

Research Articles

Antecedents and Outcomes of Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust Among Chinese People

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Abstract

Psychological insecurity and interpersonal trust were empirically tested in a conceptual model in relation to several personality and social measures as theoretical antecedents, and to interpersonal relationships and feelings of life satisfaction as hypothesized outcomes. Questionnaire data from 301 Chinese adults showed psychological insecurity to be significantly and positively correlated with neuroticism and dependency, while negatively related to family emotional support, emotional intelligence, openness, and agreeableness; and the regression revealed neuroticism to be the strongest predictor of psychological insecurity. The results for interpersonal trust showed a significant negative correlation with psychological insecurity, and a pattern of correlations with all the other variables that were in the opposite direction of those for psychological insecurity; and the regression revealed agreeableness to be the strongest predictor of interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust was also a significant predictor of coworker support and life satisfaction. The research identified behaviors that should be able to reduce psychological insecurity, and others that could increase interpersonal trust, with the overall results demonstrating the importance of being emotionally supportive and honest with other people to reduce feelings of psychological insecurity and increase interpersonal trust.

Keywords: psychological insecurity, interpersonal trust, neuroticism, agreeableness, Chinese adults

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Introduction

In Maslow's (1943) hierarchical theory of human needs, the safety-security need (to be safe, e.g., from harm, disease, and disaster) is so basic that it is difficult for people to survive when this need is not sufficiently satisfied, and that other higher-order needs, such as belongingness, will not manifest if this need is not satisfied. According to Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, and Honigmann (1945), psychologically insecure people perceive the world as threatening, and see life itself as insecure. An and Cong (2003) observed that insecurity can produce difficult interpersonal relationships and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Thus, research is needed to identify factors that influence feelings of safety and security.

To people in modern China, for example, where suicide has become a major public health problem (Phillips, Li, & Zhang, 2002), the world may seem an insecure place with fierce competition due to the large population and insufficient job opportunities. As there has been limited research on psychological insecurity in China, it is necessary

for theoretical and practical reasons to ascertain which psychological factors may be related to psychological insecurity among Chinese adults. And, as harm can come from other people, this research also assesses the relationship between psychological insecurity and interpersonal trust.

Psychological Insecurity

Maslow et al. (1945) were the first to identify the concept of psychological security/insecurity, in which psychological *security* is a feeling of safety and freedom from fear and anxiety, whereas psychological *insecurity* is the contrasting feeling of expecting risk or danger to oneself. However, Maslow et al.'s measure contained items (e.g., selfishness) other than psychological insecurity. Therefore, this research used the concept of anticipated emotional hurt or sadness to operationalize psychological insecurity. Furthermore, to counterbalance the considerable amount of research that has been done on the psychological insecurity of children and adolescents, this study focused on the psychological insecurity of adults.

To be emotionally secure, on the other hand, reflects emotional acceptance of the self and the world. Among adults, Demir (2008) argued that feelings of security may engender pleasant interpersonal bonds, and found emotional security to be one of the strongest characteristics that predicted happiness in relationships.

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal Trust was included to test it as a conceptual opposite of psychological insecurity. Trust has been defined with many different meanings and contingencies (e.g., accepting vulnerability), which obscured the concept. Therefore, trust is here defined operationally, according to its essential element, namely, "Trust is a conviction that another person will perform certain actions, or behave as promised." This avoids definitional contingencies and allows trust to be measured as a conviction.

Interpersonal trust is important in social interactions, and is crucial for avoiding interpersonal conflicts (Lount, 2010). Trust also makes it easier to accept the opinions of others (Curşeu & Schrujijer, 2010). Contrarily, an untrusting person is suspicious of others, who, then, would not trust such a person; and distrust can negatively influence satisfaction with colleagues (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Hence, the relationship between psychological insecurity and interpersonal trust is hypothesized to be antithetical. That is, people high in interpersonal trust may be less likely to think that others will cause them emotional harm, making feelings of psychological insecurity less likely.

H(1): The more Interpersonal Trust people have, the less Psychological Insecurity they will have.

