

The Impacts of the Occupational Stigma on Skilled Workers' Turnover Intention*

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Abstract: In the face of blooming development of artificial intelligence and digitalization, there has been a significant surge in demand for those junior technical employees, who are often required to be well-equipped with more sophisticated skills compared to their other age-groups. Nevertheless, when compared to traditional professions, these technical employees perceived a psychological disadvantageous due to the less 'dignified' stereotypes by the public. This perception further causes a high turnover rate among these junior technical employees. The study aims at investigating the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention among junior technical employees. Additionally, the research further examines the mediating effect from relative deprivation and the moderating effect from perceived interpersonal justice. Based on collected 505 surveys, this study found: (1) occupational stigma has a positive influence on turnover intention; (2) occupational stigma has a positive influence on relative deprivation; (3) relative deprivation has a positive influence on turnover intention; (4) relative deprivation mediates the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention; (5) perceived interpersonal justice negatively moderates the relationship between occupational stigma and relative deprivation; meaning, higher scores of perceived interpersonal justice may weaken the relationship between occupational stigma and relative deprivation, and vice versa. Suggestions and implications are provided for future related areas.

Keywords: Occupational stigma; Relative deprivation; Turnover intention; Interaction justice

* Submission Date: 1 November 2023 ; Acceptance Date: 27 August 2024.

新一代技術工人職業污名對離職傾向之研究

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摘要：產業發展促成企業對於新進入技術產業員工需求激增，然而，社會仍認為製造產業工作較不體面，污名相對傳統職業處於劣勢，進而提高新一代技術員工離職傾向。本研究的目的探討製造產業技術員工的職業污名感與離職傾向之間的關係；引入相對剝奪感為仲介變量、互動公正感為調節變量。本研究由回收 505 份有效問卷發現：(1) 職業污名感對離職傾向具有正向影響；(2) 職業污名感對相對剝奪感具有正向影響；(3) 相對剝奪感對離職傾向具有正向影響；(4) 相對剝奪感在職業污名感與離職傾向之間起仲介作用；(5) 互動公正感知負向調節職業污名感與相對剝奪感之間的關係，即互動公正感知越高，職業污名感與相對剝奪感之間的關係越弱，反之越強。研究提出建議供企業及相關領域參考。

關鍵詞：職業污名感、離職傾向、相對剝奪感、互動公正感知

1. Introduction

China is currently experiencing transformation from labor- to technology-intensive manufacturing that leads to huge demand for technical employees with refined skills surge under the era of digitalization. Current labor force can hardly meet enterprises demands regarding both quantity and quality. Regardless the increasing needs for technical employees in the manufacturing industry, turnover rate has still reached an all-time high, especially with those related to advanced intelligent production. According to the National Occupational Code, technical employees are those frontline workers who possess technical knowledge with operational skills to manage issues in production, transportation, and services functions.¹ Enterprises have been looking for these competent but relatively 'junior' but competent technical employees who are proficient in applying technology to production.

Despite of growing needs, technical employees are still affected by the typical views of "undignified" from the public. The stigma places them at a psychological disadvantage comparing to other occupations. The negative perceptions may further increase turnover intention for those who equipped with specific technical employees. Unlike previous groups, employees born after 1995 (i.e., under the age of 30) are with more solid education basis, greater occupational expectations, and aspirations for material and immaterial pursuit. In order to retain these junior new-hired technical employees, since the higher intentions to leave may derive from negative occupational stigma. It has become a great challenge for organizational management levels. Thus, the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention will be discussed in the following sections.²

Relative deprivation proposes that individuals evaluate their own status and circumstances by comparing themselves to others.³ Individuals in disadvantaged positions develop a sense of relative deprivation, which affects their mental and physical health,

¹ 余曉敏、潘毅，〈消費社會與「新生代打工妹」主體性再造〉，《社會學研究》，第3期（北京：2008），143-171。

² 薛冰潔，《影響年輕族群工作轉換意願之因素探討》，（中國台灣：中央大大學碩士論文，2020）。

³ 張利傑，《個體相對增量感對認知控制的影響機制》，（中國：中國西南大學博士論文，2020）。

prompting them to adopt negative coping strategies.⁴ Introduced during World War II, relative deprivation appeared in the US Air Force due to relatively faster promotions comparing to the Army.⁵ Those Air Force individuals who didn't get promoted perceived a sense of relative deprivation since they have more promotion opportunities comparing to those Army soldiers with limited promotion opportunities.

Stigmatized occupations are usually associated with lower wages and disadvantageous backgrounds, such as frontline technicians that may generate a sense of relative deprivation.⁶ Relative deprivation damages individual positive self-concept. To lessen these negative perceptions and keep a positive self-concept, individual employees tend to ask for extra compensation to avoid resource shortage. As such, this study explores the path through which occupational stigma affects turnover intention through a sense of relative deprivation.

Low retention rates among junior technicians in the manufacturing sector usually bring huge challenges for managers to seek cost-effective strategies to mitigate the side effects of occupational stigma on these frontline employee intentions to leave. Employees' perception of organizational justice significantly influences the coping strategies to deal with occupational stigma.⁷ Previous studies have predominantly focused on procedural and distributive justice perceptions without taking perceived interpersonal justice into consideration mostly.⁸

Perceived interpersonal justice refers to how employees perceive whether their leaders treat subordinates with politeness (i.e., interpersonal justice), completed information and

⁴ 張光磊、黃婷、殷向洲，〈非體面工作者職業污名的作用機制及其應對策略〉，《心理科學進展》，第3卷第30期（北京：2022），703-714。

⁵ Samuel A. Stouffer et al., "The American soldier: Adjustment during army life," *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II* 1. Princeton Univ. Press: 1949.

⁶ 張光磊、黃婷、殷向洲，〈非體面工作者職業污名的作用機制及其應對策略〉，《心理科學進展》，第3卷第30期（北京：2022），703-714。

⁷ Kimberly E. Chaney, Diana T. Sanchez and Melanie R. Maimon, "Stigmatized-identity cues in consumer spaces," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 29.1 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd: 2019): 130.

