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# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY, MENTAL HEALTH, JOB SATISFACTION AND PERFORMANCE OF TEMPORARY WORKERS IN FRUIT GROWING

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## ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the associations between two temporary work characteristics (workplace burnout and job insecurity), job satisfaction, and mental health in fruit growing in the Republic of Serbia, as well as the role of satisfaction with employee care in these relationships. The research involved 1,359 seasonal workers engaged in pruning and harvesting tasks on fruit plantations. Using structural equation modelling the analysis explored cause-and-effect associations. The findings reveal that job burnout exerts a stronger influence on temporary workers' mental health than on job satisfaction, whereas job insecurity has a more pronounced effect on job satisfaction than on mental health. Across these relationships, satisfaction with employee care functions as a buffer, mitigating the adverse impacts of burnout and job insecurity on both mental health and job satisfaction - two critical determinants of workplace performance.

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## Introduction

Temporary work is a form of flexible labor engagement, that allows employers to adjust workforce size and working hours in line with their operational needs (Hünefeld et al., 2020). Although temporary workers are not widely represented on the European labour market, in agricultural sector in Serbia, they are important group. The largest number of seasonal workers in Serbia are employed in fruit growing. For that reason, for Republic of Serbia, it is important to focus on these employees and this of form of

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labor engagement. First, temporary work is widely regarded as the most precarious type of labour arrangement in Europe (Eichhorst & Tobsch, 2017). It represents a less advantageous employment status compared to permanent work, largely because temporary employees are frequently subjected to unequal and unjust treatment when contrasted with core staff (Arrowsmith, 2006). Temporary employees are frequently disadvantaged in terms of compensation and benefits, with limited opportunities to participate in career development or training. As a rule, they receive lower wages and typically occupy lower professional positions (Mitlacher, 2008). They are often excluded from advanced occupational health and safety programs and have reduced access to workplace health promotion initiatives (Becker & Engel, 2015). Furthermore, they are commonly exposed to stressful and hazardous working environments (De Cuyper et al., 2009). Collectively, these circumstances generate a distinct risk profile for temporary workers.

Above all, this refers to the risk of burnout at work, which has negative effects on worker's mental health and their job satisfaction. It is well known that satisfied workers are motivated for hard work and express a strong psychological commitment to their work and attachment to organizational goals (LaGree et al., 2023), despite insecure conditions. Other words, they exhibit a strong resilience on adverse working conditions. They voice a standpoint a positive attitude towards one's job and a willingness to contribute actively to organizational goals (Tran, 2023), which enhance operational effectiveness. In doing so, they enhance the overall efficiency of organizational processes and the achievement of organizational objectives. Therefore, it is regarded as an essential element of psychological well-being and a marker of stress. In the case of seasonal workers in fruit growing, low levels of motivation and dissatisfaction often result in reduced attentiveness during work. This lack of focus increases the likelihood of workplace accidents and absenteeism, while also diminishing workers' motivation to achieve better performance. Such outcomes are particularly concerning, as dissatisfaction is commonly linked to greater exposure to occupational risks. When you add to this the difficult working conditions in fruit growing because harvesting tasks require prolonged standing, bending, and working outdoors, work at heights often under strong sunlight; workers are exposed to the risk of heatstroke, dehydration, and injuries caused by repetitive movements, it comes to the point that, satisfied with the quality of safety and health measures at work (i.e. employee satisfaction with care is regarded as a dimension of overall job satisfaction, reflecting the extent to which employees perceive their physical and psychological well-being as adequately supported by the organization. (Krick et al., 2022)) and mental health, because of the specifics of temporary employment, in terms of burnout at work and job insecurity, are the main factors that affect the performance workers at job. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the impact of mental health, as a consequence of workplace burnout and job insecurity, and job satisfaction on employee performance, considering the mediating role of satisfaction in these relationships.