Independent Variables

As this was a questionnaire study, it could not ascertain that the relationships tested were causal. But the theoretical background of certain variables, such as family support, argues that they occur prior to the development of other factors, such as trust (see Bowlby 1982; Erikson, 1963). Hence, this study used a conceptual model, which assumed that certain variables would be antecedents or outcomes of the two main variables in this research.

Family Emotional Support — This refers to the love, care, and sympathy given by one's family members. Bowlby (1982) suggested that children who receive emotional support, particularly from parents, become more socially competent. Research shows that family emotional support is positively related to emotional adjustment (Sroufe, Fox, & Pancake, 1983) and self-esteem (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Therefore, family emotional support should help a person feel emotionally protected (secure) and develop confidence when faced with emotional threats.

H(2): The more Family Emotional Support people perceive they receive, the less Psychological Insecurity they will have.

Physiological Needs Satisfaction — In Maslow's (1943) theory of needs, physiological needs refer to maintaining a balanced state of physical conditions, including having enough food, water, sleep, etc. His theory identifies the physiological needs as the most basic, such that they must be sufficiently satisfied for a person to live, and before a person becomes concerned with the next higher level need, namely, the need for safety and security. Therefore, the more one's physiological needs are satisfied, the more attention one can give to satisfying the safety-security needs, and the more *that* need will be satisfied. Taormina and Gao (2013) found support for this proposition. Consequently, satisfaction of one's physiological needs should lead to greater feelings of safety and security, including emotional/psychological security.

H(3): The more Physiological Needs Satisfaction people have, the less Psychological Insecurity they will have.

Dependency — Bornstein (2005) described dependency as a need for close relationships, to receive support and approval, and a tendency to become anxious if required to act independently. Bornstein (1993) also noted that dependent people experience evaluation anxiety and separation anxiety. That is, they have a strong desire for nurturance, and fear being without relationships that provide them with positive regard and protection. These factors indicate that dependent people fear negative emotional experiences, such as receiving unfavorable evaluations and being abandoned.

H(4): The more Dependency people have, the more Psychological Insecurity they will have.

Emotional Intelligence — Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action." Salovey and Mayer's model is relevant as it includes recognizing and controlling one's own emotions. In examining psychological insecurity, an important factor could be emotional self-control. Wong and Law (2002) thought emotionally intelligent people would have better relationships because they control their negative emotions. Therefore, people with higher emotional intelligence should have lower psychological insecurity.

H(5): The more Emotional Intelligence people have, the less Psychological Insecurity they will have.

Openness — According to McCrae and Costa (1987), Openness refers to being curious, willing to consider new ideas and points of view, and to prefer diversity (as opposed to having a strong need for closure, and being more comfortable with familiar people). As openness indicates broadmindedness (Dollinger, Leong, & Ulicni, 1996) and willingness to accept novelty, it is unlikely that people who are more "open" will see novel stimuli as emotional threats, and should be less psychologically insecure. Also, as people with higher openness show a *weaker* tendency to follow routine (McCrae & Costa, 1987), they may tolerate different opinions (instead of seeing them as threats) and be more trusting.

H(6): The higher degree of Openness people have, (a) the less Psychological Insecurity they will have, and (b) the more Interpersonal Trust they will have.

Agreeableness — Agreeableness refers to being helpful, supportive, and empathetic (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Carducci (2009) regarded interpersonal trust as a trait of agreeable people, who are sensitive to other people's needs, and found agreeableness associated with empathic concern and cooperativeness. This helps reduce negative emotions in interpersonal conflicts (Bell & Song, 2005). Therefore, agreeable people may perceive less emotional risk in social interactions and feel more psychological security.

H(7): The higher degree of Agreeableness people have, (a) the less Psychological Insecurity they will have, and (b) the more Interpersonal Trust they will have.

Neuroticism — Neuroticism refers to the tendency to be affected by negative emotions, namely, nervousness, sadness, and guilt, and to be emotionally unstable (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Research has shown emotional insecurity (with a partner) to be positively correlated with neuroticism (Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2007). People with high neuroticism constantly worry that things will go wrong. Thus, a person high on neuroticism may worry about being hurt in interpersonal relationships, instead of believing that others will bring about positive outcomes. Therefore, such people may have little interpersonal trust.