⁸ Heejung Ro and Eric D. Olson, "The effects of social justice and stigma-consciousness on gay customers' service recovery evaluation," *Journal of Business Research* 67.6 (UK: Elsevier: 2014): 1162.

explanations (i.e., informational justice). Consequently, perceived being respected, individuals with high perceptions of interpersonal justice exhibit higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and fewer instances of turnover.⁹ This study examines the role of perceived interpersonal justice in the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention as coping strategies to minimize the existing gap in the stigma research domains as well as address these frontline technicians occupational stigma considering the role of perceived interpersonal justice.

However, stereotype valuing theoretical knowledge over technical skills remains a controversial issue. Generally speaking, a prevailing stereotype exists in contemporary societies against technical employees, assuming that they are less educated and with lower skill sets. Despite the substantial educational advancements in those junior technical employees comparing to previous generations, negative occupational stigma remains a controversial issue that may cause relative deprivation. This stereotypes make them receive relatively less “decent” treatment that further drives higher possibilities to leave their jobs.

This present study advances aspects of research. Firstly, it explores the relationship between occupational stigma, relative deprivation, and employee turnover intention. It helps minimize the possibilities of turnover as behavioral outcomes by understanding the perceptions of employees who newly joined the industry. The theoretical model identifies people with negative perceptions toward jobs may influence the feeling of disadvantageous status in societies. We thus, argue that it is crucial to include employee self-views regarding their jobs and the relevant outcomes.

Further, this study takes perceived interpersonal justice as a moderating variable to uncover its impacts on lessen the effects from occupational stigma. By understanding the impact of perceived interpersonal justice to the mediation relationship, employees with higher levels of perceived interpersonal justice may decrease levels of occupational stigma on relative deprivation, and further the turnover intention in their career. As such, the contribution lies in specifies a condition under which the benefits of perceived

⁹ Jason A. Colquitt, “On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86.3 (Washington, DC: APA, 2001): 386.

interpersonal justice is less observable when it comes to discussion regarding occupational stigma.

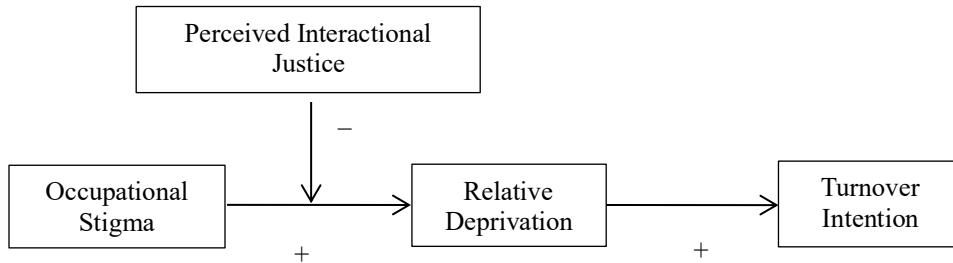


Figure 1 Hypothesized model

2. Theory and Hypothesis

2.1 Occupational Stigma and Turnover Intention

Research on employee turnover has consistently been a significant topic in the organizational behavior field. Nevertheless, those who born after 1995, with higher education, occupational expectations and seek for enjoyment just joined the labor as characterized as technical-skilled blue-collar employees. Most junior newbies evaluate their treatments and career on the basis of self-evaluations from their occupation rather than other general and objective rewards and compensation. To retain and maintain the morale, it is important to examine the impact of perceptions such as occupational stigma on these junior technical employee motives to leave the organization (i.e., turnover intentions).

This study focuses on the impacts of occupational stigma as the negative judgments about individual occupation on the basis of self-concept cognition, and interpersonal interactions.¹⁰ Individuals evaluate their position and circumstances by comparing themselves to others.¹¹ Disadvantaged individuals may come up with passive coping

¹⁰ Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner, "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity," *Academy of Management Review* 24.3 (NY: Briarcliff Manor: 1999): 413.

¹¹ 魏巍、劉貝妮、凌亞如，〈平臺演算法下數位零工職業污名感知對離職傾向的影響〉，《中國人力資源開發》，（北京：2022），第 39 卷第 2 期，18-30; Glen E. Kreiner, Blake E. Ashforth, and David M. Sluss, "Identity Dynamics in Occupational Dirty Work: Integrating Social Identity and System Justification

strategies when experiencing relative deprivation in both mental and physical aspects to lessen the impacts of stigma. In contemporary society, there is a demand for varied forms of work that may be perceived by the public as degrading and this perception stigmatizes those who take the job.¹² According to system justification theory (SJT), group members may respond to external threats against their identity and status from stigmatization. Those who hold strong occupational stigma may incline to either in exiting the occupation (or even choose not to take it in the beginning) or in implementing active defense strategies to lessen the cognitive, affective, and behavioral strain.¹³

On the one hand, people tend to be more cautious and hypersensitive in their interactions with others if they choose to hide the stigma to avoid discrimination from their occupations. Individuals exposed to overwhelmingly negative opinions regarding their occupation may strategically allocate psychological resources to lessen negative emotions (e.g., guilt, anxiety).¹⁴ Individuals differentiate what they aspire to be from what they do not want to be throughout the Once the public's negative occupation stigma collide with employee positive self-concept, the pre-existing occupation perceptions (e.g., self-worth, self-efficacy) may be mistakenly considered as inferior and undignified.¹⁵ To mitigate and alleviate the impacts the negative emotions to their self-categorization process

Perspectives". *Organization Science* 17.5: (Maryland, US: INFORMS: 2006): 619-636.

¹² Glen E. Kreiner, Blake E. Ashforth, and David M. Sluss, "Identity Dynamics in Occupational Dirty Work: Integrating Social Identity and System Justification Perspectives". *Organization Science* 17.5: (Maryland, US: INFORMS: 2006): 619-636.

