

## Article

# Investigating the Impact of Psychological Contract Violation on Survivors' Turnover Intention under the Downsizing Context: A Moderated Mediation Mechanism

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**Abstract:** In the light of social exchange theory, our study aimed to explore the impact of psychological contract violation on survivors' turnover intention, specifically in a downsizing context. We put forth a moderated mediation model to uncover the mediating role of organizational commitment, as well as the boundary conditions of organizational support and emotional susceptibility as a moderating mechanism. To test our hypotheses, we surveyed 202 out of 271 layoff survivors belonging to the stores of an established manufacturing and retail footwear business in the southwest region of China. The study found a positive relationship between psychological contract violation and the survivors' turnover intention. In addition, organizational commitment has been identified as a powerful mediator between psychological contract violation and turnover intention. This study, however, only explores how organizational support significantly moderates the mediating effect of organizational commitment in regard to psychological contract violation and turnover intention. This study helps organizational practitioners to ensure sound management practices for employees, in order to get rid of adverse consequences evinced through individuals' negative emotions.

**Keywords:** psychological contract violation (PC); organizational commitment (OC); organizational support (OS); turnover intention (TI)



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## 1. Introduction

As per the International Labor Organization's 8th edition report, the global loss of employees' working time in the first quarter of 2021 was 4.5%, equivalent to 131 million full-time jobs. According to the 9th edition of the report, the total work time loss in the first quarter of 2022 (compared to the fourth quarter of 2019) decreased to 3.8% (approximately 112 million full-time jobs), which was lower than the previous forecasts (2.4%, or approximately 70 million full-time jobs). The situation badly impacted both low and middle-income economies.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China showed that the registered urban unemployment rate at the end of 2021 was 4%, significantly higher than the 3.6% that was present at the end of 2019 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Chinese economy adversely. In the presence of economic instability, many companies have to lay off staff in order to alleviate the current downturn or to cut labor costs via implementing a contraction strategy. The layoffs inevitably cause a great disturbance within the organization, causing unsustainability. The retained employees may have doubts about the development prospects of the organization because of the current turmoil and panic, which may lead them to quit the organization. This would, consequently, deplete the country's talent pool and impede the organization's performance.

Numerous studies have explored a positive correlation between psychological contract violations and turnover intentions [1–3]. Clinton and Guest [1] believe that exchange fairness and organizational trust are the mediating effects of the two. Aykan [2] examined the relationship through the mediating role of loneliness perception in employees. In addition, Turnley and Feldman [3] verified the intermediary mechanism of this relationship, unmet expectations and job dissatisfaction. The psychological contract is an undisclosed and informal mutual expectation between an organization and its employees [4]. Psychological contract violations occur when employees believe that their efforts are not proportional to the rewards given by the organization. As a result, employees will be dissatisfied and exhausted in the organization, which reduces their work efficiency and leads them to quitting the job. A range of scholars have explored the positive relationship between psychological contract violations and turnover intention under the shadow of social exchange theory [5,6], but some gaps are yet to be explored.

Previous studies on the turnover intention of specific groups have mainly focused on the new generation of employees or certain occupational groups, such as medical staff [7–9], and have rarely paid attention to the survivors after layoffs. Unscheduled layoffs will cause survivors to develop “survivor syndrome” [10], which can make employees narrow-minded, encourage them to violate management principles and perform ineffectively for the organization. These changes will affect employees’ trust in the organization, causing survivors to rethink their careers or even look for a better job during current employment [11]; this negatively impacts organizational performance. Therefore, it is necessary and worthwhile to find out the causes that shape the turnover intention of survivors, in order to create a sustainable work environment.