H(8): The higher degree of Neuroticism people have, (a) the more Psychological Insecurity they will have, and (b) the less Interpersonal Trust they will have.

Outcome Variables

Coworker Support — Coworker Support refers to the help, encouragement, etc., offered by other employees at work "with the objective of alleviating anxiety, fear, or doubt" (Taormina, 1997, p. 37). Chiu (1990) found coworker support positively related to cooperating with others, and suggested that coworker relationships are built voluntarily; but Maslow et al. (1945) saw psychologically insecure people as unsociable. This means they might not voluntarily establish relationships with coworkers, which would result in their receiving lower levels of coworker support.

H(9): The more Psychological Insecurity people have, the less Coworker Support they receive.

A similar outcome might occur for people with low interpersonal trust. Erikson (1963) thought that trust is essential to social adjustment. Whereas social interaction involves the risk of unpleasant interpersonal outcomes, people low on trust might not initiate social relationships. Therefore, conversely, trusting people would be more likely to receive social support.

H(10): The more Interpersonal Trust people have, the more Coworker Support they receive.

Life Satisfaction — Life Satisfaction refers to one's assessment of life in positive terms, and includes gratification with "significant others' views of one's life" (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 277). Life satisfaction has also been assessed by the contentment people feel with their achievements (e.g., Sirgy et al., 1998). Hinnen, Sanderman, and Sprangers (2009) found attachment security (emotional security) positively associated with life satisfaction, and Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) saw attachment security as the lack of anxiety in close relationships, which may indicate psychological security.

H(11): The more Psychological Insecurity people have, the less Life Satisfaction they will have.

Also, Barefoot et al. (1998) found that, for people aged 55-80, more interpersonal trust was associated with more life satisfaction. In this study, it is expected that this relationship would also exist among the general adult population.

H(12): The more Interpersonal Trust people have, the more Life Satisfaction they will have.

Method

Participants

Participants were 301 (147 female, 154 male) Chinese adults in Beijing, China, aged 22 to 65 years (Mean = 33.27, Standard Deviation = 8.60). For Marital Status, 173 were married and 128 single. For Educational attainment, two had none, 14 had primary school, 73 had secondary school, 131 had a bachelor's degree, and 81 had a master's degree or higher. Median Monthly Income (in RMB) was 4,000-5,999.

Measures

As the original scales were in English, back-translation was conducted to obtain language equivalence. Whereas some items were adopted from multifaceted scales, only items for the central concept were chosen, and a few new items were added that focused on the relevant constructs (scale pretests proved reliable, with all alphas > .70). Unless otherwise noted, a 5-point Likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used. In the descriptions below, the symbol [R] indicates the item is "reverse scored."

Demographics — Ages were recorded as given. For the categorical variables, "dummy coding" was employed (to allow statistical analyses), specifically: Gender (0 = female, 1 = male); Marital Status (1 = single, 2 = married); and Monthly Income, in RMB (1 = <2000, 2 = 2000-3,999, 3 = 4000-5,999, 4 = 6,000-7,999, 5 = 8,000 or more).

Regarding the Validity of the Measures — Of the 11 measures, most have been used in previous research, especially the Big-5 personality profiles (Agreeableness, Openness, and Neuroticism in this study), the validity of which is well established, including for Chinese samples (Tyler, Newcombe, & Barrett, 2005). Also, Coworker Support, Family Emotional Support, Life Satisfaction, and Physiological Needs Satisfaction were established scales and all had been used before with Chinese samples. One measure, Emotional Intelligence, was composed of items from two previously published versions of this construct. Another two measures, namely, Interpersonal Trust (also tested previously with Chinese samples) and Dependency, came from established scales, using a smaller set of the original items (that best focused on the central construct), but with a few new items added to strengthen the original concept (their internal reliabilities were .75 and .81, i.e., the new items fit well into the original concepts, indicating the validity of the items with their relevant measures). Only Psychological Insecurity was newly created (as explained below), and its validity is described in the Discussion section.

