

# Job Insecurity as a Predictor of Conflict in Botswana Construction Industry

Josephine Moeti-Lysson

University of Botswana

E-mail: Moeti-Lysson@mopipi.ub.bw

Evans Sokro

Federation University Australia

E-mail: e.sokro@federation.edu.au

Jerry Courvisanos

Federation University Australia

E-mail: j.courvisanos@federation.edu.au

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## Abstract

The construction sector continues to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of many nations, most importantly, today's emerging economies. Although the sector is labour intensive and employees play critical roles in various projects and their success, there has been little research on people management practices and policies. Obtaining data from 617 employees working in eight Botswana construction companies, this study investigates employees' perceptions of job insecurity and conflict in domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies. The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between temporary work and perception of job insecurity and as such, job insecurity is positively related to conflict; these have large and significant impacts on deviant workplace behaviour. Also, there is statistically significant difference between males and females in both types of companies on how they perceive job insecurity as the cause of conflict, which needs to be addressed in human resource management to ensure better labour relations and higher labour productivity.

**Keywords:** Job insecurity, conflict, construction industry, Botswana

## 1. Introduction

The construction industry in developing nations remains one of the leading industries whose growth is interconnected with other sectors, and possibly the first industry whose downturn is very much associated with poor economic performance of the affected country (Datta, 2000). Accordingly, the construction industry in Botswana plays a very crucial role in the country's economic development especially in terms of its contribution to employment creation and income generation. According to labour statistics, Botswana's construction industry is the third largest private employer after manufacturing, wholesale and retail (Central Statistics Office, 2014). As a result, the expansion and growth of this industry will lead to job creation and a drastic reduction in unemployment which currently stands at 20% (Central Statistics Office, 2014).

Despite the size and socio-economic significance of the construction sector, issues relating to how employees are managed are not well understood (Dainty & Loosemore, 2013). As employees remain the most important asset of any organisation, they play a significant role in aiding organisations achieve both short-term and long-term objectives and compete favourably in today's competitive business environment. Consequently, the kinds of human resource management (HRM) practices and policies that are implemented have direct impact on employees' experiences at work and the employment relationship (Winstanley & Woodal, 2000; Guest, 2002). Also, in spite of the importance of the construction industry to Botswana economy, it is startling that little research on people management exists in this industry. Undeniably, a greater focus on the management of people in the construction sector would assist the industry players effectively manage their employees in order to enhance employee satisfaction which could result in timely completion of projects. A review of the literature reveals that research on conflicts has tended to focus primarily on the effects of conflict on employee commitment, performance and job satisfaction. Empirical evidence regarding the main causes of conflicts, however, has received little consideration in the human relations literature. Hence, not much is known about the main causes of conflict in the workplace.

Accordingly, the research question posed is whether employees' perceptions of job insecurity is a cause of conflict in the construction sector? The issue of job insecurity in the construction sector is grounded in the complex nature of project-based contracts and the fact that the tenure of employment of the majority of employees depend to a large extent on the availability and duration of projects. Temporary workers who are directly engaged by organisations for a limited time period often perceive their employment as insecure due to lack of prospects of job continuity (Kalleberg, 2003; McGovern, Smeaton, & Hill, 2004; Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2013). Understanding how job insecurity contributes to conflict at the workplace could assist organisations; especially construction firms to effectively manage their employees to ensure successful project execution.

In line with the above objectives, the rest of this paper is organised as follows. The first section reviews the literature on job insecurity and conflict. Then, it describes the study methodology, followed by presentation of empirical results. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

### *1.1 Concept of Job Insecurity and Conflict*

Researchers seem to agree that job insecurity can be described as a subjective perception of direct threat to the future of one's job (Sverke et al., 2002; De Bustillo & De Pedrazam, 2010). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), note that job insecurity takes place when there is involuntary loss. These authors define job insecurity as "perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 438). Indeed job insecurity reflects an individual's perception in relation to the stability and continuity of his/her employment with an organisation (Probst et al., 2003). Studies have found perceived job insecurity to be positively associated with job dissatisfaction, lower organisational commitment and performance, increase psychosomatic complaints and reduced life satisfaction (Sverke et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 2008).