¹³ 魏巍、劉貝妮、凌亞如，〈平臺演算法下數位零工職業污名感知對離職傾向的影響〉，《中國人力資源開發》，（北京：2022），第39卷第2期，18-30; Glen E. Kreiner, Blake E. Ashforth, and David M. Sluss, "Identity Dynamics in Occupational Dirty Work: Integrating Social Identity and System Justification Perspectives". *Organization Science* 17.5: (Maryland, US: INFORMS: 2006): 619-636.

¹⁴ Rongrong Zhang et al., "Stigma beyond levels: Advancing research on stigmatization," *Academy of Management Annals* 15.1 (UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2021): 188; Kayla B. Follmer, Isaac Emmanuel. Sabat, and Rose L. Siuta, "Disclosure of stigmatized identities at work: An interdisciplinary review and agenda for future research," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 41.2 (England: Wiley: 2020): 169; Robyn A. Berkley, Roxanne. Beard, and Catherine S. Daus, "The emotional context of disclosing a concealable stigmatized identity: A conceptual model," *Human Resource Management Review* 29.3 (UK: Elsevier: 2019): 428.

¹⁵ David Matthew. Doyle, and Lisa. Molix, "Disparities in social health by sexual orientation and the etiologic role of self-reported discrimination," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 45 (NY: Springer: 2016): 1317.

(e.g., psychological anxiety), individuals tend to passively adopt avoidance strategies (e.g., increasing possibility to resign).¹⁶

Existing research found that occupational stigma may affect both group interactions that make it difficult to meet the social needs.¹⁷ Those prejudgments about interactions from occupational stigma (e.g., discrimination), cause anxiety and further consume physiological resources to manage potential threats (e.g., cardiovascular reactivity, VC lung capacity, CO cardiac output).¹⁸ Once the stigma diffuses, individuals may encounter more barriers to interact with external group members that keep those individuals from non-stigmatized one.¹⁹ To lessen interpersonal interactions to minimize adverse effects of occupational stigma, employees tend to leave the groups. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Occupational stigma is positively related to turnover intention.

2.2 Occupational Stigma and Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation usually occurs when individuals feel disadvantaged and less valued when comparing to a reference group.²⁰ Individuals with occupational stigma

¹⁶ 蔣昀潔、李璐、黃慶，〈陽光下的陰影：職業污名的研究視角，成因及應對〉，《中國人力資源開發》，第 37 卷第 9 期（北京：2020），24；Laura Smart. Richman, Julie. Martin, and Jennifer. Guadagno, “Stigma-based rejection and the detection of signs of acceptance,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 7.1 (UK: Sage Publications: 2016): 53; Bosmans, Kim, et al., “Dirty work, dirty worker? Stigmatization and coping strategies among domestic workers,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 92 (UK: Elsevier: 2016): 54; Alice D. Boyes, and Janet D. Latner, “Weight stigma in existing romantic relationships,” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 35.4 (Routledge: Taylor & Francis: 2009): 282; 張光磊、黃婷、殷向洲，〈非體面工作者職業污名的作用機制及其應對策略〉，《心理科學進展》，第 30 卷第 3 期（北京：2022），703。

¹⁷ Jason K. Clark et al., “Gender stereotypes and intellectual performance: Stigma consciousness as a buffer against stereotype validation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 68 (NY: Elsevier: 2017): 185

¹⁸ Laura R. Stroud., et al., “The Yale Interpersonal Stressor (YIPS): Affective, physiological, and behavioral responses to a novel interpersonal rejection paradigm.” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 22.3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2000): 204; Michael C. Cadaret et al., “Stereotype threat as a barrier to women entering engineering careers.” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 99 (NY: Elsevier, 2017): 40.

¹⁹ Erika V. Hall et al., “Composition and compensation: The moderating effect of individual and team performance on the relationship between Black team member representation and salary,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 104.3 (Washington, D.C.: APA, 2019): 448.

²⁰ Ted Robert. Gurr, “Sources of rebellion in Western societies: Some quantitative evidence,” in *Collective Violence*, eds. (London: Routledge, 2017), 132; Heather J. Smith et al., “Relative deprivation: A theoretical

reveal heightened vigilance when interacting with out-group members. This may hinder information exchange and reduce the interaction quality.²¹ The inferior experiences diminish trust and security built throughout the process when interacting with others.²²

Comparing to other professional counterparts in less stigmatized groups, occupational stigmatized individuals often see themselves with disproportionately lower rewards for their efforts since they perceived themselves as less valued by the public.²³ These technical employees taking their occupations as negative stigmatized and are normally degrading in the society may exacerbate occupational stigma that engender a sense of relative deprivation.²⁴ This study next focuses on interpersonal interactions and income distribution when examining the relationship between occupational stigma and relative deprivation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Occupational stigma is positively related to relative deprivation.

2.3 Relative Deprivation and Turnover Intention

Perceived relative deprivation may negatively impacts individual mental (e.g., life satisfaction, depression) and physical well-being (e.g., increased morbidity premature mortality rates).²⁵ Individuals may make efforts protecting themselves from losing

and meta-analytic review,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16.3 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012): 203.

²¹ Mieke Verhaeghe and Bracke Piet, Verhaeghe, Mieke, and Piet Bracke. “Stigma and trust among mental health service users.” *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 25.4 (NY: Elsevier: 2011): 294.

²² Rongrong Zhang *et al.*, “Stigma beyond levels: Advancing research on stigmatization,” *Academy of Management Annals* 15.1 (UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2021): 188.