Psychological Insecurity — To measure Psychological Insecurity, a 10-item scale was constructed. One item came from Maslow et al.'s (1945) Security-Insecurity Scale, i.e., "It is very easy for me to become emotionally upset." Two items were from Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) Relationship Scales Questionnaire, namely, "I find it easy to get emotionally close to others" [R], and "I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others." The remaining seven items were added to focus on emotional insecurity, namely, "I feel deeply hurt when people reject me," "I am often hurt in my relationships with other people," "I do not feel emotionally secure in this world," "I am a person who is easily hurt emotionally," "I am emotionally troubled by the suffering of other people," "I can never be sure what is going to happen to me emotionally in this world," and "There is no such thing as true love."

Interpersonal Trust — Interpersonal Trust was measured with 10 items that asked whether people in general (excluding family members) can be trusted. Five items were adopted from Rotter's (1967) Interpersonal Trust Scale, one from Costa and McCrae's (1992) Trust Scale, and four new items were added to strengthen the construct.

The items were as follows: “If I ask them to keep a secret, they will do so,” “They are mainly interested in their own welfare” [R], “Their behavior reveals what they think,” “I believe that they can be trusted,” “They can be counted on to do what they say,” “Most of them are very sincere,” “They can be relied upon to tell the truth,” “I think they are basically honest,” “I have to be alert or they might take advantage of me” [R], and “I believe they have very good intentions.”

Family Emotional Support — Ten items were selected from [Procidano and Heller’s \(1983\)](#) 20-item Perceived Family Social Support Scale (only the 10 items for *received* support were used). Sample items were: “My family gives me the moral support I need,” “Other people are closer to their family than I am” [R], “My family enjoys hearing about what I think,” “Members of my family share many of my interests,” and “I rely on my family for emotional support.”

Physiological Needs Satisfaction — The 12 items used were adopted from [Taormina and Gao’s \(2013\)](#) Physiological Needs Satisfaction Scale, which asked how satisfied people are with basic needs, such as the quality of food and water. Sample items were: “The amount of food that I eat every day,” “The quality of the water I drink every day,” “The amount of heating I have when the weather is cold,” and “The amount of sleep I get to feel thoroughly relaxed.” Answers were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Dependency — This was an 8-item scale. Five items were from [Hirschfeld et al.’s \(1977\)](#) Interpersonal Dependency Inventory, and three items were added to stress the central concept. Sample items were: “I prefer having other people to depend on,” “I am at my best when I have someone I can depend on,” “I hate having to depend on other people” [R], “It is terrifying to think of losing the person I depend on,” and “Even when things go wrong I can get along without asking for help from anyone” [R].

Emotional Intelligence (Controlling Own Emotions) — This was measured by means of a 5-item scale containing one item from [Schutte et al.’s \(1998\)](#) Emotional Intelligence Scale, i.e., “I have control over my emotions,” plus four items from [Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, and Salovey’s \(2006\)](#) Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale, i.e., “I have problems dealing with my feelings of anger” [R], “I can handle stressful situations without getting nervous,” “I can quietly handle problems that would upset most other people,” and “I know how to keep calm in difficult situations.”

Openness — This variable was measured by a 10-Item scale composed of five items from [Costa and McCrae’s \(1992\)](#) NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), two items from [Caligiuri, Jacobs, and Farr’s \(2000\)](#) Attitudinal and Behavioral Openness Scale, and three added items. Sample items were: “I get excited by new ideas,” “I am very interested in many different things,” “Other cultures fascinate me,” “I am not interested in theoretical discussions” [R], and “I enjoy learning new things.”

Agreeableness — This 10-item scale used seven items from [Costa and McCrae’s \(1992\)](#) NEO-PI-R, and three items from [Jackson, Paunonen, and Tremblay’s \(2000\)](#) Six Factor Personality Questionnaire (6FPQ). Sample items from this scale were: “I have a good word for everyone,” “I am easily offended” [R], “I accept people as they are,” and “I am concerned about others.”

Neuroticism (Worry) — To avoid overlap with Psychological Insecurity, only the “worry” facet of Neuroticism was used in a 5-item scale. Two items were from the Neuroticism domain of [Costa and McCrae’s \(1992\)](#) NEO-PI-R, and three items from [Peterson and Seligman’s \(2004\)](#) Neuroticism measure. The five items were: “I am filled with doubts about things,” “I often worry about things,” “I usually expect the worst,” “I usually look on the bright side” [R], and “I am not confident that things will work out for the best.”