Scholars also argue that job insecurity has negative effect on employee behavioural outcomes including in-role behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour, turnover intention and absenteeism (Davy et al., 1997; King, 2000; Staufenbiel & König, 2010). In particular, Reisel et al. (2010), examine the effects of job insecurity on job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour, deviant behaviour and negative emotions of employees and found that job insecurity is negatively related to satisfaction, and as such it has both direct and indirect effects on work behaviours and emotions. In relation to temporary workers, De Cuyper et al. (2006), contend that there is significant relationship between temporary work and perceptions of job insecurity and that the majority of temporary workers report high value of job insecurity. Other studies also found positive correlation between job insecurity and longer work hours, under-reporting of accident and higher levels of productivity (Fischer et al., 2005; Probst et al., 2007). Additionally, employees who have a poor perception of job security may worry about losing not only their salary, but also their connections with colleagues and even their social status (Ma et al., 2015). From whichever angle it is viewed, job insecurity is threatening to employees because it is the anticipation of an unplanned negative job change (Reisel et al., 2010). Hence, it can be deduced from these scholars that employees' perception of job insecurity is accompanied by strong emotional responses because unemployment implies the loss of income and support and of some characteristics related to work, such as sense of belonging, sense of achievement and self-esteem. While prior studies have established the links between job insecurity and employee behavioural outcomes, to date no study has examine the effect of job insecurity on conflict at the workplace. This study, therefore, argues that when employees feel apprehensive in relation to their employment status they are likely to engage in various forms of conflict.

Conflict, on the other hand, is a much-discussed term over a broad range of disciplines. For example, Coser (1956, p. 8) defines social conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals". The terms of this definition reach out to include political and military power; restricting the context to that of industrial relations, it is acknowledged that workplace conflict emerges when one party to it – whether an individual or a group of individuals – finds that its goals, values or opinions are being thwarted by an interdependent counterpart (Thomas, 1992; Thompson & McHugh, 2002; Van Tonder et al., 2008; Wall & Callister, 1995). Van Tonder et al. (2002), are more specific, and list resource availability,

affirmative action programs, the scope and content of workload, the introduction of new management techniques and differences of a cultural and racial nature as possible sources of conflict at the organisational level. Moreover, an important point brought up by De Dreu and Gelfand (2008, p. 6), is that workplace conflict is inherent in organisations and to a large extent, an autonomous process that is difficult to channel and control. This amplifies the implications of the idea (cited above) of the ‘interdependency’ of the parties in (industrial) conflict.

It is upon dependency created by a need or desire for certain resources that the notion of power becomes a key part of conflict processes. This involves both the initiation of conflict as well as the outcomes of particular conflictual incidents (Blalock, 1989). Power can, thus, broadly be defined as involving both the capacity to act on your own volition and in your own interests as well as the ability to control resources (for example, labour) and bring about desired behaviours in others. Dahl (1957, pp. 202-203) stresses the part played by power in conflicts: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do”. Such use of power creates powerlessness in those employees with lack of job security (Hyman, 1989). This job insecurity is thus the basis of conflict in the industrial relations scene.

The prevailing view among conflict researchers is that conflict outcomes may be either functional or dysfunctional to organisations and teams (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Ferner, Edwards, & Tempel, 2012). It should be noted that the focus of this research is not whether the conflict reported is functional or dysfunctional; rather it examines the role of job insecurity in conflict situations. For purposes of this research, conflict is defined as a perception of incompatibility between the values, needs, interests or actions of multiple parties and is an inherent part of our daily life, both at work and in other settings (Deutsch, 1973; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Wall & Callister, 1995). For instance, there could be conflict between an individual or group, and their line manager/employer, if extra work is delegated to the employee, but no (or insufficient) extra compensation is offered. The individual or group will attend to its own self-interest and seek to rebalance the power relationship. Employees may then resort to a variety of behaviours to redress their workplace frustrations. In situations where the aggrieved party has no access to union support, or where government regulations are either absent or unenforced, then these efforts may include counterproductive behaviours that range from reluctant and minimal compliance to hostility, organisational aggression or sabotage (Fox & Spector, 2005; Storms & Spector, 1987).