## Materials and methods

### Theoretical foundations of the research

According to the World Health Organization, “mental health is a state of well-being in which individuals are able to realize their abilities, cope effectively with everyday stress, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their community.” (WHO, 2007, p. 1). It is often considered a consequence of workplace burnout. This is evidenced by an extensive body of research spanning multiple fields of inquiry, such as (Papathanasiou, 2015; Paspalj et al., 2024; Schonfeld et al., 2019; Bianchi et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2022; Nadon et al., 2022). Whereas stress reflects a transient adaptation accompanied by somatic and psychological signs, workplace burnout constitutes a chronic disorder connected to compromised mental health under continuous job pressure and difficult working conditions. Also, numerous studies have demonstrated that workplace burnout consists of four dimensions (Schaufeli et al., 2020; Angelini et al., 2021; Đorđević & Novičević Čečević, 2025; Miljković, & Arsić, 2025; Jakšić & Burić, 2024; Stojilkovic & Malenovic Nikolic, 2024): physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment. “Physical exhaustion is associated with the perception of being overexploited at work. Its manifestations include persistent fatigue, insomnia, and loss of appetite over an extended period, which may contribute to the onset of occupational illnesses and adverse life outcomes” (Harjanti & Todani, 2019). Emotional exhaustion refers to a condition in which individuals feel unable to make meaningful psychological contributions to organizational activities. It is recognized as the most critical dimension of workplace burnout and typically emerges from repeated exposure to occupational stress (Erkan, 2018). Individuals experiencing emotional exhaustion often report discomfort, fatigue, and depressive symptoms, and may engage in maladaptive coping strategies such as alcohol abuse (Stojilkovic & Malenovic Nikolic, 2024). Depersonalization is indifference towards workplace demands, clients, and colleagues. A lack of personal accomplishment is the feeling that the employee is not successful enough at the workplace, that he is not worthy enough of that workplace.

Research shows that workplace burnout has a negative impact on job satisfaction. Wolpin et al. (1991) and Bal & Kökalan (2021) explained the causal relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, suggesting that burnout leads to decreased job satisfaction rather than the reverse. In this relationship, occupational health and safety (OHS) is essential as it mitigates occupational stress, which in turn decreases the likelihood of burnout and related health problems. On the other hand, there is a strong correlation between workplace burnout and occupational risks: the greater the occupational risk, the higher the level of employee burnout (Chirico, 2016). Leiter and Robichaud (1997) demonstrated that the sense of control over managing occupational risks, as a result of OHS, reduces emotional and physical exhaustion, i.e., workplace burnout. Hence, OHS functions as a protective buffer mitigating workplace burnout. The stronger the perceived sense of control, the greater the satisfaction employees

report with workplace care, reflecting the protective role of OHS practices. Therefore, it can be assumed that employee satisfaction with care (as an outcome of the quality of OHS) moderates the relationship between burnout and mental health, such that higher levels of OHS reduce the negative impact of burnout, but the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction. The greater employee satisfaction with care will reduce the negative effect of job burnout on job satisfaction. Further empirical investigations demonstrate that, alongside job insecurity, mental health plays a decisive role in shaping job satisfaction (Thekiso et al., 2013; Witt et al., 2020; Otaghi, et al., 2023).

Based on this, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: Job burnout has a negative impact on the mental health and job satisfaction of seasonal workers in fruit growing;

H2: Satisfaction with employee care mitigates the negative effect of job burnout on the mental health and job satisfaction of seasonal workers in fruit growing.

H3: Mental health has a positive impact on job satisfaction of seasonal workers in fruit growing.

Alongside workplace burnout, job insecurity, which represents a key characteristic of temporary employment, is consistently acknowledged in the literature as a critical factor impacting the mental health of employees. It should be understood as an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (Heaney et al., 1994). Job insecurity is a chronic stressor that increases psychological withdrawal, such as decreased job satisfaction (Ferrie, 1999). It reduces psychological well-being and job satisfaction while increasing psychosomatic complaints and physical strains (Witte, 1999). In line with these views, other authors also highlight that job insecurity contributes to decreased job satisfaction and adversely affects employees' mental health (Rajani et al., 2016; Richter, A., & Näswall, 2019; Jaramillo et al., 2022).

Based on this, it can be hypothesized that:

H4: Job insecurity has a negative impact on the mental health and job satisfaction of seasonal workers in fruit growing;

According to social exchange theory (SET), individuals enter relationships with organizations to maximize benefits, based on the principle of reciprocity. One party knows what it expects from the other, and what the other expects in return. Both parties have a clear understanding of mutual expectations. Considering that OHS practices are interpreted as signals of employer goodwill (Wang et al., 2020), which typically foster positive employee reactions, it is reasonable to expect that employees will respond to OHS by expressing satisfaction. In the context of temporary employment, this implies that employee satisfaction with workplace care should buffer the negative effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction, ultimately resulting in improved workplace outcomes.

Based on this, it can be hypothesized that:

H5: Satisfaction with employee care mitigates the negative effect of job insecurity on the job satisfaction of seasonal workers in fruit growing.