Coworker Support — This variable was measured with the 5-item Coworker Support facet of the Organizational Socialization Inventory ([Taormina, 2004](#)). The five items were: “Other workers have helped me on the job in various ways,” “My coworkers are usually willing to offer their assistance or advice,” “Most of my coworkers have accepted me as a member of this company,” “My coworkers have done a great deal to help me adjust to this organization,” and “My relationships with other workers in this company are very good.”

Life Satisfaction — This variable was measured using [Sirgy et al.’s \(1998\)](#) 10-item Life Satisfaction scale. Respondents rated the extent to which they felt satisfied with their lives compared to certain situations. The question asked “How satisfied are you compared to...” and sample situations were: “The life goals you set for yourself,” “What you feel you deserve to have received in life,” “The accomplishments of your relatives,” “The accomplishments of your friends,” and “The accomplishments of most people in your position.”

Procedure

The American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for research ethics were followed (including the rights to refuse and stop participating), for assuring anonymity, and protecting participants’ privacy and confidentiality. Also, all measures and procedures had been approved by a university research ethics committee. Respondents were randomly selected from shopping areas and transit stations frequented by people from various backgrounds, told the purpose of the study, and asked to participate. Those who agreed were given a questionnaire, which was collected on site when finished. Thus, 301 usable questionnaires were obtained from 741 people requested to participate, yielding a response rate of 40.62%.

Results

Test for Common Method Bias

As this study only used questionnaires, common-method bias needed to be assessed. This was tested by [Harman’s \(1960\)](#) method of factor analyzing the variables using the maximum-likelihood approach with a forced, 1-factor solution, and the resultant Chi-square value divided by the degrees of freedom; where a ratio less than 2.00:1 would indicate bias. In this study, the ratio was 4.42:1. Thus, common-method bias was not a concern.

Correlations of the Main Variables — The main interest of this research was to examine the relationships that Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust had with the theorized independent variables, and the theoretical outcome variables. The research also tested whether Psychological Insecurity was negatively related to Interpersonal Trust. The relationship between those main variables was indeed negative, and their patterns of correlations with the other variables all had opposite polarities, affirming that Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust are antithetical. Thus, all hypotheses were supported, with the results shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Means, SDs, Cronbach Alphas, and Correlations for the Main Variables (N = 301)

| Variable | M | SD | Psychological Insecurity | Interpersonal Trust | Alpha |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | | Correlations | Correlations | |
| Psychological Insecurity | 2.76 | 0.55 | — | — | .79 |
| Interpersonal Trust | 3.55 | 0.57 | -.19**** | — | .75 |
| Family Emotional Support | 3.72 | 0.51 | -.30**** | .24**** | .83 |
| Physiological Needs Satisfaction | 3.38 | 0.52 | -.27**** | .20**** | .83 |
| Dependency | 3.17 | 0.53 | .14** | -.03 | .70 |
| Emotional Intelligence | 3.35 | 0.53 | -.28**** | .25**** | .73 |
| Openness | 3.65 | 0.48 | -.20**** | .25**** | .81 |
| Agreeableness | 3.75 | 0.33 | -.35**** | .35**** | .71 |
| Neuroticism | 2.88 | 0.56 | .56**** | -.24**** | .66 |
| Coworker Support | 3.69 | 0.53 | -.14* | .36**** | .80 |
| Life Satisfaction | 3.11 | 0.70 | -.15** | .24**** | .92 |
| Gender | 0.51 | 0.50 | -.11 | .06 | — |
| Age | 33.27 | 8.60 | .04 | -.08 | — |
| Marital Status | 1.58 | 0.50 | -.07 | .01 | — |
| Education Level | 2.91 | 0.87 | -.16** | .16*** | — |
| Monthly Income (RMB) | 2.85 | 1.40 | -.20**** | .13* | — |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$. **** $p < .001$.