²³ 黎耀奇等，〈基於資源保存理論的旅遊職業污名影響研究〉，《旅遊學刊 Lvyou Xuekan》，第 36 卷第 5 期（北京：2021），93；Michael. S. Gaddis, “Discrimination in the credential society: An audit study of race and college selectivity in the labor market.” *Social Forces* 93.4 (UK: Oxford University Press, 015): 1451

²⁴ 朱永躍、王世賢、歐陽晨慧，〈職業污名對工匠精神的抑制效應：來自製造業產業工人的實證研究〉，《江蘇大學學報（社會科學版）》，第 25 期第 1 卷（江蘇：2022），86-100；趙德雷，〈污名身份對人際影響力和社會距離的影響〉，《心理學報》，第 45 期第 11 卷（北京：2013），1283。

²⁵ Shuwei, Zhang, Erping, Wang, and Yiwen, Chen, “Relative deprivation based on occupation: An effective predictor of Chinese life satisfaction.” *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 14.2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2011): 148 ;Masashige, Saito *et al.*, “Relative deprivation, poverty, and subjective health: JAGES cross-sectional study,” *PloS one* 9.10 (San Francisco, CA: Public Library of Science, 2014):

resources at hand when experiencing relative deprivation. The reactions may result in unintended errors, impacting work memory, cognitive flexibility, and the possibility of morbidity and premature mortality. As the coping strategies to reduce the relative deprivation from current disadvantaged status, deviant behaviors may act as alternatives that further lead to sense of guilt.²⁶ These behaviors (e.g., violence, theft, and crime) make it difficult for these relatively deprived individuals to maintain the current status that trigger possibilities to leave the organizations comparisons.²⁷ Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Relative deprivation is positively related to turnover intention.

2.4 Mediating Role of Relative Deprivation

Comparing with others may strengthen the sense of relative deprivation for those stigmatized individuals.²⁸ In this case, negative occupational stigma experienced by technical employees may cause relative deprivation. Further, relative deprivation resulting from occupational stigma may lead to adverse effects (e.g., poor social interactions, disadvantageous bargaining status in compensation).²⁹ Those technical employees receive relatively higher education may feel over-qualified. The disadvantageous status from occupational stigma with unmet expectations escalates their sense of relative deprivation.³⁰

e111169 ;Shadi Beshai et al., "Personal relative deprivation associated with functional disorders via stress: An examination of fibromyalgia and gastrointestinal symptoms," *PLoS One* 12.12 (San Francisco, CA: Public Library of Science: 2017): e0189666.

²⁶ Martino Ongis and Davidai Shai, "Personal relative deprivation and the belief that economic success is zero-sum." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 151.7 (Washington, D.C.: APA: 2022): 1666.

²⁷ Anthony Napoletano et al., "The view from the bottom: Relative deprivation and bullying victimization in Canadian adolescents," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31.20 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications: 2016): 3443.

²⁸ 熊猛、葉一舵，〈相對剝奪感：概念，測量，影響因素及作用〉，《心理科學進展》，第 24 卷第 3 期（北京：2016），438。

²⁹ Glen E. Kreiner, Blake E. Ashforth, and David M. Sluss, "Identity Dynamics in Occupational Dirty Work: Integrating Social Identity and System Justification Perspectives". *Organization Science* 17.5: (Maryland, US: INFORMS: 2006): 619-636.

³⁰ Berrin Erdogan et al., "Perceived overqualification, relative deprivation, and person-centric outcomes: The moderating role of career centrality." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 107 (NY: Elsevier: 2018): 233.

Both physical and mental conditions (e.g., emotional exhaustion, stress) may suffer that further trigger the possibilities of turnover as the common response in the workplace. Occupational stigma intensifies relative deprivation that further increase the possibilities of turnover. Thus, this study posits:

Hypothesis 4: Relative deprivation mediates the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention.

2.5 Relative Deprivation and Turnover Intention

Not all individuals perceived a sense of relative deprivation when confronting with discrimination and injustice. Relative deprivation theory shows that outcomes may be varied depends on contextual factors.³¹ This study presents that organizational justice may weaken the negative impacts from occupational stigma on relative deprivation.³²

Interactional justice as one aspect of organizational justice is composed of information and interpersonal justice.³³ On the one hand, information justice may derive from supervisors' continuous communications with comprehensive information and specified work values. As such, individuals re-evaluate their occupational identity and their perceptions in reducing negative stigma as well as a sense of relative deprivation. For example, the negative stigma is decreased when sanitation workers perceive a sense of accomplishment in protecting environment via recycling.³⁴ On the contrary, less information justice may intensify relative deprivation due to a lack of alignment with their occupation.

Respectfully fair treatment from distributing results and executing procedures may

³¹ 孫燈勇、郭永玉，〈相對剝奪感：想得，應得，怨憤於未得〉，《心理科學》，第 390 卷第 3 期（北京：2016），714。

³² 周春燕、郭永玉，〈公正世界信念—重建公正的雙刃劍〉，《心理科學進展》，第 21 卷第 1 期（北京：2016），144。

³³ Colquitt, Jason A. "On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86.3 (Washington, D.C.: APA, 2001): 386-400.

³⁴ Peter Hamilton, Redman Tom, and Rober McMurray, "'Lower than a snake's belly': Discursive constructions of dignity and heroism in low-status garbage work," *Journal of Business Ethics* 156 (Netherlands: Springer: 2019): 889.

generate dignity that leads to higher level of interpersonal justice. Interactional justice helps relieve stigma-induced issues that further decrease the negative occupational stigma on interpersonal interactions.³⁵ By contrast, lower interpersonal justice may increase occupational stigma that make stigma-sensitive employees perceive the sense of unfairness and relative deprivation.³⁶ Therefore,

Hypothesis 5a: Perceived interactional justice moderates the relationship between occupational stigma and relative deprivation; such that this relationship will be weaker when perceived interactional justice is high than when it is low.

Additionally, this study further proposes that organizational interactional justice moderates the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention via relative deprivation. The higher the perceived interactional justice, the weaker the mediating effect of relative deprivation. Thus,

Hypothesis 5b: Perceived interactional justice moderates the mediating relationship of occupational stigma and turnover intention via relative deprivation, such that the mediated relationship will be weaker when perceived interactional justice is high than when it is low.