Prior studies on psychological contract violation and turnover intention have been based on individual emotional perception, such as emotional loneliness, attitude, such as job satisfaction, and employment relationships in the organization [2,3,12,13]. Previous studies have verified that psychological contract violation has a positive effect on turnover intention through employee loneliness and job dissatisfaction [2,3]. The employment relationships in the organization will affect the psychological contract violation of the employees, and then affect employee behavior, including factors such as turnover intention [12,13]. Most of these factors play a partial mediating role in psychological contract violation and turnover intention, so there may be some other variables that can act as a “bridge” between them. Organizational commitment is not only affected by psychological contract violation, but also inhibits individual turnover intention [14]. Therefore, it is appropriate to study this from the perspective of organizational commitment.

In addition, organizational support can promote the maintenance of psychological contracts between employees and organizations, such as compensation and benefits, working environment, etc. Moreover, when individuals perceive that there is more organizational support, their willingness to leave is weakened [15]. Thus, organizational support may become a functional condition for organizational commitment, in order to mitigate the impact of psychological contract violation on turnover intention; this forms a moderated mediation model, which needs further research.

As for the mechanism of psychological contract and behavioral outcome variables, such as turnover intention, there are some factors that can moderate the effect; this includes the organizational environment (national cultural background) and the content of the contract breach (relational contract breach or transactional contract breach) [5,16]. Suazo and Stone [17] argued that a “breach” is when an individual anticipates that they have not been rewarded as per promised, and a “violation” is a more severe form that causes individuals to be exhausted and depleted easily. Emotional susceptibility is a steady tendency to perceive pain, stress, and threat, resulting in negative emotions that affect an individual’s cognition and behavior [18]. Therefore, emotional susceptibility may affect the functional mechanisms of employee turnover intention, but there is a lack of empirical research on this matter.

In what follows, based on social exchange theory, we first explore the impact of psychological contract violation on the turnover intention of survivors after layoffs. Secondly, organizational commitment is introduced as a mediating variable, and the mechanism of psychological contract violation and how it affects turnover intention is explored in depth. Finally, considering the different levels of organizational support and individual emotional susceptibility, we explore the changes in the relationship between psychological contract violations and turnover intentions.

## 2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

### 2.1. Psychological Contract Violation and Turnover Intention

The psychological contract is established by employees and employers in the pursuit of their own interests, in the exchange of interests and personified transactions. In the process of formation, it will undergo four stages: schema construction, initial formation period, revision, and remodeling and restoration [19]. Psychological contract violation refers to an emotional experience produced by an individual when he perceives that the organization fails to fully fulfill the psychological contract [20]. Subsequently, individuals feel that they have been treated unfairly or even feel that the organization is perfidious. That is to say, psychological contract violation occurs when employees believe that the value exchange they actually receive is less than what the employer promises [4]. Furthermore, psychological contract violations make employees show higher turnover behavior, perform immoral actions, and exhibit neglectful behavior [13,20].

According to social exchange theory, when both the employee and organization follow the exchange rules, and establish a fair and reciprocal relationship, employees will engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors [21]. When the organization fails to fulfill its commitments, it will lead to the breakdown of the psychological contract for employees, which makes them consider leaving [15]. On the one hand, the organization may cut employee benefits in order to reduce costs after layoffs. Survivors continue to take on the same or possibly more jobs due to reduced staffing. The employee psychological contract will break due to the insufficient returns provided by the organization, and will result in a decreased willingness to stay. On the other hand, survivors will question the development prospects of the organization and reduce their expectations for work rewards. Once the organization fails to meet their needs in certain aspect, the survivors will be dissatisfied with other aspects of the organization due to the halo effect, thus causing a strong intention to leave. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** *Psychological contract violation has a positive impact on survivors' turnover intention.*

### 2.2. The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to the employees' identification of the organization's vision, mission and values [22]. It consists of three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Furthermore, all three dimensions of organizational commitment are related to the psychological contract. Additionally, organizational commitment is a good predictor of employee turnover intention [23].