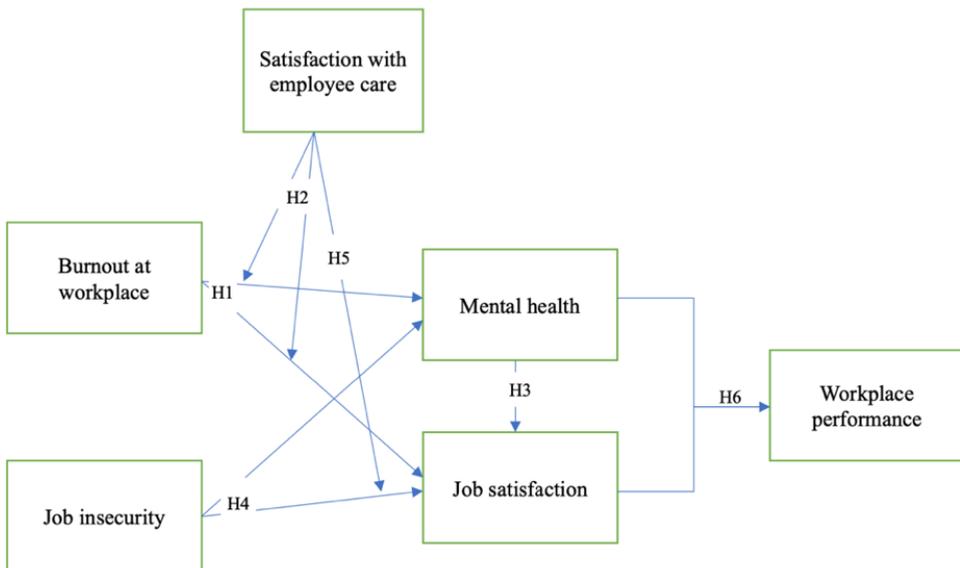
It is well established that high levels of job satisfaction foster positive attitudes toward one's work and a greater willingness to contribute actively to organizational objectives (Radivojevic et al., 2025). Employees who perceive that their organization cares for them tend to demonstrate loyalty and dedication, thereby enhancing organizational outcomes (Oh et al., 2023). Such loyalty contributes to organizational efficiency, as satisfied employees are more likely to engage in behaviours that strengthen operational effectiveness.

Based on this, it can be hypothesized that:

H6: Job satisfaction and mental health have a positive effect on workplace performance.

The preceding discussion implies the following model, which is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The research model



Source: Authors

## Research methodology

The research was conducted on a sample of 1,359 seasonal workers in the Republic of Serbia, employed on fruit plantations in pruning and harvesting tasks. Data were collected during 2025. The questionnaire is presented in Table A1. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In accordance with the WHO's definition of mental health, research on employee performance typically applies GHQ measures (Hünefeld et al., 2020), and this study follows that practice by adopting an eight-item scale. Although burnout has been shown to affect employees' mental health, empirical

studies diverge on which dimension is most impactful. Reported findings range from emotional exhaustion exerting the strongest influence (Schonfeld et al., 2019) to depersonalization being found to have no effect (Papathanasiou, 2015). Nevertheless, the operationalization of workplace burnout (BO) is consistently based on a scale that incorporates all four of its dimensions. For the purposes of this study, the scale developed by Stoiljkovic and Malenovic Nikolic (2024) was employed. Job insecurity (JI) is commonly assessed through a two-item scale (Wagenaar et al., 2012). Yet, as Jaramillo et al. (2022) emphasize, job insecurity consistently exerts a negative impact on workers' mental health, regardless of the operationalization method employed. Job satisfaction (JS) was measured with four items covering satisfaction with different job facets (de Graaf-Zijl, 2012). According to Radivojevic et al. (2025), employee performance should be expressed in terms of orientation to results. Therefore, employee performance (EP) was measured using a four-item scale. Satisfaction with employee care (SC) was assessed using the scale proposed by Radivojevic et al. (2025).

The validity of the questionnaire was tested through factor analysis using the varimax rotation method. Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), while reliability was evaluated through composite reliability (CR). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement instrument. The results are presented in Table A1. The factors clustered as expected, with all items showing factor loadings above 0.40 and no cross-loadings exceeding 0.30. Average variance extracted (AVE) values indicated good convergent validity, as each subscale exceeded the threshold of 0.50. Reliability was also satisfactory, with CR values for all subscales surpassing the recommended standard of 0.70. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the results confirmed adequate discriminant validity (see Table 1). The adequacy of the sample was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Okin sample adequacy test (test value = 0.842). The Bartlett's sphericity test was also conducted ( $\chi^2_{(378)} = 7225.1$ ).