3. Method

3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study commenced in October 2022 and targeted 18-30 year-old technical employees in 12 manufacturing companies in Southwest China. The specific industries included home manufacturing, wood product manufacturing, textile fabric production, wallpaper production, and alloy manufacturing. Given the high turnover rates and employment of entry to senior-level technicians in these companies, they were chosen as the study subjects.

³⁵ Heather J. Smith and Yuen J. Huo, "Relative deprivation: How subjective experiences of inequality influence social behavior and health," *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1.1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014): 231.

³⁶ Sora Jun and Junfen Wu, "Words that hurt: Leaders' anti-Asian communication and employee outcomes," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 106.2 (Washington, D.C.: APA, 2021): 169.

The data collection was conducted through questionnaires. Initially, contact was made with the human resources departments of the factories. After negotiation, the questionnaires were distributed in two phases, resulting in 505 responses from these junior technical employees. The two-phase distribution, spaced three weeks apart, aimed to reduce chance influences on variable relationships and enhance data quality (Walker et al., 2012).

In the first phase, 538 technical employees were invited to assess occupational stigma, interactional justice, and control variables, along with providing demographic information (response rate: 100%). The second phase, three weeks later, collected data on relative deprivation and employee turnover intention.

By contacting with departmental leadership, 28 employees were absent owing to either resigned, on medical leave, or engaged in off-site assignments. A total of 510 questionnaires were collected in the second phase (response rate: 94.8%). After matching the questionnaires using the last four digits of the employees' phone numbers, 505 valid questionnaires were obtained, resulting in an overall response rate of 93.9%. The high response rate was attributed to employees being allowed to fill out the questionnaires during working hours and receiving support from the human resources department and relevant leadership.

3.2 Measures

The four variables involved in this study were measured using well-established foreign scales. To ensure the validity of the scales and mitigate potential understanding and translation biases arising from language and cultural differences, the translation-back-translation method proposed by Brislin was employed to translate the relevant scales from English to Chinese.³⁷ Initially, three doctoral research students specializing in management studies overseas were invited to perform the translation-back-translation of the scales. Additionally, three management scholars were invited to evaluate and test the translated scales to ensure their appropriateness. The scales used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from

³⁷ Richard W. Brislin, "Translation and content analysis of oral and written materials," *Methodology* (Ukraine, 1980): 389.

“1” to “5” where “1” represented “strongly disagree, ” and “5” represented strongly agree.

3.2.1 Occupational Stigma

This study will utilize the revised Occupational Stigma Scale by Shantz and Booth, consisting of 6 items (e.g., “Many people have negative views about skilled professions, even if they do not express them”, “Many people judge skilled professions based on occupational stereotypes rather than the actual job content”).³⁸ In their article, authors tried to capture workers’ perceptions of the public’s stigmatization of their job and the work that they do on the job. Consistent with this study, we applied this 6-item scale and the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale used in this study is 0.89.

3.2.2 Relative Deprivation

This study employed the Relative Deprivation Scale developed by Zhang et al., consisting of five items categorized into emotional and cognitive dimensions.³⁹ Examples of positively framed items include “Compared to individuals in non-stigmatized professions, the level of resentment towards your disposable income” and negatively framed items include “Compared to individuals in non-stigmatized professions, the level of satisfaction with your disposable income.” The Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was 0.88.

3.2.3 Perceived Interactional Justice

This study utilized the scale developed by Colquitt to measure employees' perception of interpersonal justice.⁴⁰ Despite variations in factor structures and measurement methods

³⁸ Amanda E. Shantz and Jonathan E. Booth, “Service employees and self-verification: The roles of occupational stigma consciousness and core self-evaluations,” *Human Relations* 67.12 (NY: Sage Pub, 2014): 1439.

³⁹ Hong Zhang et al., “Personal relative deprivation boosts materialism,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 37.5 (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2015): 247.

⁴⁰ Colquitt, “On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure,” 386-440.

related to interpersonal justice by different scholars stemming from diverse cultural backgrounds, a majority of studies still rely on the scale introduced by Colquitt.⁴¹ This scale has been validated in various cultural contexts. For instance, Shu and Liang translated the scale into Chinese and investigated its influence on the performance of a Chinese private enterprise, demonstrating that the scale effectively captured the essence of interpersonal justice.⁴² Several studies have affirmed its strong reliability and validity. Therefore, this study adopted the nine-item scale by Colquitt to measure employees' perception of interpersonal justice, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94.⁴³

3.2.4 Turnover Intention

This study employed a scale developed by, which comprises four items. These items include two positively and two negatively framed questions. The items are as follows: “I have essentially not contemplated leaving my current organization”, “I am committed to a long-term career progression within this organization”, “I frequently experience feelings of discontent in my present job, and I am inclined towards seeking opportunities in a new organization”, and “In the forthcoming six months, there is a high probability of my departing from my current organization”. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for this scale used in our study was calculated to be 0.87.

3.2.5 Control variables

This study employed control variables, focusing on demographic characteristics that are highly likely to influence employee turnover intention and relative deprivation perception in consistent with previous studies. Specifically, the controlled variables

⁴¹ Colquitt, “On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure,” 386-440.

⁴² 舒睿、梁建，〈基於自我概念的倫理領導與員工工作結果研究〉，《管理學報》，第12卷第7期（南京：2015），1012。

⁴³ 魏巍、劉貝妮、凌亞如，〈平臺演算法下數位零工職業污名感知對離職傾向的影響〉，《中國人力資源開發》，第39卷第2期，（北京：2022）18-30。

encompass age, gender, education level, and years of work experience.⁴⁴

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Discriminant validity testing was performed on the four variables: occupational stigma, relative deprivation perception, interactional justice, and employee turnover intention. A four-factor model exhibited excellent fit indices ($\chi^2/df=1.06$, RMSEA=0.011, CFI=0.99, TLI=0.99). Compared to single-factor, two-factor, and three-factor models, the four-factor model demonstrated superior fit across various fit indices, indicating that the four research variables could be treated as separate constructs in the upcoming analysis.