Existing research found that the psychological contract can bring high job satisfaction and high organizational commitment to employees [16,24]. The psychological contract contains "two-way" responsibility. When employees feel that they are paid less and take on more responsibilities, negative emotions, such as anger and boredom, will occur. Employees will then violate the psychological contract with their employees, resulting in slacking at work and a reduction in organizational commitment [25].

High organizational commitment means that employees have high affective commitment, high continuance commitment, and normative commitment [22]. Affective commitment refers to the deep bond between employees and the organization. It means that employees will have more trust in the organization, have higher tolerance for the

organization's dishonesty, and are more willing to stay even if the organization fails to fulfill its commitments either completely or partially. Continuous commitment means that employees choose to stay in the organization in order to avoid the loss of leaving the organization. In the context of economic slowdown, the opportunity cost for survivors to leave the enterprise will become greater. It will be harder to find a better job, so high continuous commitment will force employees to stay for survival. Normative commitment is a sense of responsibility for the return of benefits given by the organization [22]. The survivors chosen by the organization will be more enthusiastic to contribute towards organizational progress and will be less inclined to leave. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** *Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between psychological contract violation and turnover intention.*

### 2.3. The Moderating Role of Organizational Support

Organizational support refers to an organization's attention to its employees' contributions and their well-being [15]. According to the job demands-resources model, when employees believe that the organization cares about them and gives them enough attention, the input of such work resources is conducive to helping employees achieve their work objectives, and reducing the physical and mental exhaustion caused by work requirements [26]. For survivors, layoffs tend to trigger "survivor syndrome" [27]. This will lead to increased job insecurity, increased job stress and lower job satisfaction [28].

However, this can be mitigated if the organization can give them a relatively high level of organizational support. On the one hand, this can make up for the emotional damage caused by organizational layoffs, alleviate the consumption of additional emotional resources, and prevent employees from emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, layoffs result in a high level of emotional load. This kind of work-related support, provided by the organization, will be regarded as their personal recognition. Therefore, they will make greater efforts to seize the opportunity and focus on accomplishing work objectives; this improves individual work performance and then improves job satisfaction. In this case, even if an employee's organizational commitment is at a low level, it will not cause the employee to leave. That is to say, as long as the supporting factors are adjusted, such as salary, welfare and job security, regardless of the changes incurred in organizational practices and the labor market environment that leads to employees' psychological contract violation and a reduction in organizational commitment, employees will not show signs of serious harm. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** *The mediating effect of organizational commitment is moderated by organizational support, such that when survivors feel less organizational support, the negative impact of organizational commitment on employees' turnover intention is weaker, as compared to stronger.*

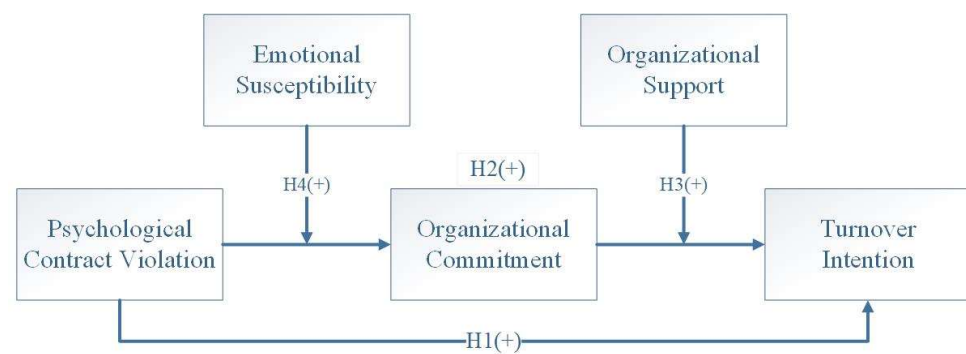
### 2.4. The Moderating Role of Emotional Susceptibility