## **2. Methods**

This study primarily applies mixed methods to explore employees’ perception in relation to job insecurity and conflict in Botswana construction industry. In this research, survey questionnaire approach was adopted with a large sample to provide a broad overview of employees’ perceptions of three factors as causes of conflict in their respective organisations. The three factors are job security, income distribution and managerial control. Since the research question in this paper seeks to capture understanding on how employees perceive job insecurity, the results on job security are only reported. Also in-depth interviews were conducted to help provide quality information by interacting with the employees (Creswell et al., 2003) on the issue of job security.

Data was collected from eight companies, but due to confidentiality they are only referred to as domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies. Survey data was collected from January to April 2014. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 690 questionnaires were returned while 617 questionnaires were found to be usable as all questions had been answered, hence a response rate of 77%. Among the 617 employees, 397 (64.3%) were male. Furthermore, in this male category 213 (53.7%) worked in domestic-owned companies, 184 (46.3 %) worked in Chinese-owned companies. The sample was made up of 220 (35.7%) females, 131 (59.5%) worked in domestic-owned companies while 89 (40.5%) worked in Chinese-owned companies. As to the employment status in domestic-owned companies; 115 (32%) were permanent, 141 (42%) on contract, and 88 (26%) temporary. In Chinese-owned companies, no employee was a permanent worker, 133 on contract (48%) and 140 (52%) temporary. To further understand the quantitative results, interviews were conducted with 15 employees from both types of companies (seven from domestic-owned and eight from Chinese-owned). The interviewees included among others an accountant, a driver, cleaners, bricklayers and quantity surveyors. The sample size was made up of 60% (9) male and 40% (6) female.

The data processing stage includes the coding and editing of data to eliminate or at least reduce the incidence of invalid or missing data. This process also involves checking the data for respondent eligibility and consistency in classification. Field (2013) and Rowley (2014), emphasis that SPSS can help the researcher to check and verify data and to generate descriptive statistics and charts, graphs to describe and explore the data and also offers a range of statistics for exploring relationships between variables. All responses were deliberately coded in numerical form because data analysis was to be performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The current (at the time) version of SPSS 21.0 was used to address all the research questions. The quantitative data collected was coded and entered into SPSS software and analyzed using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics using t-tests.

Comparative analysis was conducted with independent sample t-tests to determine whether or not a statistically significant difference between two sets of means exist. In this study, independent sample t-tests were used to determine whether a significant difference in employees' perceived causes of conflict exist between domestic- and Chinese-owned companies. An independent-sample t-test was conducted, since it was used to compare the mean scores of two different groups of companies (Pallant 2010). Conducting the t-tests requires that the normality of the data is not violated. Therefore, to test the normality of the distribution for the data, Shapiro-Wilk's and K-S Lilliefors test for normality was conducted. The t-test has been widely used by other researchers in management and HRM who conducted comparative studies (Cheng & Chan, 2008).

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

Independent sample t-test was conducted to assess whether there are any statistical significant differences between domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies on employees' perception about job security as one of the causes of conflict in the workplace. To assess whether there is a link regarding company ownership and gender demographic characteristics

as to how they perceive job security as the main cause of conflict, all responses to statements on job security were analysed using independent t-test as shown in Table 1. Based on ownership, as a comparative analysis, there are statistically significant differences between domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies. Also, based on gender, the results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between males and females in both types of companies on how they perceive job security as the cause of conflict.