**Table 1.** Results of the discriminant validity

	MH	BO	SC	JI	JS	EP
MH	0.826					
BO	0.342	0.774				
SC	0.339	0.174	0.835			
JI	0.276	0.231	0.129	0.972		
JS	0.438	0.076	0.567	0.172	0.847	
EP	0.128	0.097	0.418	0.089	0.511	0.849

Note: Coefficients are given in absolute values. All correlations are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Authors

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the results confirmed adequate discriminant validity (see Table 1).

## Results

Descriptive statistical analysis reveals that seasonal workers exhibit lower levels of mental health, with considerable variation among individuals in this regard. The majority of respondents report lower levels of mental health. The analysis further indicates that workers are exposed to high levels of workplace burnout, with relatively low variability across this dimension. A similar pattern is observed in relation to job insecurity. In contrast, responses concerning job satisfaction and work performance display substantial dispersion. Overall, employees report being satisfied with their performance at the workplace. However, these findings point to the need to examine additional factors that may influence employees' mental health and motivation, such as personality type and related characteristics.

**Table 2.** Descriptive analysis

	MH	BO	SC	JI	JS	EP
Mean	1.271	3.133	1.512	3.201	2.409	3.103
St. Dev.	0.510	0.071	0.713	0.316	3.116	1.671
Excess kur.	-0.103	1.012	1.437	0.035	3.628	1.115
Skewness	-0.202	1.031	-1.061	1.091	-1.315	2.042

Source: Authors

The research model depicted in Figure 1 was estimated using JASP software. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to assess the validity of the measures and to test the hypothesized relationships. Different goodness-of-fit indices were applied, with one selected from each index category. The results for the overall model are as follows: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.032; root mean square residual (RMSR) = 0.052; non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.971; and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.911. All indices indicate good values.

**Table 3.** Results of hypothesis testing

Variables	Coeff.	Stand. error	Crit. Val.	P value	Results
MH - BO	-0.468	0.028	-16.714	0.000	H1 accept
JS - BO	-0.362	0.019	-19.053	0.000	
MH (BO*SC)	-0.277	0.024	-11.542	0.000	H2 accept
JS - (BO*SC)	-0.128	0.012	-10.667	0.000	
JS - MH	0.204	0.030	6.800	0.000	H3 accept
MH - JI	-0.074	0.003	-24.667	0.000	H4 accept
JS - JI	-0.081	0.002	-40.500	0.000	
JS - (SI*SC)	-0.067	0.002	-33.500	0.000	H5 accept
EP $\leftarrow$ MH	0.164	0.011	14.909	0.000	H6 accept
EP $\leftarrow$ JS	0.253	0.013	19.462	0.000	

Source: Authors

## Discussions

The results imply that the influence of BO on MH is more significant than the influence of BO on JS. The justification for such a finding can be found in the fact that burnout directly affects employees' psychological resources and emotional stability, whereas job satisfaction is more closely related to cognitive evaluations of the work environment (Singh & Pandey, 2025). Burnout is primarily a health phenomenon, so its impact on mental health is stronger and more immediate. Job satisfaction is an evaluative construct that can be maintained even when mental health declines, as it depends on a wider range of work factors (Evans et al., 2006). Such findings suggest that employers should not regard job satisfaction as a sufficient indicator of employee well-being. Mental health represents a fundamental resource, if it is impaired, job satisfaction cannot compensate for the consequences on performance and the long-term sustainability of the workforce. In addition to the above, the finding that satisfaction with employee care emerges as a shock absorber that mitigates the impact of workplace burnout on both mental health and job satisfaction. However, the moderating effect is stronger in the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction than in the relationship between burnout and employees' mental health. The moderating effect of satisfaction with employee care (as a result of OHS) is stronger in the relation burnout → job satisfaction because both constructs are based on the evaluation of the work environment. In contrast, burnout → mental health is a behaviorally and physiologically rooted relationship, so organizational care can alleviate it only partially. Mental health is a fundamental condition that depends on a wider range of factors (genetics, personality, life circumstances). Burnout directly affects it through exhaustion and stress reactions, so there is less room for moderation. Job satisfaction is an evaluative category - it depends on the perception of the work environment, relations with colleagues, benefits and care of the employer. This is precisely where OHS interventions and the perception of "employee care" have the greatest impact. Unlike mental health, which is more deeply rooted in individual psychological resources, job satisfaction relies more on evaluation of the work environment. Employers have more room to influence it through policies, benefits and a culture of care.