Emotional susceptibility is often used to describe the degree to which an individual's emotional state is more susceptible to negative events. It is related to employees' perceptual ability and emotional sensitivity. Individuals with a high emotional susceptibility are more likely to perceive negative emotions, such as pain, stress, insecurity and threat. At work, employees will experience an invisible emotional contagion process, and they will spontaneously form the same emotional experience as others unconsciously [29]. Those with a high emotional susceptibility are more easily influenced by the emotions of others. Layoffs can lead to negative emotions, such as panic and worry, among employees. These negative emotions spread rapidly among others within the organization. When the negative internal emotions, generated by psychological contract violations, are intertwined with the external emotions spread within the organization, it will aggravate the reduction in the organizational commitment caused by psychological contract violations. Compared to employees with low emotional susceptibility, employees with high emotional susceptibility

are more likely to have a stronger emotional experience under the influence of external emotions, and such negative emotions take extra efforts to digest. If employees are exposed to such negative emotions for a long time, this extra effort will become a burden, which will damage their physical and mental health. As a result, individuals are more sensitive to psychological contract violations, which, in turn, exacerbates the destructive effect of psychological contract violation on organizational commitment. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** *Emotional susceptibility positively moderates the negative impact of psychological contract violation on organizational commitment, and is stronger when the emotional susceptibility of survivors is high, rather than low.*

The overall theoretical model is portrayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The Moderated Mediation Model.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1. Sample

The survey was carried out in four regions of southwest China: Sichuan, Chongqing, Guizhou and Yunnan. The enterprise selected was a manufacturing and retail foot wear business established in Hong Kong, China, and the respondents were layoff survivors of that business' stores located in the southwest region of China. After China's reform and opening up, the business was gradually developed and reformed into a large group with thousands of stores, due to the demographic dividend and the many preferential policies of the government. Due to the increased popularity of e-commerce after 2016, the outdated conventional strategies the business used resulted in an increase in operational costs, which made the company's survival in the market very difficult. After 2018, the company began to adjust its strategies, changing from expansion to contraction. The company monitored and controlled its costs by closing underperforming chain stores and implementing a layoff policy. The selected organization has experienced a large number of layoffs, which is in line with our survey requirements. In addition, the researchers were located in southwest China, so we selected layoff survivors from the stores also located in four regions of Southwest China. Meanwhile, due to the limited conditions of the study, we adopted a non-random sampling method to obtain research data through questionnaires. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, a cover letter was appended with the surveys to highlight the study's significance and encourage voluntarily participation. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed to the survivors in the chain stores, and 271 questionnaires were received, with a recovery rate of 77%; of these, 202 were valid and complete, with a validity rate of 74.5%. In addition, due to the particularity of the sales industry, the majority of the respondents were female.

#### 3.2. Measures

A five-point Likert scale was utilized in the questionnaire (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree) for all items.

**Psychological contract violation:** We measured psychological contract violation with the psychological contract scale developed by Morrison [30]. There were four items that related to psychological contract violation, such as “I feel betrayed by my organization “. In our study, the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient is 0.86.

**Organizational commitment:** We adapted Cook et al.’s [31] nine-item scale of organizational commitment to measure organizational commitment; this includes statements such as “I am quite proud to be able to tell people who it is I work for”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient is 0.76.

**Turnover Intention:** The turnover intention scale, developed by Mobley [32], was adapted. The scale contains 4 items, such as “I never thought of quitting”. The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient is 0.77.

**Organizational Support:** The scale developed by Eisenberger [15] measures to what extent the employees perceive that the organization attaches importance to their contributions and cares about their happiness. The scale contains 6 items, such as “the organization values my contribution to its well-being.” The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient is 0.79.

**Emotional susceptibility:** We adapted Doherty’s [33] 15-items scale of emotional contagion to measure emotional susceptibility. The scale tests the sensitivity of individuals to five basic emotions: sadness, love, happiness, fear and anger. The sample item includes “If someone I’m talking with begins to cry, I get teary-eyed.” The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient is 0.79.