Regression Analyses

Although the hypotheses were tested by the correlations, regression analyses were also run for Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust in order to identify the strength of their relationships with the independent variables. Consequently, Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust were each regressed (stepwise) on all of the independent variables and demographics to ascertain whether any of those variables could act as statistical predictors. Whereas the regressions were exploratory in that they tested the strength of each variable as a potential predictor, no hypotheses were necessary regarding their relative strengths. The results of these regressions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Stepwise Regressions for Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust (N = 301)

| Predictors | Psychological Insecurity | | Interpersonal Trust | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | Beta | ΔR^2 | Beta | ΔR^2 |
| Family Emotional Support | -.10 | | .08 | |
| Physiological Needs Satisfaction | -.12* | .01 | .09 | |
| Dependency | .14*** | .02 | -.03 | |
| Emotional Intelligence | -.03 | | .13* | .01 |
| Openness | .07 | | .08 | |
| Agreeableness | -.15*** | .03 | .28**** | .13 |
| Neuroticism | .47**** | .31 | -.13* | .02 |
| Gender | -.05 | | .04 | |
| Age | .13** | .01 | -.11* | .01 |
| Marital Status | -.02 | | .02 | |
| Education Level | -.02 | | .08 | |
| Monthly Income | -.13** | .01 | .10 | |
| Total R² | | .39 | | .17 |
| Final F | | 31.92**** | | 15.55**** |
| df | | 6,286 | | 4,288 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$. **** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Stepwise Multiple Regressions for Coworker Support and Life Satisfaction (N = 301).

| Predictors | Coworker Support | | Life Satisfaction | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | Beta | ΔR^2 | Beta | ΔR^2 |
| Psychological Insecurity | .02 | | -.02 | |
| Interpersonal Trust | .29**** | .13 | .17*** | .03 |
| Family Emotional Support | .12* | .01 | .06 | |
| Physiological Needs Satisfaction | .17** | .05 | .34**** | .14 |
| Dependency | .06 | | .12* | .01 |
| Emotional Intelligence | .01 | | .05 | |
| Openness | .07 | | -.02 | |
| Agreeableness | .07 | | .06 | |
| Neuroticism | .05 | | .01 | |
| Gender | .06 | | -.01 | |
| Age | -.07 | | -.08 | |
| Marital Status | -.01 | | .21*** | .04 |
| Education Level | .01 | | .02 | |
| Monthly Income | .18*** | .03 | .10 | |
| Total R² | | .22 | | .22 |
| Final F | | 20.53**** | | 21.52**** |
| df | | 4,282 | | 4,288 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$. **** $p < .001$.

Additionally, two outcome variables were included in this study to assess how Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust might relate to certain practical aspects in life. Thus, Coworker Support (as an interpersonal variable) and Life Satisfaction (as the gratification of one's achievements in life) were also regressed (stepwise) on Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust (along with all the other variables and demographics) to determine whether Psychological Insecurity and/or Interpersonal Trust could predict the outcome variables. The results of the regressions for the two outcome variables are shown in [Table 3](#).

Discussion

The main focus of this study was on Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust, their relationships with each other, and with several hypothesized antecedent and outcome variables; and a set of demographics was tested to examine whether they play a role in relation to the main variables. At this point, it should be noted that this study did not use a causal (longitudinal) methodology. Rather, it was designed to examine the relationships between certain variables that were conceptually regarded as possible “antecedents” because they were selected from existing theories (e.g., [Bowlby, 1982](#)) that argued for their causality. These variables were initially examined in correlations, and subsequently tested in regressions to assess their strength as statistical “predictors” of the criterion variables.

Consequently, findings for the demographics are discussed first, followed by deliberations on the relationship between Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust, and then the relationships of these main measures with their relevant antecedent and outcome variables.

Demographics

Only two demographics correlated significantly with Psychological Insecurity or Interpersonal Trust. Education's negative relation with Psychological Insecurity and its positive relation with Interpersonal Trust suggest that increased knowledge might make people more secure with themselves, which, in turn, could enable them to be more trusting. That is, their knowledge of the world and of themselves might protect them emotionally and allow them to rely on themselves if disappointed by interpersonal distresses.