Table 1. T-test results on job security and demographic characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	Job security statements									
	Lack of job security is the main cause of dispute		My job is quite secure		Due to low job security, few complaints from employees		Employee can be fired anytime		There is no employment contract	
	Mean	T	Mean	T	Mean	T	Mean	T	Mean	T
Sex	4.04	1.135	2.54	-1.160	3.77	2.254*	3.84	.935	2.94	3.770*
	3.92		2.66		3.54		3.75		2.54	
Ownership	3.82	-4.498*	2.63	.953	3.49	-4.626*	3.53	-6.728*	2.82	.490
	4.22		2.53		3.93		4.16		2.77	

Note: (\*) means there is significance;  $p < .05$

Table 2. Responses on Job security statements in both companies

	Domestic-owned							Chinese-owned						
	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mean	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Lack of job security is the main cause of dispute	3.82	33	36	13	15	2	Disagree	4.22	55	27	5	8	4	
My job is quite secure	2.63	9	20	18	31	22	Strongly Disagree	2.53	8	7	20	32	23	
Due to low job security, there are few complaints from employees'	3.49	23	37	14	19	7	Disagree	3.93	38	33	15	11	3	
Employees can be fired at any time	3.53	29	27	17	22	5	Disagree	4.16	47	33	12	6	2	
There is no employment contract signed	2.82	15	19	15	38	13	Strongly Disagree	2.77	16	2	14	48	10	

Respondents were asked to rate the statement on a Likert scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree)

The results in Table 2 demonstrate that 69% of respondents in domestic-owned companies and 82% in Chinese-owned companies are of the view that lack of job security is the cause of conflict. This finding provides support to the notion that foreign-owned companies offer less



secure employment because they can more easily shift production across locations and this result in employees losing their jobs (Dill & Jirjahn, 2014). In addition, 60% of employees in domestic-owned companies and 71% of employees from Chinese-owned companies indicate that due to low job security, there are few employee complaints to their employers. Also, 56% of employees in domestic-owned companies and 80% of employees from Chinese-owned companies perceived that they could be fired at any time. Although there are statistically significant differences on job security as the cause of conflict on the above statements, the respondents from both Chinese-owned and domestic-owned companies perceived no differences based on ownership on certain statements. Specifically, on the following statements; 2 (my job is not secure) and 5 (there are no employment contract signed), employees in both types of companies shared similar sentiments. The results of this study provide evidence that there are statistically significant differences in the forms of conflict that employees in domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies engage in as a response to causes of conflict.

Table 3 presents demographic characteristics of the 15 interview respondents. The interviewees were drawn from six companies, 47% (7) from domestic-owned companies and 53% (8) Chinese-owned companies. The employees' level of education ranged from a master's degree in engineering to the minimum of primary education. Although most employees (8) were in their mid-to-late 30s, the ages of employees ranged from 29 to 55 years old. Tenure of employment ranged from ten months to 16 years.

Table 3. Profile of the interviewees

<b>Domestic-owned companies</b>								
<b>Respondents</b>	<b>R1</b>	<b>R2*</b>	<b>R3</b>	<b>R4</b>	<b>R5*</b>	<b>R6*</b>	<b>R7</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	
<b>Age</b>	55	36	42	42	39	34	39	
<b>Nationality</b>	Motswana	Motswana	Motswana	Motswana	Motswana	Motswana	Zimbabwean	
<b>Education</b>	Tertiary	Secondary	Primary	Vocational	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
<b>Position</b>	Accountant	Cleaner	Cleaner	Carpenter	Labourer	Labourer	Quantity Surveyor	
<b>Salary (Pula)/month</b>	+20000	1100	1000	2500	1500	1000	+30000	
<b>Experience</b>	20 years	5 years	5 years	12 years	6 years	2 years	12 years	
<b>Tenure</b>	16 years	3 years	2 years	5 years	4 years	1 year	7 years	
<b>Chinese-owned companies</b>								
<b>Respondents</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>R9</b>	<b>R10</b>	<b>R11</b>	<b>R12*</b>	<b>R13</b>	<b>R14</b>	<b>R15</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
<b>Age</b>	29	40	30	30	49	38	35	38
<b>Nationality</b>	Motswana	Zimbabwean	Motswana	Motswana	Zimbabwean	Motswana	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwean
<b>Education</b>	Secondary	Vocational	Secondary	Primary	Tertiary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
<b>Position</b>	Storekeeper	Builder	Receptionis t	Labourer	Quantity Surveyor	Cleaner	Driver	Plumber
<b>Salary (Pula)/month</b>	1500	1500-2500	1200	1500-2000	+27000	1000	1800	6500
<b>Experience</b>	2 years	12 years	1.4 years	3 years	10 years	10 years	8years	10 years
<b>Tenure</b>	1 year	2 years	10 months	2 years	5 years	5 months	4 years	4 years

