# Affective Commitment as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Psychological Climate and Turnover Intention

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**Abstract:** The present study examined the relationships among psychological climate perceptions, affective commitment and turnover intentions in a sample of Turkish employees from private security services. The results indicated that psychological climate perceptions related positively to affective commitment and negatively to turnover intentions. In addition, mediational analyses showed that affective commitment partially mediated the relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions. Implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

**Key words:** Psychological climate • Affective commitment • Turnover intentions • Turkey

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, research has focused on understanding the antecedents of voluntary turnover because of its consequences for organizations in terms of loss of valuable human resources, recruiting and training costs of new employees, excess burden on remaining employees and interruption of ongoing activities [1, 2]. Turnover intentions have been shown to be the immediate precursor to actual turnover [3, 4]. Furthermore, the relation between turnover intention and actual turnover has been well-established in the mainstream literature [2, 3]. While there are a variety of antecedents for turnover intention, one of the most common is characteristics of the work environment [3].

Griffeth et al.'s [3] meta-analysis on the antecedents and correlates of employee turnover has shown that the characteristics of the work environment, such as job content, job stress, group cohesion, autonomy and leadership can impact employee turnover intention. The experience of job related dissatisfaction and organizational commitment have been also shown as the precursors of turnover intentions [5]. With regard to Turkish studies, Gül et al. [6] have demonstrated the negative link between job satisfaction and turnover intention. The study conducted by Sabuncuoğlu [7] in Turkey's Top 500 Industrial Enterprise has showed that support from management and colleagues have significant negative relationship with turnover intentions. Futhermore, Çekmecelioğlu [8] have found that the work characteristics such as support from supervisor, encouragement and challenge are the predictors of turnover intentions.

In a work environment, several social and structural features of the organization can affect work attitudes [9-11]. Employees cognitively perceive and assess every aspect of their work environment [12, 13]. The perception and interpretation of the work environment leads employees to behave in a way that is meaningful to them, creating a psychological climate. Psychological climate is defined as being a set of perceptions and interpretations held by employees toward issues of organizational structures, processes and events [9, 11, 12]. In other words, overall thoughts and feelings about the work environment that an employee experiences and reports are the foundation for the psychological climate that he or she perceives. In the literature, there is a general acceptance on the conceptualization of climate as a multilevel construct [12]. At the individual level, psychological climate refers to individuals' perceptions of interpretations of their work environment, whereas organizational climate refers to a group-level construct that reflects beliefs about the work environment that are shared by organizational members [10, 14]. Thus, psychological climate is an individual rather than an organizational attribute [15]. Nevertheless Parker et al. [12] has suggested that, in climate research, if the criterion variable is viewed as a characteristic of an individual, psychological climate should be the appropriate construct of choice.

Most of the previous research has indicated that psychological climate is a multidimensional construct [16]. Although researchers have proposed several models of psychological climate, employees' perceptions and interpretations of their work environment can be classified under generic categories based on job, role, leader, work group and organizational characteristics [12]. In a similar way, Brown and Leigh [15] have conceptualized psychological climate as a multidimensional construct composed of six common dimensions: Supportive management (i.e., the extent that management is perceived by an employee as giving autonomy and responsibility for his or her work), role clarity (i.e., the extent that role expectations and work situations are perceived by an employee as clear, consistent, or predictable), contribution (i.e., the extent that an employee perceive his or her role-related performance is important, in terms of contributing and adding value to broader organizational goals), recognition (i.e., the extent that management is perceived by an employee as recognizing and appreciating his or her work efforts), self-expression (i.e., the degree that an employee perceives that there are organizational sanctions for expressions of individuality in his or her work roles) and challenge (i.e., the degree that an employee feels that work is challenging and requires the use of creativity and a variety of skills). Although psychological climate is a multidimensional construct, researchers has found a higher-order, general factor (PCg) that represents an employee's overall psychological appraisal of the work environment [11].

Since employees respond to their perceptions and valuations of their work environment rather than to the environment itself, psychological perceptions have significant influences on employees' behavior [9, 17]. Research has indicated that psychological climate often mediates the relationships between actual organizational events and employees' attitudes and behaviors [12, 16]. Parker et al.'s [12] metaanalysis on the relationships between psychological climate perceptions and work outcomes has shown that psychological climate predicted work outcomes such as individual performance, through the mediating mechanism of work attitudes like commitment. Furthermore, Langkamer and Ervin [18] have found that psychological climate perceptions impacted turnover intentions by influencing employees' affective commitment. With regard to Turkish studies, Devecioğlu [19] have demonstrated that perceived organizational support impacted turnover intentions by influencing employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Likewise, Çekmecelioğlu [8]

has found that organizational commitment mediated the relationship between the work characteristics such as training activities and turnover intentions.