For Monthly Income, its negative relation to Psychological Insecurity might reflect the influence of a person's financial resources. That is, people who lack monetary assets (compared to people who are financially secure) might be more negatively impacted by, and feel more vulnerable to, life's hardships; and become emotionally distressed by other people's insincerity. Conversely, the positive relation between income and Interpersonal Trust might indicate that people with higher incomes feel less troubled by untrustworthy people because their greater financial resources strengthen their self-reliance.

Psychological Insecurity Versus Interpersonal Trust

[Maslow \(1943\)](#) argued that feeling safe and secure is necessary for personal development and happiness, and excessive worry makes one feel unsafe and psychologically *insecure*. This study proposed that insecure people would worry that other people might harm them emotionally, and thus be less trusting; and this hypothesis was supported. Thus, for better psychological well-being and more trusting social relationships, family and friends might improve others' feelings of emotional security by offering high levels of emotional support.

Psychological Insecurity

First, as this scale was newly created, its validity should be discussed. The Psychological Insecurity scale can be seen to have “content validity” because the items were created from existing theory and represent several aspects of emotional insecurity, including anticipated emotional hurt in social interactions and on knowing others’ sufferings, attachment insecurity, and knowing one’s own emotional status. The scale also had “construct validity” not only because the items were constructed from Maslow et al.’s (1945) theory of Psychological Insecurity, but also because the results show that it had suitable correlates with other measures. In other words, it had “convergent validity” because Psychological Insecurity is characterized by fear and anxiety, and in the results it correlated positively and significantly with the “worry” facet of Neuroticism (which was also a powerful statistical predictor of Psychological Insecurity). The measure also had “divergent validity” because (a) overall, common-method bias was statistically discounted, signifying the new measure’s distinction from other measures; and, more specifically, (b) the measure had a significant negative correlation with Openness, which is a variable that is supposed to be antithetical to Psychological Insecurity because (according to Maslow’s theory) insecure people suffering from fear and anxiety are not “open” to new and unknown ideas or experiences.

For a better understanding of the results, it should be remembered that Psychological Insecurity is an *undesirable* state in which the person is overly sensitive to and easily hurt by other people’s emotionally upsetting behaviors. Indeed, Psychological Insecurity was significantly correlated, and in the hypothesized directions, with all the independent variables. These results provide greater information about factors that might affect the extent to which people feel psychologically insecure.

Specifically, Psychological Insecurity was higher for increased levels of Dependency and Neuroticism. This indicates that highly dependent people have low emotional acceptance of negative evaluations from others and of separation in interpersonal relationships. For Neuroticism (measured as a state of worry), its significant positive correlation with Psychological Insecurity implies that it reflects emotional uncertainty; and Neuroticism was its strongest predictor. These results supported Maslow et al.’s (1945) theory because they regarded psychological *security* as a feeling of being safe and free of fear and anxiety, while psychological *insecurity* was characterized by anxiety and fear. The correlations supported those ideas, and although no hypothesis was made regarding which variables would predict psychological insecurity, the regression confirmed its conceptual relationship with worry.

Combining the above results with Bowlby’s (1982) theory of attachment, which argues that children who receive emotional support from parents will be more socially competent, these results imply that psychological insecurity may be avoided if parents provide children with more emotional support and raise them to be self-dependent; and that emotional anxiety could be reduced when family and friends are emotionally honest and supportive.

Psychological Insecurity was *lower* for high levels of Physiological Needs Satisfaction, Family Emotional Support, Emotional Intelligence, Openness, and Agreeableness. For Physiological Needs Satisfaction, these results also support Maslow’s (1943) theory that satisfying the underlying biological needs enables people to have the personal resources necessary to attend to, and attain, higher levels of safety and security. The findings for Family Emotional Support strengthen the idea that receiving such social and emotional support from one’s family members could increase a person’s psychological security.

From a practical perspective, the remaining variables of Agreeableness, Openness, and Emotional Intelligence may be difficult to influence, but, to the extent that there are ways to increase them, the results suggest that they should be enhanced as possible ways to increase psychological security. For example, one might provide rein-

forcements (such as giving liberal amounts of verbal praise) to others to foster their agreeable behaviors. Another example could be to design courses, e.g., on how to control one's own emotions and to be more aware of other people's emotions (to increase emotional intelligence).