**Control variables:** In line with earlier studies [34], our study included the gender, age, marriage, position, length of service, and education of the sample as controlled variables.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Firstly, we tested the reliability and validity of psychological contract violation, organizational commitment, turnover intention, organizational support and emotional susceptibility. This study employed the structure of equation modeling, in line with previous studies [35,36]. Then, it conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of five variables, including psychological contract violation (PC), organizational commitment (OC), turnover intention (TI), organizational support (OS), and emotional susceptibility (ES). The analysis results in Table 1 reveal that the five-factor model fits the best, and there is no serious common-method bias problem, according to the results of the single-factor model. According to the previous literature, considering that the cutoff values are close to 0.95 for TLI and CFI, 0.08 for SRMR, and 0.06 for RMSEA, it is assumed that the model has a good fit with the observed data [37].

**Table 1.** Confirmatory Analysis Results Table.

Model	Description	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Single-factor model	PC + OC + TI + OS + ES	4.20	0.126	0.153	0.425	0.392
Two-factor model	PC + OC + TI + OS; ES	4.03	0.123	0.168	0.444	0.425
Three-factor model	PC + OC + TI; OS; ES	3.98	0.122	0.167	0.455	0.434
Four-factor model	PC + OC; TI; OS; ES	2.28	0.080	0.083	0.772	0.757
Five-factor model	PC; OC; TI; OS; ES	2.10	0.00	0.078	0.806	0.792

Note: PC = Psychological Contract violation; OC = Organizational Commitment; TI = Turnover Intention; OS = Organizational Support; ES = Emotional Susceptivity.

### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 2. The results show that psychological contract violation is negatively related to organizational commitment ( $r = -0.646$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but positively related to turnover intention ( $r = 0.511$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Organizational support is negatively related to psychological contract violation ( $r = -0.604$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and turnover intention ( $r = -0.343$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but positively related to organizational commitment ( $r = 0.502$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Emotional susceptibility is negatively related to psychological

contract violation ( $r = -0.202, p < 0.01$ ), but positively related to organizational support ( $r = 0.287, p < 0.001$ ). These preliminarily data verify the hypotheses.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis result.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Gender	1.91	0.29											
2 Age	2.99	0.95	-0.187 *										
3 Marriage	1.89	0.39	0.087	0.321 **									
4 Position	1.37	0.64	-0.171	0.088	-0.049								
5 Length of service	3.11	1.10	-0.189 *	0.497 **	0.228 *	0.073							
6 Education	1.33	0.60	-0.117	0.146	0.056	0.439 **	0.048						
7 Psychological contract violation	2.14	0.70	-0.148	0.069	-0.124	0.256 **	0.134	0.261 **	<b>(0.86)</b>				
8 Turnover intention	2.45	0.79	-0.101	-0.054	-0.123	0.265 **	0.032	0.127	0.511 **	<b>(0.77)</b>			
9 Organizational commitment	3.45	0.53	0.049	-0.018	0.062	-0.259 **	-0.062	-0.237 *	-0.646 **	-0.719 **	<b>(0.76)</b>		
10 Organizational support	3.27	0.60	0.074	-0.057	0.041	-0.221 *	-0.150	-0.213 *	-0.604 **	-0.343 **	0.502 **	<b>(0.79)</b>	
11 Emotional susceptibility	3.81	0.56	-0.018	0.006	0.021	-0.022	-0.135	-0.170	-0.202 *	-0.043	0.091	0.287 **	<b>(0.79)</b>

Note:  $N = 202$ , (Cronbach alpha are stated along the diagonal parenthesis). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

To test Hypothesis 1, after controlling for age, gender, marriage, position, length of service, and education, we put turnover intention (dependent variable) and psychological contract violation (independent variable) into the regression equation. The regression results are shown in Table 3. It can be seen from Model 4 that psychological contract violation has a significant impact on turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.484, p < 0.001$ ), so H1 is supported.