Table 1 Summary Table of Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
A, B, C, D	260.66	246	1.06	0.01	0.03	0.99	0.99
A,C,B+D	909.06	249	3.65	0.07	0.06	0.91	0.88
A,B+C+D	1811.04	251	7.22	0.11	0.11	0.73	0.70
A+B+C+D	2726.14	252	10.82	0.14	0.13	0.57	0.53

Note: N=505; A, B, C, D represent occupational stigma, relative deprivation perception, interactional justice, and turnover intention.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis of individual variables is summarized in Table 2. From Table 2, it can be observed that occupational stigma is significantly positively correlated with turnover intention ($r=0.48$, $p<0.01$). Occupational stigma is also significantly positively correlated with relative deprivation ($r=0.35$, $p<0.01$). Relative deprivation is significantly

⁴⁴ 周曄、黃旭，〈高職業聲望從業者職業污名感知和員工幸福感—基於認知失調視角〉，《經濟管理》，第40卷第4期，（北京：2018），84-101. DOI:10.19616/j.cnki.bmj.2018.04.006.; 王玉梅、於曉彤、文珊珊，〈職業污名感和工作不潔感一致性對工作幸福感和工作結果的影響〉，《中國人力資源開發》，第39卷第2期，（北京：2022），6-17。

positively correlated with turnover intention ($r=0.49$, $p<0.01$). These results provides initial support for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Table 2 The table of variable means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients (N=505)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Gender	1.48	.50							
2.Age	2.46	.64	.06						
3.Education	3.19	1.08	.03	.58**					
4.Tenure	1.82	.67	.01	.57**	.36**				
5.Occupational Stigma	3.93	.80	.06	.08	.01	.06			
6.Relative Deprivation	3.76	.82	.02	.07	-.03	.01	.35**		
7.Perceived Interactional Justice	4.06	.75	-.03	-.04	.04	.02	-.37**	-.25**	
8.Turnover Intention	3.62	1.01	-.01	.29**	.12**	.14**	.48**	.49**	-.50**

Note: N=505, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

4.3 Mediation Analysis

This study utilized the SPSS software in combination with the Process program to validate the hypotheses, and the results are presented in Table 3. In Model 1, occupational stigma was found to significantly predict employee turnover intention in a positive manner ($\beta=0.49$, $p<0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 1. Model 2 in Table 3 reveals that occupational stigma has a positive effect on relative deprivation ($\beta=0.38$, $p<0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Finally, Model 3 shows that when occupational stigma and relative deprivation are simultaneously introduced into the regression equation, relative deprivation significantly and positively affects employee turnover intention ($\beta=0.34$, $p<0.001$). Thus,

Hypotheses 2 and 3 are confirmed, and it can be preliminarily determined that relative deprivation partially mediates the relationship between occupational stigma and employee turnover intention. To further confirm the existence of the mediating effect and address certain limitations of Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation analysis, this study employed Bootstrapping for further examination, setting the number of bootstrap samples to 5000. The results indicate that relative deprivation partially mediates the relationship between occupational stigma and employee turnover intention, with an indirect effect of 0.13 (CI [0.08, 0.18]) and a direct effect of 0.37 (CI[0.29,0.44]). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 3 The results of the mediating and moderating effect analysis

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Turnover Intention	Relative Deprivation	Turnover Intention	Relative Deprivation
Employee gender	-.10(.07)	-.01(.08)	-.10(.06)	-.02(.08)
Employee age	.42(.07)	.18*(.09)	.36***(.07)	.16(.08)
Employee tenure	-.05(.06)	.06 (.07)	-.03(.06)	-.05*(.07)
Employee education	-.04(.04)	-.08(.04)	-.01(.04)	-.07(.04)
Occupational Stigma	.49***(.04)	.38***(.05)	.37***(.04)	.27***(.05)
Relative Deprivation			.34***(.04)	
Perceived Interactional Justice				-.11**(.04)
Occupational Stigma × Perceived Interactional Justice				-.11*(.04)
Note: N=505, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$				

4.4 The moderation and moderated mediation test

The empirical results for Hypotheses 5a and 5b are presented in Model 4 of Table 3-5, respectively. The results for Hypothesis 5a demonstrate a significant interaction effect between occupational stigma and interpersonal justice ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$), as depicted in

Figure 2. Specifically, at lower levels of interpersonal justice, the impact of occupational stigma on relative deprivation is more pronounced, confirming Hypothesis 5a.

To test Hypothesis 5b, two levels of interpersonal justice (-1SD, +1SD) were utilized. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of occupational stigma on employee turnover intention via relative deprivation at low levels of interpersonal justice ($\beta = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.19]). However, this indirect effect was non-significant at high levels of interpersonal justice ($\beta = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.11]), confirming Hypothesis 5b. The moderated mediation index for occupational stigma was -0.04 with a bootstrapped 95% CI excluding 0, indicating a significant moderated mediation effect. This supports the presence of a moderated mediation model in which occupational stigma influences relative deprivation and subsequently employee turnover intention based on different levels of interpersonal justice, thus confirming Hypothesis 5b.