Organizational commitment has long been a topic of great interest to researchers due to its association with desirable outcomes such as employee performance, organizational citizenship, absenteeism and turnover [20]. Although the early conceptualizations of organizational commitment were unidimensional, Meyer and Allen's [21] three-component model has gained popularity and substantial empirical support among several alternative models of commitment [22]. The first component of the organizational commitment model by Meyer and Allen [21] is affective commitment that reflects the extent to which subordinates emotionally attach to, identify with and involve in the organization (i.e., employees stay with the organization because they want to). The second component, continuance commitment, is based on employees' perceptions of the costs associated with leaving the organization and perceived lack of alternatives (i.e., employees stay with the organization because they need to). The third component, normative commitment refers to feelings of obligation to remain with the organization (i.e., employees stay with the organization because they feel they should).

Much of the empirical work has focused on affective commitment [22, 23] due to its association with desirable outcomes such as job performance, fewer intentions to quit the organization, lower turnover and reduced absenteeism [3, 24-26]. As cited by Wasti [22], Stanley et al. [27] conducted a meta-analysis that evaluated the cross-cultural generalizability of Meyer and Allen's [21] model and showed that turnover intention correlated negatively with affective commitment. Research has indicated that employees develop feelings of affective commitment primarily from positive work-related experiences [25]. Perception of organizational support and justice [21], recognition and appreciation [20], leadership [22] has found to be important work-related antecedents of affective commitment. Furthermore, psychological climate perceptions have related to affective commitment. [18].

Research Model and Hypotheses: The purpose of the present study is to explore antecedents of turnover intention using a sample of employees from private security services. As mentioned above, there is cumulated evidence suggesting that the relationship between psychological climate and work outcome is mediated by work attitudes [12]. Affective commitment has been found

to mediate the relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions [18]. Furthermore, several Turkish studies have shown the mediating role of commitment on the relationship between organizational characteristics and turnover intentions [8, 19]. Consequently, from this perspective, employees' perception and interpretation of the work environment would first influence affective commitment toward their organizations and subsequently further modify or change intentions to quit their organizations. Specifically, in the present study, it is expected that affective commitment would mediate the relationships climate perceptions between psychological turnover intentions. The following hypotheses were proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a negative relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive relationship between psychological climate perceptions and affective commitment.

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions is mediated by affective commitment.

# MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Procedure: A convenience sample of 238 employees from several companies in Ankara was collected. Companies operated in private security services and their sizes ranged from 14 to 51 employees. Permission was secured from top management and then employee lists were provided by the personnel or HR department of the companies. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymity of responses was guaranteed. Employees were asked to report their perceptions of psychological climate, affective commitment and turnover intentions. Of the 238 employees, 21% were female and 71% were male. The employees' ages were concentrated in the 25-30, representing almost 87% of the sample. Majority of the employees had been in their jobs for over one year and for the sample average length of tenure within their organization was 2.79 years (SD= 1.23). Of those who reported their education level, 80.2% held a high school or a college degree, 18.1% held a bachelors degree and the remaining 1.7% held a graduate school degree.

Measures: All the main constructs included in the study were assessed with self-report measures. Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Since the Psychological Climate Scale was originally in English; two-way translations were performed by two bilinguals with English and Turkish proficiencies to ensure equivalency of meaning [28] and the scale was then piloted with a group of employees. The specific measures used in the present study are outlined below.

Psychological Climate Scale: Employees' perceptions of psychological climate were measured with the 21 items proposed by Brown and Leigh [15]. Employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on each item of the scale that included six dimensions of psychological climate (e.g., "My boss is flexible about how I accomplish my job objectives"). Higher scores indicated higher level of psychological climate perceptions. In an effort to examine whether the six dimensions of psychological climate scale represent a higher-order (PCg) factor, a second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model of psychological climate was tested on the present data through an analysis of covariance structures using LISREL 8 [29]. Although the results obtained ( $\chi^2$  [44, N = 238] = 104.30, RMSEA = .071, GFI = . 93, CFI = . 92, IFI = . 92, NNFI = . 90) showed an acceptable fit for the first-order model representing that 21 items loaded on six factors, the second-order factor model  $(\chi^2 [41, N = 238] = 93.22, \text{RMSEA} = .059, \text{GFI} = .95, \text{CFI} = .$ 95, IFI = . 95, NNFI = . 92) fit the data fairly well, suggesting that dimensions of psychological climate have a higherorder factor (PCg). Comparison of the first-order model and second-order model showed no significant change in  $\chi^2$  relative to the difference in degrees of freedom. The second-order factor model suggesting that dimensions of psychological climate have a higher-order factor (PCg), was selected for testing the hypotheses based on the findings of CFA. Coefficient alpha for psychological climate scale was. 88.

