in Nigeria. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 349–358. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.12.002>
- Karatepe, O. M., & Kilic, H. (2015). Does manager support reduce the effect of work–family conflict on emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions? *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 14(3), 267–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2015.1002078>
- Keim, A. C., Landis, R. S., Pierce, C. A., & Earnest, D. R. (2014). Why do employees worry about their jobs? A meta-analytic review of predictors of job insecurity. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19(3), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036743>
- Kerse, G., Kocak, D., & Ozdemir, S. (2018). Does the perception of job insecurity bring emotional exhaustion? The relationship between job insecurity, affective commitment, and emotional exhaustion. *Business and Economics Research Journal*, 9(3), 651–663. <https://doi.org/10.20409/berj.2018.154>
- Leka, S., & Jain, A. (2010). *Health impact of psychosocial hazards at work: An overview*. World Health Organization.
- Liu-Lastres, B., Huang, W.-J., & Bao, H. (2023). Exploring hospitality workers' career choices in the wake of COVID-19: Insights from a phenomenological inquiry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 111, 103646. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103646>
- Ma, H.-Y., Chen, L.-C., Chuang, P.-C., & Yang, Y.-T. (2024). Health workers' mindfulness-based stress reduction and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 17, 4731–4740. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S498084>
- Maslach, C. A., & Leiter, M. P. (2008). Early predictors of job burnout and engagement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(3), 498–512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.3.498>
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2(2), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2(2), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
- Medhat, M., & El Kassas, M. (2020). COVID-19 in Egypt: Uncovered figures or a different situation? *Journal of Global Health*, 10(1), 010368. <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.10.010368>
- Michel, J. W., Kavanagh, M. J., & Tracey, J. B. (2013). Got support? The impact of supportive work practices on the perceptions, motivation, and behavior of customer contact employees. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 54(2), 161–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965512450414>
- National Restaurant Association. (2021). *State of the restaurant industry report measures virus' impact on business*. <https://restaurant.org/education-and-resources/resource-library/state-of-the-restaurant-industry-report-measures-virus-impact-on-business>
- Piccoli, B., Callea, A., Urbini, F., Chirumbolo, A., Ingusci, E., & De Witte, H. (2017). Job insecurity and performance: The mediating role of organizational identification. *Personnel Review*, 46(8), 1508–1522. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2016-0120>
- Rathi, N., & Lee, K. (2016). Emotional exhaustion and work attitudes: Moderating effect of personality among frontline hospitality employees. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 15(3), 231–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2016.1148570>
- Schumacher, D., Schreurs, B., Van Emmerik, H., & De Witte, H. (2016). Explaining the relation between job insecurity and employee outcomes during organizational change: A multiple group comparison. *Human Resource Management*, 55(5), 809–827. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21684>
- Sim, M. R. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic: Major risks to healthcare and other workers on the front line. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 77(5), 281–282. <https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2020-106567>
- Smit, N. W., De Beer, L. T., & Pienaar, J. (2016). Work stressors, job insecurity, union support, job satisfaction and safety outcomes within the iron ore mining environment. *South African*

- Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v14i1.707>
- Smithson, J., & Lewis, S. (2000). Is job insecurity changing the psychological contract? Young people's expectations of work. *Personnel Review*, 29(6), 680–702. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480010296465>
- Spurk, D., & Straub, C. (2020). Flexible employment relationships and careers in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103435>
- Sun, J., Sarfraz, M., Khawaja, K. F., Ozturk, I., & Raza, M. A. (2022). The perils of the pandemic for the tourism and hospitality industries: Envisaging the combined effect of COVID-19 fear and job insecurity on employees' job performance in Pakistan. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 15, 1325–1346. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S365972>
- Thompson, R. R., Garfin, D. R., Holman, E. A., & Silver, R. C. (2017). Distress, worry, and functioning following a global health crisis: A national study of Americans' response to Ebola. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 5(3), 513–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617692030>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, December 4). *Employment situation summary*. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>
- Unguren, E., & Arslan, S. (2022). How does COVID-19 fear affect job insecurity and stress for hospitality employees? A moderated mediation model for age and financial status. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 18(3), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.18089/tms.2022.180301>
- Vatankhah, S., Javid, E., & Raoofi, A. (2017). Perceived organizational support as the mediator of the relationships between high-performance work practices and counterproductive work behavior: Evidence from the airline industry. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 59, 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2016.12.001>
- World Health Organization. (2020a). *Coronavirus*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
- World Health Organization. (2020b, June 29). *Timeline of the WHO's response to COVID-19*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>