From the interviews, an appreciation of the motivations behind the statistics above can be discerned. For example, R9 who works in a Chinese-owned company noted in relation to the level of job security:

...the atmosphere is very tight. There is no freedom anymore. Now you are afraid that someone will see you if you take a five minute break and will tell the manager that you don't work. They continuously keep their eyes on you, hoping you'll make a mistake so they can get rid of you. (R9)

Also, R5 who has worked for a Chinese-owned company, but now works for a domestic-owned company expressed the following views:

I have no choice. If I complain, and if my job is in jeopardy, I have nowhere to go. So I am forced to be quiet and not to complain. I have no one to talk to about these issues, because if I can go talk to someone at the labour offices, I'd only make my situation worse. (R5)

These opinions were shared by a majority of employees in both types of company-ownership. Employees believe that the procedures in their companies were unfair, and that their work behaviours are over-scrutinised. As a result, they were more resentful and more likely to



behave aggressively towards their supervisors. This finding also provides support in favour of previous studies in this line of investigation (Choi & Chen, 2007; Deng, 2014) The results also reveal that those employees who fear job loss at unexpected times may find themselves taking shorter breaks, stay longer and volunteering for extra work. All these actions are attempts to show dedication and thus increase their profile so that they may not lose their job. Previous research indicates that the perception of having a job, but not knowing whether it is secure, has been classified as one of the more stressful burdens that an employee can shoulder (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Probst, 2010; Reisel et al., 2010). Job insecurity then means employees are bound to react or respond to this situation hence leading to more conflict.

The findings of the current study also reinforces the work of other scholars such as Callea et al. (2016) who find that job insecurity is more of a negative for temporary employees since these employees experience a (perceived) gross violation of the psychological contract. The statistical findings on employment status demographic indicate that most of the employees who work on temporary basis, in both companies constitute a higher proportion of respondents who maintain that lack of job security is the main cause of conflict. Notably, the means are significantly different between domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies; 4.19 and 4.24 respectively. On the statement due to “low job security, there are few complaints from employees”, the means are significantly different between domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies; 3.72 and 3.94 respectively. On the statement “employees can be fired at any time” means are significantly different between domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies; 3.69 and 4.28 respectively. It can be observed that the respondents who mostly agree with the above statements on job security are more prevalent in the temporary group as compared to those on permanent and contract employment. The quotes below were expressed by two employees that reflect the increased tension suffered by temporary employees due to lack of job security. The first view by R3 was expressed by an employee in a domestic-owned company, while the second by R2 who was previously a temporary employee in a Chinese-owned company expressed their views below:

Temporary employees don't have any assurance of job security, although our employer can generally fire anyone at any time with reasons or no reasons, those of us who were employed as temporary workers are at risk. We can be discharged at any time especially if the company does not have any contract. (R3)