Affective Commitment Scale: Employees' affective commitment was assessed with the eight-item scale developed by Wasti [30]. Employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on each item of the scale (e.g., "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own"). Higher scores indicated higher level of affective commitment. Previous research has suggested that the scale has good psychometric properties and can be used as a single-factor measure

[31]. Before testing the hypothesis, the affective commitment scale was subjected to a series of CFA and the results showed satisfactory fit for the one-factor model ( $\chi^2$  [27, N= 238] = 51.44, RMSEA = .061, GFI = .94, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, NNFI = .98), specifying that each item load on a single factor. For the present study, Cronbach alpha was .89.

Turnover Intention Scale: Employees' attitudes about leaving the job was assesed with the three-item scale that was developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh [32]. Employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on each item of the scale (e.g., "I often think of leaving the organization"). Items were coded so that higher scores represented higher levels of turnover intentions. Gül et al. [6] has shown that the items comprising the Turkish version of the scale assess a single underlying factor. Before testing the hypothesis, the turnover intention scale was subjected to a series of CFA and the results indicated reasonable fit for the onefactor model ( $\chi^2$  [27, N = 238] = 49.11, RMSEA = .057, GFI =. 95, CFI =. 99, IFI =. 99, NNFI =. 99), specifying that each item load on a single factor. For the present study, Cronbach alpha was. 91.

**Data Analyses:** To test the degree to which affective commitment mediates the relationship between perceptions of psychological climate and turnover intentions, hierarchical regression analysis was used. For mediational analysis, the mediation procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny [33] was used, which required three separate analyses. Demographic variables (age, gender, education and tenure) were included as control variables to minimize their spurious effects. Demographic variables might explain some of the variance in perceptions of psychological climate and/or turnover intentions [34-36].

## RESULTS

The means, standard deviations and correlations among all the variables for the sample are presented in Table 1. All the measures have acceptable internal consistency reliability estimates. Most of the control variables were not intercorrelated with each other, except age and tenure (r=. 15, p<. 05) and gender and education (r=. 14, p<. 05) relationship. Tenure was also slightly correlated with affective commitment (r=. 14, p<. 05) and turnover intentions (r=-.14, p<. 05). This indicates that it is possible that employees' affective commitment toward their organizations can develop and turnover intentions can decrease over time. Correlation results showed that both psychological climate (r=-.33, p<. 01) and affective commitment (r=-.44, p<. 01) correlated moderately with turnover intentions.

Table 2 reports the results of the multiple regression analysis. Controlling for the effects of demographics variables, the regression results were consistent with the correlations. That is, psychological climate was a significant predictor of both affective commitment ( $\beta$ =. 41, p < 0.01) and turnover intentions ( $\beta$ = -.29, p < 0.01). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were supported. The coefficient associated with the relation between affective commitment and turnover intentions (controlling for psychological climate) also was significant ( $\beta$ = -.32, p < 0.01). Thus, pre-conditions for mediational analysis were met.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that affective commitment would mediate the relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions. Table 2 shows the results of the mediation analyses, following Baron and Kenny's [33] three-step approach. In order to fully support the hypothesis, the relationships between the predictor variables (psychological climate) and

Table 1: Means,	standard	deviations	and in	tercorrelations	of all	variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0.79	0.40	-						
2. Age	26.51	2.52	0.07	-					
3. Tenure	2.79	1.23	0.11	0.15*	-				
4. Education	1.21	0.45	0.14*	0.09	0.07	-			
5. Psychological Climate	3.71	0.7	0.06	0.09	0.09	0.09	(.88)		
6. Affective commitment	3.60	0.89	0.09	0.11	0.14*	0.11	0.48**	(.89)	
7. Turnover intentions	2.94	1.18	-0.01	-0.12	-0.14*	-0.05	-0.33**	-0.44**	(.91)

Note. \*\* $p \le 01$ ; \* $p \le 05$ ; N = 238; internal reliability estimates (a) are presented in parentheses along the diagonal; women coded 0, men coded 1; high school/college degree coded 1, bachelors degree coded 2 and graduate school degree coded 3.