Table 4 The Moderating Effect of Interactional Justice

SE	Indirect effect			
	boot LLCI	boot ULCI		
-1 SD	0.38	0.05	0.27	0.48
Mean	0.27	0.05	0.16	0.38
+1 SD	0.16	0.08	0.002	0.32

Table 5 The Moderated Mediation Analysis Results

SE	Indirect effect			
	boot LLCI	boot ULCI		
-1 SD	0.13	0.03	0.08	0.19
Mean	0.09	0.02	0.05	0.14
+1 SD	0.05	0.03	-0.01	0.11
Index	-0.04	0.02	-0.08	-0.002

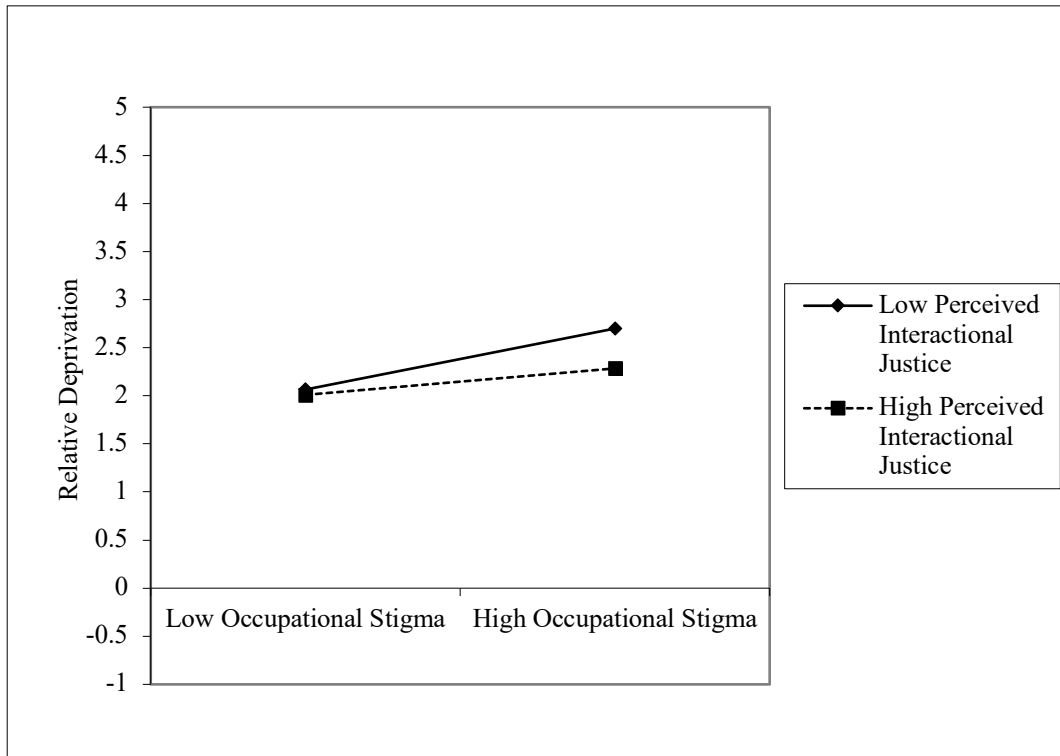


Figure 2 The Moderation Effect Diagram of Perceived Procedural Justice

4. Discussion

This study, grounded in the relative deprivation theory, examined the mediating mechanism of occupational stigma on turnover intention through relative deprivation, while also considering the moderating effect of interpersonal justice. Specifically, when employees have high levels of interpersonal justice, the mediating effect of occupational stigma on turnover intention through relative deprivation is weakened.

4.1 Theoretical implications

First, previous studies on occupational stigma have largely focused on the stigma associated with traditional “dirty work,” such as physical stigma, moral stigma, and social

stigma.⁴⁵ In the context of rigorously competitive manufacturing industry, enterprises have to make a great effort to keep the employee retention rate low, especially these junior skilled employees. As such, this study chose a group who newly joined the industry traditionally perceived as “dirty work”. To examine how people perceive their jobs may facilitate management level to cope with negative perceptions regarding manufacturing “blue-collar” jobs comparing to white collar one. This helps to distinguish the differential mechanisms of negative effects brought about by “dirty work” and occupational stigma. Furthermore, this study breaks from the traditional perspective predominantly focused on high stigma, differentiating stigma, and subtle stigma and primarily examines the diluted occupational stigma's impact on individual behavior, enriching relevant research on the impacts from diluted occupational stigma in the general management field.⁴⁶

Second, this study empirically examines and identifies relative deprivation as the mediating mechanism exerting impact on turnover intention from individual subjective perception. Existing research on the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention has either remained at the theoretical level, analyzing the influencing mechanisms, or explored the mechanisms from objective job characteristics, or organizational discretion.⁴⁷ By adopting a psychological perspective, this study reveals that relative

⁴⁵ Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner, “Dirty work and dirtier work: Differences in countering physical, social, and moral stigma.” *Management and Organization Review* 10.1 (Oxford: Blackwell Pub: 2014): 81; Blake E. Ashforth et al., “Congruence work in stigmatized occupations: A managerial lens on employee fit with dirty work.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 38.8 (England: Wiley: 2017): 1260; Lawrence. Yang et al., “Culture and stigma: Adding moral experience to stigma theory,” *Social Science & Medicine* 64.7 (Exeter: Elsevier Science, 2007): 1524; John R. Belcher and Bruce R. DeForge, “Social stigma and homelessness: The limits of social change,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22.8 (NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012): 929.

⁴⁶ Nyla R. Branscombe, et al., “Moving toward or away from a group identity: Different strategies for coping with pervasive discrimination,” in *The Social Cure*, eds. Nyla R. Branscombe, Saulo Fernández, Angel Gámez, Tracey Cronin. (Psychology Press), 115-131; Lucinda Austin and Barbara Miller Gaither, “Perceived motivations for corporate social responsibility initiatives in socially stigmatized industries.” *Public Relations Review* 43.4 (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2017): 840; Elizabeth C. Pinel, “You're just saying that because I'm a woman: Stigma consciousness and attributions to discrimination.” *Self and Identity* 3.1 (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis, 2004): 39.