Those in domestic-owned companies who disagree that lack of job security is the main cause of dispute could be those who were employed as permanent / contract staff. They could be the most experienced and highly skilled labour force. Signing and agreeing on long term or permanent contracts of employment gives an employee some piece of mind about future planning, housing or personal loans. This is so because employees feel they have a source of permanent income. But if you are just like me no bank or micro lenders will listen to you, I hear the interest rate is even higher than my salary [stated with a very serious face]. (R2)

Given the responses from respondents on the above quotes indicate that employment status has an impact on how employees perceived job security as one of the main causes of disputes (or more generally ‘conflict’). R2 who worked previously in Chinese-owned company is of

the view that if one is employed on temporary basis, there is no assurance that tomorrow they will still be employed, and this is also due to the nature of construction industry which depends on availability of work or projects that need to be done. Additionally, R3 who works in a domestic-owned company maintains that if one has a more stable job he/she will be able to plan for the future. It will also become easy for them to access credit facilities from financial institutions because the banks will know that they will be able to get their money back, hence it makes sense to see few of those on contract and permanent status agreeing that lack of job security is the main cause of disputes. Based on the interviewees' perceptions the results demonstrate that employees from both types of companies do agree that those employed on temporary status are more prone to job insecurity hence the results shows that perceived higher job insecurity raised the potential level of conflict.

The findings of this study indicate that employees from Chinese-owned companies are of the view that due to lack of job security, employees tend to tolerate a lot from the employers, for fear of being dismissed from work, and this is supported by other studies in a similar context (Fajana, 2008; Giese & Thiel, 2015; Iyanda, 1999; Omari & Paull, 2015). In the present study, it is evident that there is a positive relationship between employment status and job insecurity and this is consistent with Wang et al. (2016). For example, in Chinese-owned companies, the results indicate that there is significant relationship between temporary work and perception of job insecurity. The results indicate that 72% of temporary workers report high incidents of job insecurity and this is consistent with the findings of Bernhard-Oettel et al. (2011), De Cuper et al. (2005) and Kraimer et al. (2005).

In the context of this study, in 2014 Botswana had an unemployment rate of 20%, a fact that has become particularly harmful for employees, as it places pressure on them to work harder and for longer hours, in response to their feelings of uncertainty about their future. The findings of this study (with respect to perceptions of job insecurity) is consistent with the International Labour Organization's (2001) and Probst and Brubaker's (2001) research, both of which found that due to a high unemployment rate in most developing countries, construction employees stay in a job because there are few or no alternatives. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted in construction settings (ILO, 2001; Olomolaiye & Ogunlana, 1988) suggesting that the perceived threats to job loss have deleterious effects on employees. Therefore, the findings of this study in Botswana confirm the assertion that workers are forced to endure poor industrial relations, poor working conditions, high job insecurity, long working hours and low wages. R2 who worked in a Chinese-owned company argues that it is only during compliance of health and safety audit visits by government officials that employees are provided with protective gear. Although in both types of ownership employees perceive and share the same sentiments above, it appears that Chinese-owned companies more often than not have poor working conditions and do not provide employees with protective clothing. The few companies that do provide the protective clothing do deduct the money from employees' wages.

Similarly, in a study conducted in Zambia, Li (2010) found that non-ferrous mining companies in Africa, and in particular Chinese-owned companies at large, have an adverse reputation regarding labour and environmental practices, and the neglect of corporate social responsibility.

For example, the 2005 Beijing General Research Institute of Mining and Metallurgy noted that an explosion in a Chinese-owned copper mine killed almost 50 Zambian workers and fuelled much negative reputation for Chinese companies (Li, 2010). This same study also notes that Swiss, British, South African and Canadian companies are said to have better labour and environmental standards.

In the present study, the results indicate that most of the respondents work long hours not because they are explicitly told to do so but because they implicitly expected to, and the repercussions for not doing so threatens their livelihoods. This concurs with the findings of Baah and Jauch (2009), Guliwe (2009) and Olomolaiye and Ogunlana (1988). Specifically, Baah and Jauch (2009) found that in most cases, workers felt that they had no choice but to work long hours of overtime, even without any extra pay. For instance, in Zimbabwe and Ghana, most workers in Chinese companies reported that they are forced to work overtime and long hours (around 9 -12 hours per day) for seven days per week; and this is in contravention of the national labour laws. Workers are aware that a refusal to work such long hours would lead to automatic dismissal.