**Table 3.** Regression results of main effect and mediating effect.

Variables and Models	Organizational Commitment		Turnover Intention		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	-0.015	-0.055	-0.053	-0.023	-0.059
Age	0.035	0.034	-0.095	-0.093	-0.071
Marriage	0.070	-0.026	-0.094	-0.02	-0.037
Position	-0.184	-0.094	0.241*	0.171	0.109
Length of service	-0.077	0.009	0.071	0.005	0.011
Education	-0.164	-0.043	0.031	-0.062	-0.091
Psychological contract violation		-0.626 **		0.484 **	0.069
Organizational commitment					-0.663 **
R2	0.094	0.434	0.092	0.295	0.544
$\Delta R2$		0.34		0.203	0.249
F	3.379 **	21.208 **	3.294 *	11.581 **	28.765 **

Note:  $N = 202$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ; respectively represent that it is significant at the 1%, and 5%.

In order to test the mediating effect of organizational commitment on H2, we used the sequential test method to test the mediating effect [38]. Model 4 indicates that psychological contract violation is positively related to turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.484, p < 0.001$ ). Model 2 shows that psychological contract violation is negatively related to organizational commitment ( $\beta = -0.626, p < 0.001$ ). The results from Model 5 show that, after adding the mediating variable of organizational commitment, psychological contract violation has no significant impact on turnover intention ( $p > 0.05$ ). In addition, there is a significant negative correlation between organizational commitment and turnover intention ( $\beta = -0.663,$

$p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, organizational commitment fully mediates the relationship between psychological contract violation and turnover intention; therefore, H2 is supported.

In order to ensure the validity of the results further, we used the Bootstrap method to further test H2, and obtained the Bootstrap sample after 5000 random samplings of the original sample data. The results are shown in Table 4. It is clear that organizational commitment has a significant mediating effect regarding the impact of psychological contract violation on turnover intention. The indirect effect value is 0.466, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.339, 0.612]; therefore, the mediating effect is significant, and H2 is supported.

**Table 4.** Bootstrap test results of mediating effect.

Mediating Model	Indirect Effect	SE	LLCL	ULCL
PC→OC→TI	0.466	0.069	0.339	0.612

To verify the moderated mediation model in H3, we used the sequential testing method proposed by Wen et al. [38]. The specific operations are as follows: Firstly, it implements the regression analysis of the dependent variable on the independent and moderating variables. Secondly, it carries out the regression analysis for the mediating variable on the independent and moderating variables. Thirdly, it implements the regression analysis of the dependent variable on the independent variables, moderating variables and mediating variables. Finally, it executes the regression of the dependent variable on the independent variables, moderating variables and mediating variables, and the interaction terms of the moderating variables and the mediating variables. As shown in Table 5, the regression coefficient of turnover intention on psychological contract violation in Model 1 is significant ( $\beta = 0.458, p < 0.001$ ). In Model 2, the regression coefficient of organizational commitment on psychological contract violation is significant ( $\beta = -0.531, p < 0.001$ ). The regression coefficient of turnover intention on organizational commitment in Model 3 is significant ( $\beta = -0.675, p < 0.001$ ). The regression coefficient of turnover intention on the interaction term in Model 4 is significant ( $\beta = 0.138, p < 0.001$ ). Thus, H3 is supported.

**Table 5.** Regression results of moderated mediating effect.

Variables and Models	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Turnover Intention	Organizational Commitment	Turnover Intention	Turnover Intention
Gender	−0.024	−0.049	−0.057	−0.058
Age	−0.092	0.028	−0.073	−0.074
Marriage	−0.021	−0.022	−0.036	−0.043
Position	0.169	−0.084	0.112	0.090
Length of service	0.001	0.024	0.017	0.023
Education	−0.064	−0.037	−0.088	−0.093
Psychological contract violation	0.458 *	−0.531 *	0.099	0.051
Organizational Support	−0.045	0.165	0.066	0.008
Organizational Commitment			−0.675 *	−0.686 *
Organizational Commitment * Organizational Support				0.138 *
R2	0.267	0.428	0.525	0.563
ΔR2		0.161	0.097	0.038
F	10.143 *	19.770 *	25.709 *	24.576 *

Note:  $N = 202$ , \*  $p < 0.01$ , represent that it is significant at the 1%.