⁴⁷ 張利傑，〈個體相對增量感對認知控制的影響機制〉，（中國：中國西南大學博士論文，2020）；Ashforth and Kreiner, “How can you do it?": *Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive*

deprivation acting an intrinsic mechanism between occupational stigma and turnover intention that not only supplements the research on the antecedents of occupational stigma and turnover intention but also broadly consider both environmental factors and individual subjective perceptions regarding relative deprivation.⁴⁸ This view is consistent with the previous literature on stigma, which presents that individuals possessing a clear basis for perceiving stigma, such as occupation, gender, showing stronger adverse effects when they are experienced by cues that make their stigma salient.

Additionally, although scholars have found that the impact of occupational stigma on turnover intention may derive from contextual factors, such as perceived organizational support, perceived justice, most scholars have mainly focused on perceived procedural justice and distributive justice. Interpersonal justice as the situational factor in between occupational stigma and turnover intention may help delve into other perspectives regarding both social-cultural and organizational contexts as a whole. The role of perceived interpersonal justice influencing the relationship between occupational stigma and turnover intention may fill the gap in uncovering the impacts of contextual factors in the domain of stigma.

4.2 Practical Implications

This study proposed that employee occupational stigma may increase turnover intention through relative deprivation, and this is moderated by their perceived interactional justice. The conclusions drawn from this study offer practical and actionable managerial recommendations for enterprises as follows.

Based on the findings, there is no surprise that occupational stigma may significantly increase the turnover intention among junior recently-hired employees. Management level may start from both internal as well as external aspects to strengthen and rebuild the

identity, 413-434; Ruth Simpson, Jason Hughes, and Natasha Slutskaia, "Emotional dimensions of dirty work: Butchers and the meat trade," in *Gender, Class and Occupation: Working Class Men doing Dirty Work*, eds. Ruth Simpson, Jason Hughes, Natasha Slutskaia. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). 189-207.

⁴⁸ Smith, "Relative deprivation: A theoretical and meta-analytic review," 203-232.

perceptions regarding specific industry. This can be achieved by organizing collective activities to formulate strong occupational culture that transform negative mindsets into a more self-confident, respectful recognizable one which may offset the negative impacts of external judgments. As for people whose tasks facing the public, work meaningfulness of each occupation should be strongly and openly promoted through media and organizational open communication, emphasizing the relentless craftsmanship and the significance of these technical employees.

Efforts to mitigating relative deprivation should be made to alleviate and minimize the contrast and/or inconsistency between technical and other less stigmatized professions. Increasing cross-organizational social interactions through team-building events and community practices may further foster a sense of empathy and collectivity that may reduce the gaps among different groups in other industries. Daily working environment can exert power on influencing public perceptions, such as cleanliness and lightness. It's one of the priorities to ensure employee welfare and benefits not only regarding materials and facilities (e.g., rest areas, coffee corners and rest zones) but acknowledging their dedication through recognition and other incentives that may reduce the sense of discrepancy with non-stigmatized professions.

Leaders or management levels within organization may act as the key to enhance perceived interactional justice through practices, such as leadership training. Perceived interactional justice plays a crucial role in reducing turnover intention since people are aware and continuously receive information from organizations. Trainings for supervisors and management levels should create clear guidelines to prohibit the use of abusive language or demeaning managerial practices towards employees as a whole. The implementation of these leadership trainings may support employees to be less inclined to ruminate about their treatment and less separate themselves from their workplace when experiencing negative stigma during interactions with higher-ups.

4.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This study has some methodological considerations. Firstly, data were mainly

collected from employees that may have concerns regarding the common-method bias. Participants may have hesitated to report their relative deprivation experiences due to social desirability bias. We applied Harman's single-factor test to address the common method variance (CMV). We loaded all variables into the exploratory factor analysis and examined the unrotated factor solution to determine the number of factors that are necessary to account for the variance. The results shows that the first principal component explained 38.26% of the total variance, which is lower than the criterion of 40%. It indicated that CMV is acceptable. Nevertheless, future studies should adopt multi-source and multi-time point data collection methods to improve research accuracy.

Samples collected were mainly lower-level and frontline technical employees in Chinese regional factories that limits the generalization to other occupations and other levels of technical employees. Future research may further diversify the samples to see if the model may be applied across industries. Regarding the regions and cities, further research may include both “salary” and “working hours per day” as control variables to exclude their impacts on research results.

Additionally, the study applied the system justification theory (SJT) to explain the mechanism between occupational stigma and turnover intention among junior technical employees.⁴⁹ SJT was broadly applied to group categorization (e.g., race, gender), less studies apply to talk about occupation-related classification, this study, for instance. As far as this study concerned, SJT can beneficially support this field by considering the ability and willingness of groups to actively combat stigmas. As such, Future research may further develop specialized scales or employ alternative theoretical perspectives to capture these nuances.

Regarding the moderating effect, the study focuses on interactional justice as the moderator that may limit potential influences of other contextual factors in the forming process of occupational stigma. Factors like a team climate, or individual personality traits may also play a role in mitigating the impact of relative deprivation. Future research should

⁴⁹ John T., Jost and Mahzarin Banaji. “The role of stereotyping in system justification and the production of false consciousness,” *British Journal Social Psychology* 33.1 (UK: 1994): 1-27.

explore the combined effect of occupational stigma, relative deprivation, and turnover intention by considering individual traits, leadership and team dynamics.

Nevertheless, this study found that these field-specific employees engage in less-desirable occupations and contexts led them to actively engage in behaviors that push them to leave their jobs in ways that are undesirable to organizations, especially in this highly competitive labor market. Our findings support the view that there are different correlations between employees' beliefs toward their tasks, occupational identities, and the social structures.⁵⁰ To improve the justice as the contextual influence may lessen the adverse impacts of such negative view exposures, via organizations' efforts to encourage more dynamic and diversely collaborative interactions in the workplace.

⁵⁰ John. Schaubroeck, M., Long. W. Lam, Jennifer Y.M. Lai, Anna C. Lennard, Ann C. Peng, and Ka Wai Chan, "Changing experiences of work dirtiness, occupational disidentification, and employee withdrawal," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 103.10 (US: American Psychological Association: 2018): 1086.

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