Employees with preserved mental health have more energy, emotional stability and resistance to stress. This allows them to evaluate work tasks and circumstances more positively, which directly reflects on greater job satisfaction. Results also show that that job insecurity has a greater negative impact on mental health than job satisfaction. The justification for this can be found in the fact that job insecurity creates chronic stress, anxiety and a sense of unpredictability. These factors directly affect the psychological stability and emotional well-being of employees. Job insecurity activates existential stress - worrying about the future, financial stability and identity. This stress has a stronger and more immediate effect on mental health than on the evaluation of job satisfaction, because it affects basic psychological needs (security, predictability, control). On the other hand, although job insecurity may reduce satisfaction, employees may still be satisfied with some aspects of the job.

The finding that satisfaction with employee care mitigates the negative effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction confirms the core postulates of SET. When employees perceive that their employer cares about them, a sense of reciprocity and trust develops, which lies at the heart of SET. This perception can buffer the adverse consequences of job insecurity, as employees evaluate that the employer nevertheless invests in their well-being.

The finding that mental health and job satisfaction have a positive impact on the performance of employees at the workplace, while the impact of job satisfaction is stronger, can be explained by the fact that job satisfaction is directly related to motivation, engagement and organizational commitment. Mental health provides stability and resilience, but its impact on performance is indirect. Employees may have relatively poor mental health but still perform well if they are satisfied with their work (e.g. because of support from colleagues, benefits, or a sense of purpose).

### **Conclusions**

The research demonstrates that the characteristics of temporary employment significantly influence both mental health impairments and job satisfaction. First, workplace burnout exerts a stronger impact on mental health than on job satisfaction, as it directly undermines employees' psychological resources and emotional stability. Second, job satisfaction is an evaluative construct that can remain stable even under conditions of declining mental health, since it depends on a broader range of work-related factors (Evans et al., 2006). These findings suggest that employers should not treat job satisfaction as a sufficient indicator of employees' overall well-being. Third, satisfaction with employee care acts as a buffer that reduces the effects of workplace burnout on both mental health and job satisfaction. Moreover, satisfaction with employee care also mitigates the impact of job insecurity on job satisfaction.

The findings carry practical implications, highlighting the influence of job characteristics on the job satisfaction of temporary workers. Employers are therefore advised to prioritize employee care, as this will enhance satisfaction, motivation, and work performance. Although they cannot eliminate inherent features of temporary work, such as fruit picking and pruning, by demonstrating concern for the safety and health of seasonal workers, employers can offset the negative consequences associated with temporary employment.

Future research should focus on longitudinal approaches and different sectors of temporary work to gain a deeper understanding of the effects on mental health and job satisfaction. Special emphasis can be placed on examining employer interventions and cultural contexts that shape the experiences of temporary workers.

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix

Table A1. The results of EFA and CFA

	Items	ECF Factor loads	CFA		CR
			Factor loads	AVE	
MH	Have you been feeling perfectly well and in good health?	0.470	0.763	0.682	0.928
	Somatic symptoms	0.413	0.891		
	Anxiety/insomnia	0.620	0.902		
	Social dysfunction	0.424	0.733		
	Severe depression	0.463	0.805		
	Have you been managing to keep yourself busy and occupied?	0.482	0.847		
BO	I have continued to feel tired in completing work.	0.416	0.763	0.600	0.923
	I continue to feel headaches when facing work assignments.	0.406	0.811		
	I have continued to feel anxious.	0.462	0.731		
	I lost the enthusiasm to do daily activities.	0.419	0.725		
	I found it difficult to concentrate.	0.532	0.703		
	I did not care about colleagues who were facing work problems.	0.512	0.774		
	I often ignore conversations when colleagues start the conversation.	0.483	0.851		
	I feel unable to complete work tasks	0.422	0.825		
SC	Management provides strong support to employees in OHS	0.408	0.842	0.698	0.902
	The amount of compensation about suffered pain and physical damage	0.513	0.811		
	The protective equipment provided by the employer is suitable for the tasks and hazards present in your job	0.489	0.784		
	Risk judgment and management reaction	0.449	0.901		
JI	How concerned are you about the following issues	0.765	0.975	0.945	0.972
	Your job security	0.921	0.969		
JS	Satisfaction - job content	0.453	0.859	0.717	0.910
	Satisfaction - working conditions	0.491	0.784		
	Satisfaction - working hours	0.501	0.905		
	Satisfaction - wage	0.459	0.835		
EP	Achieving results	0.411	0.911	0.720	0.911
	Employee orientation;	0.529	0.887		
	Achieving personal work goals and tasks	0.603	0.821		
	Adherence to principles and values	0.442	0.768		