Table 2: Results of hierarchical regression for testing mediation

Steps and variables	Affective Commitment	Turnover Intentions		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Control variables				
Gender	.10	.02	.01	
Age	.11	11	10	
Tenure	.16*	15*	14*	
Education	.10	01	02	
Predictor variable				
Psychological Climate	.41**	29**	16*	
Mediator variable				
Affective Commitment			32**	
$\Delta R^2$	.05**	.15***	.05**	
$\Delta F$	6.07**	17.94***	6.07**	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.19	.22	

*Note.* \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05; N = 238;  $\Delta R^2$  is for the last variable entered into the model.

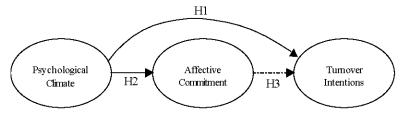


Fig. 1: Research Model and Hypotheses

turnover intentions must disappear when the affective commitment variable are entered in a final step. As reported in Table 2, when the effects of affective commitment was controlled, the association between psychological climate and turnover intentions decreased (from  $\beta$ = -.29 to  $\beta$ = -.16). This indicated that affective commitment partially mediated the relationship between psychological climate and turnover intentions. Further, the Sobel test [33, 37] indicated that affective commitment was a significant partial mediator between psychological climate and turnover intentions (z= -2.62, p<.05). In terms of the total effect that was mediated, 45.24% of the relationship between psychological climate and turnover intentions was mediated by affective commitment. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

## DISCUSSION

The main aims of this research were to test a psychological climate and turnover intentions model and examine the mediational role of affective commitment. In terms of the first and second hypothesis, the results indicated that psychological climate perceptions were significantly associated with affective commitment and

controlling turnover intentions, even after demographic variables. Additionally, affective commitment was found to predict turnover intentions. With regard to the third hypothesis, affective commitment was found to partially mediate the relationship between psychological climate and turnover intentions. In a more specific way, perceptions of psychological climate predict turnover intentions, either directly and/or through the mediating role of affective commitment. Although, Langkamer and Ervin [18] found that affective commitment fully mediated the relationship between psychological climate perceptions and turnover intentions; the partial mediation, as found in this study, may be a realistic goal for the social sciences, given the multiple causes of psychological phenomena [33].

The findings of this study supported the role of employees' perception and assessment of their work environment on their behaviors and attitudes [9, 17]. More importantly, however, the results suggested that when an employee perceives that the work environment is personally beneficial to his or her sense of wellbeing [9, 11], he or she is more committed to work and his or her turnover intention decreases [12]. The findings of this study were also similar to the findings of Turkish studies

[8, 19]. Given the scarcity of empirical research on turnover intentions and psychological climate in Turkey, this study may contribute to the literature by showing that employees' perceptions and valuations of their work environment influence affective commitment toward their organizations and modify or change intentions to quit their organizations.

Research has suggested that psychological climate perceptions have significant influences on employees' behavior and attitudes [9, 12, 17]. This study indicates that organizations and managers may help to develop employees' affective commitment and decrease turnover intentions if they invest in more positive climate [18]. Considering that psychological climate perceptions have influences on employees' behaviors and attitudes [12], such an investment may enhance not only commitment of their employees, but also employees' overall performance. As a result, for organizations to be effective in part through behaviors and attitudes of their employees, they should care about how employees perceive the work environment, considering a number of aspects such as giving an employee autonomy and responsibility for his or her work; defining clear, consistent, or predictable work roles; emphasizing that an employee's role-related performance is important; recognizing and appreciating an employee's work efforts; providing a climate for expressions of individuality.

There are several limitations in this study. Due to cross-sectional nature of the study, it is not possible to draw any inferences regarding causal relations among the variables. Future research with a longitudinal design should examine the causal relationships found in this study. Further, data for variables was collected from the same source (employees) and this may raise concerns about common method variance [38]. Future studies should collect data for variables from separate sources (i.e., employees, employers). Last, the respondents in this study were from a single culture and small companies. Future studies may test if the empirical findings replicate in other samples of interest as well as across nationalities and cultures.

In conclusion, despite these limitations, the results of this study provide evidence that perceptions of psychological climate have a negative effect on employees' turnover intentions. Furthermore, the findings indicate that psychological climate perceptions predict turnover intentions, either directly and/or through the mediating role of affective commitment.

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