To test the moderating effect of H4, the control variable, independent variable, moderating variable, interaction term and dependent variable are put into the regression analysis in turn. Model 3 in Table 6 shows that the regression coefficient of the interaction terms of



emotional susceptibility and psychological contract violation are not significant; therefore, H4 is not supported.

**Table 6.** Regression results of the moderating effect of emotional susceptibility.

Variables and Models	Organizational Commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	−0.053	−0.023	−0.022
Age	−0.095	−0.093	0.096
Marriage	−0.094	−0.02	−0.021
Position	0.241 *	0.171	0.168
Length of service	0.071	0.005	0.011
Education	0.031	−0.062	−0.053
Psychological contract violation		0.484 **	0.497 **
Emotional susceptibility			0.042
Psychological contract violation *			−0.40
Emotional susceptibility			
R2	0.092	0.295	0.299
ΔR2		0.203	0.04
F	3.294 *	11.581 **	9.089 **

Note:  $N = 202$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ; respectively represent that it is significant at the 1%, and 5%.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Results

Based on social exchange theory, we explored the effect of psychological contract violation on turnover intention, the mediating role of organizational commitment, and the moderating role of organizational support and emotional susceptibility. We obtained the following four findings after analyzing 202 samples. Indeed, earlier empirical investigations uncovered the direct linkage between psychological contract violation and turnover intentions [13,20], but this study tried to fill the gap by highlighting the special case of survivor's turnover intentions. First, psychological contract violation positively predicts the turnover intention of survivors. Second, organizational commitment completely mediates the relationship between psychological contract violation and turnover intention. Additionally, the incorporation of a mediator provides a strong basis to understand the theoretical reasoning. Third, the study findings reveal that emotional susceptibility does not moderate the relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational commitment at the first stage. The possible reasons include the fact that empathy can make employees affected by the emotions of others, and such emotions are transient and unreal [39]. Fourth, the mediating role of organizational commitment on turnover intention is moderated by organizational support. In addition, the data used in our study were collected three months after layoffs, so the effect of susceptibility may be negligible, and it may have little effect on the relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational commitment.

### 5.2. Theoretical Implications

There are three main aspects to the theoretical contributions of our research: Firstly, our research explored the full mediating role of organizational commitment between psychological contract violation and turnover intention. Existing studies have focused on factors such as the organization and the relationship between superiors and subordinates. Although some studies have explored the relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational commitment, as well as the relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intention, few studies have put these three into one model. Organizational commitment is closely related to psychological contract violation and turnover intention, and it is necessary to explain the relationship among them to develop a sustainable work environment. Our study established and tested theoretical models of these three variables, and the results demonstrate that organizational commitment fully mediates

the relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational commitment. It not only enriches the research on the mediating mechanism of psychological contract violation and its impact on turnover intention, but also improves the formation mechanism of turnover intention.

Secondly, we explored the moderating effect of organizational support on the mediating effect of organizational commitment. In previous studies, organizational support was a moderating variable between psychological contract violation and behavioral variables [17]. A large number of studies have proved that there are mediating variables between psychological contract violation and behavioral variables, but no moderated mediation model has been verified. The establishment of H3 in our study verifies the moderating role of organizational support on the mediating effect of organizational commitment, and improves the mechanism of psychological contract violation and turnover intention.