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal Trust was tested for its relationship with Psychological Insecurity, and with some variables expected to be related to trust. The findings revealed that Interpersonal Trust was *higher* for higher levels of Openness and Agreeableness. Based on the theory that people with high Openness accept different opinions and behaviors of other people, it was suggested that such people would not perceive differing opinions as threatening. That is, it was theoretically expected that greater Openness would give a person greater confidence for trusting other people. The findings confirmed these ideas.

For Agreeableness, if agreeable people are helpful and friendly, other people will display fondness for them (Carducci, 2009), such that agreeable people would be more likely to perceive others as friendly and trustworthy. The results supported the hypothesis that higher Agreeableness leads to more trust. Also, Interpersonal Trust was *lower* with high levels of Neuroticism, i.e., neurotic people worry excessively, which includes the worry that other people will harm them, making them disinclined to trust other people.

The results imply that, to increase trust among people, it may help to increase people's agreeableness and openness, perhaps (as noted previously) by creating educational courses. Likewise, interpersonal trust might also be increased by reducing neuroticism. For example, as neuroticism is characterized by excessive worry, it might help to increase interpersonal trust if people in social relationships are more emotionally supportive with each other, and if people (in general) can be encouraged to be more emotionally honest.

Outcomes of Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust

Coworker Support and Life Satisfaction were included in this study to determine whether they might have a positive or negative relationship with different amounts of Psychological Insecurity and/or Interpersonal Trust. More specifically, they were regarded as theoretical outcome variables (because they occur in adulthood) in order to ascertain whether Psychological Insecurity could be related to undesirable practical consequences with colleagues at work, and whether Interpersonal Trust could be related to more positive achievements in one's life.

Coworker Support was negatively related to Psychological Insecurity, strengthening Maslow et al.'s (1945) idea that psychologically insecure people tend to be unsociable. That is, they might not actively involve themselves in relationships with coworkers, making their colleagues less likely to interact with them and provide less support (of various types). On the other hand, Interpersonal Trust was positively correlated with and a significant predictor of Coworker Support. Indeed, one should at least be able to trust that one's colleagues or teammates will complete their assigned tasks. Thus, when people trust their coworkers those coworkers are more likely to reciprocate, and work teams are more likely to succeed.

For Life Satisfaction, it was expected that the more Psychological Insecurity people have, the less Life Satisfaction they have. That is, excessive fear of emotional harm could reduce a person's attempts to make efforts to undertake difficult things because of fear of failure, and thus do not take risks to try to attain higher achievements in life. Also, for Life Satisfaction and Interpersonal Trust, a positive relation was anticipated, and found. This may be explained by the idea that trust is necessary to build strong relationships with other people, and that good relationships with others are often essential for people to achieve great things in life. Together, these findings suggest

that when people feel emotionally secure they may assume a more positive outlook and take the initiative to achieve more in their lives. Overall, these findings suggest that it is important for people to develop trusting relationships.

Conclusions

The present research made it possible to empirically examine Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust as related phenomena, and the findings converged on four important implications. First, Psychological Insecurity and Interpersonal Trust were found to be conceptual opposites. Second, there are behaviors that should be able to reduce psychological insecurity, such as by providing more emotional support to other people. Third, there are also behaviors that may increase interpersonal trust, namely, being emotionally encouraging to one's children and family, and being more emotionally honest and supportive with other people in general. Fourth, people's feelings of psychological security and interpersonal trust should be increased because these variables are important to one's psychological well-being, and they have significant relationships with practical life outcomes.

Future research could focus on two aspects. One would be on possible antecedents in the conceptual model, e.g., to investigate ways that could *decrease* Psychological Insecurity, such as by providing more emotional support and encouragement. The second aspect would be to investigate other life outcomes, such as those in the [Maslow \(1943\)](#) hierarchy, namely, belongingness, esteem received, and self-actualization, while paying particular attention to the means of, and extent to which, reducing psychological insecurity (or, more preferably, *increasing* psychological *security*) would bring more desirable life outcomes.

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