This study further established that job insecurity is perceived as a breach of relational psychological contract entitlements, which, in turn, reduces job satisfaction and organisational commitment, thus leading to deviant behaviours. This contradicts the Sutton (2007) finding that workers with job insecurity increase their work effort and productivity to earn extra cash and a good recommendation in preparation for a job loss. Hence, the findings of the current study suggest that job insecurity, and consequent conflict through deviant behaviour, is related to unfavourable outcomes particularly among those working on a temporary employment basis in Chinese-owned companies. As such, the research question posed in this paper is to the affirmative; i.e. that employees' perceptions of job insecurity is a significant cause of conflict in the construction sector.

#### **4. Conclusion and Future research**

One of the limitations of this study is that the samples were drawn from domestic-owned and Chinese-owned companies' only construction firms in Gaborone, Francistown and Palapye. Therefore, future research can be conducted to address this limitation; for instance, other construction company ownerships such as South African, joint ventures, and those that operate in other locations could be considered. A consensus can only be reached by accumulating evidence from a more representative sample of the whole population. Therefore, the current study offers a base for future research.

The findings of this study on job insecurity are augmented by a number of other factors such as the external economic and social environment. The effects of global financial crises and high unemployment rates also influence the work environment (e.g. employees) are of the view that since the unemployment rate is high, then there are limited options for obtaining jobs. Hence, employees stay in current jobs regardless of the unfairness perceived.

Based on the findings in this paper, construction employees are of the view that more often than not, they are left with the choice of quitting their jobs or going to the courts. However,

quitting is viewed as a difficult choice since there are very few jobs in the construction industry, hence certain employees end up staying in the same jobs just to make ends meet. Secondly, because of low job security employees usually find it difficult to report cases of abuse by the employers, as it has been observed that employers usually terminate the employment of those employees who take them to court. Thus, the option of justice is viewed to be too costly by the majority of employees. This raises the issue of alternative forms of 'justice' which is reflected in labour conflict that emerges in various covert forms such as absenteeism, sabotage and theft/pilfering (Edwards & Scullion, 1982). The research project based on the data collected from the Botswana construction industry aims to address this issue in a future paper.

## **5. Practice Implications**

Authors such as Herrmann (1995) and Ratner (2001) argue that governments in some emerging economies overlook human rights abuses perpetrated by foreign investors, provided the latter are satisfying certain economic targets. For example, Idemudia (2009) and Orogun (2010) found that in Nigeria, oil companies where high revenues are accruing to local government are associated with political and economic marginalisation of local inhabitants who have been negatively affected by environmental degradation.

As a result of the findings of this study, it is recommended that when government engages with businesses (e.g. construction companies), the focus should not only be on business interests, but should be broadened to include certain social aspects of life. The government should take concerted action to regulate and manage the country's growing foreign investment, especially the Chinese presence, by strengthening the enforcement of, and adherence to, laws and regulations governing immigration, labour practices and investment policies. The findings of this study indicate that employees in Chinese-owned construction companies perceive that some areas of conflict that lead to job insecurity arise due to lack of mutual cultural understanding; for instance, language barriers have been indicated as a problem which often leads to poor communication between supervisors and employees, which can in turn lead to misunderstandings of each other's intentions. Non-compliance to set minimum wages and employment contracts regulations often lead to tensions and conflicts within the workplace. The construction industry is one that needs much better regulation and more appreciation by the companies (especially Chinese-owned) of the social implications of the precarious nature of employment of their employees. In this way, job security can be more assured, leading to less conflict and greater productivity, which would greatly benefit the economic development of countries like Botswana.

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