Finally, we conducted research on survivors after layoffs. Survivors differ from other employees in their psychological state, which will lead to negative emotions, confusion, insecurity and distrust towards the organization due to layoffs [40]. These changes in survivors will affect their cognition and behavior. The previous theories used to explain turnover intention may not be suitable for explaining the behavior of survivors leaving the organization. Therefore, our study broadens the application of turnover intention research to a certain extent. In addition, there are relatively few studies on the attitudes and behaviors of survivors in China. The research on the turnover intention of survivors not only enriches the research on the turnover mechanism, but it also helps to deepen the understanding of survivors, resulting in a sustainable work environment.

### 5.3. Practical Implications

The findings of the present study show that there are certain guiding insights for management practice. First, the organization should try its best to completely fulfill its commitments. According to the fairness theory, when employees believe that the reward given by the organization is not proportional to what they pay, they will feel unfairly treated, and then their efforts will be reduced [41]. From the perspective of the psychological contract, when employees' feel that the organization has not rewarded them with what they deserve, it will lead to psychological contract violation; this results in negative emotions, such as dissatisfaction and distrust, towards the organization, which will affect an individual's job performance. When negative emotions reach a "threshold", the employees cannot work normally and choose to leave. Therefore, it is necessary for organizational practitioners to provide timely incentives to their employees and implement a fair evaluation system for all individuals.

Second, the organization should pay attention to the needs of employees and give them adequate support. When organizations give individuals enough support, they will feel valued and trusted by the organization. Giving a unique identity to the individuals improves interpersonal relationships, which ultimately benefits the organization in the long term. Even if employees feel that the business has failed to fulfill their commitments in some aspects, which lowers their organizational commitment, they will not have high turnover intentions because they will see these "episodes" as occasional and, therefore, the employee will not be driven to leave.

Third, the organization should pay attention to the feelings of the employees. Emotional commitment is part of organizational commitment. Organizations can deepen emotional commitment between employees and the organization by establishing constructive emotional care initiatives to create a sustainable work environment. Organizations stimulate positivity among individuals by providing support from top management in their difficult times. An individual will be willing to stay in the organization and work hard to achieve organizational goals due to this deep feeling. Organizational scholars should arrange friendly talks with employees, in order to listen to their ongoing issues and give them suitable solutions; this ultimately creates a strong bond between the employee and the employer.

Furthermore, for survivors, the organization should adopt a softer and more flexible management method, and redesign employees' work content and career development plans. In addition, active communication with the staff is necessary, in order to understand their psychological needs and eliminate their negative emotions. Furthermore, it is important to guide individuals to rationally view the changes in pay and remuneration caused by the epidemic. This can create an atmosphere of mutual understanding between the organization and the staff, increase their confidence in the organization, and enhance their willingness to stay.

#### 5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Finally, there are also some limitations in our research: (a) The data used in this study are cross-sectional, which may lead to the results being affected by a common method bias. Future research could use a longitudinal design to verify whether the results change over time. Future studies may collect data from different sources and use a multi-wave approach to remove bias issues. (b) The samples of our study are mainly young women, and we can continue to investigate the generalizability of the test results for middle-aged and elderly samples in the future. (c) The studied framework in this research can be integrated in other industries, regions and countries, which may lead to the uncovering of potential factors that cause negative behaviors i.e., turnover intention in the context of downsizing. (d) The study incorporated only one organization due to a shortage of resources and time; therefore, future scholars may integrate other sectors to generalize the findings.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** All participants provided written informed consents before to complete the survey, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and researchers guaranteed the anonymity of data. The Ethics committee of the University, determined that data collection posed no risk and thus, was exempt from ethics submission.

**Informed Consent Statement:** We are inviting you to participate in a study to explore the possible consequences of psychological contract violation. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. All of the information we collect will be highly confidential. We will not record your name, employee ID, or any information that could be used to identify you. If you have any questions about this study, please contact the research team on given emails. Emails: lvhao@nuaa.edu.cn; gfwang@uestc.edu.cn. Please mark the following indicating your choice to be in this study: (1) Yes, I agree to participate in the study; (2) No, I do not want to participate in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available on a reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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