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# **EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF CO-WORKER SUPPORT AND ITS EFFECT ON JOB SATISFACTION, WORK STRESS AND INTENTION TO QUIT**

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## Abstract

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Co-worker support has received an increasing amount of attention recently due to the positive effects it can have in the workplace. It can increase job satisfaction and has been found to help reduce work stress. As both of these are possible antecedents of intention to quit, this study investigated employee perceptions of perceived co-worker support and its effect on job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit. It was theorised that co-worker support would have a positive relationship with job satisfaction and negative relationships with work stress and intention to quit. Co-worker support was also hypothesised to act as a moderator variable in the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and the relationship between work stress and intention to quit. Participants completed a questionnaire which included measures of co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit. In a sample of ninety-eight retail employees co-worker support was found to have a significant relationship with job satisfaction and intention to quit, however no direct relationship was found between co-worker support and intention to quit. On this occasion, no moderating effects were found. These findings emphasise the need for organisations to be aware of the importance of co-worker support.

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## Introduction

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Research within the area of social support and its beneficial effects in the workplace has become increasingly popular in the last two decades (Ducharme & Martin, 2000) and more recently the idea of researching different types of support, for example supervisor and co-worker support has received an increasing amount of attention (McCalister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon & Steinhardt, 2006; Albar Marin & Garcia-Ramirez, 2005). One key reason for this is that each source of support can have different effects on other variables. For example, some researchers argue that co-worker support is more relevant to overall satisfaction with the job where as supervisor support relates to specific job satisfaction areas (Seers, McGee, Serey & Graen, 1983). Due to an increasing number of organisations relying more heavily on work teams to achieve organisational objectives the research on co-worker support is becoming progressively more important (Ducharme & Martin, 2000) thus the present research is timely.

The present research aimed to further the findings of the past research and expand on it using a retail environment. Of particular interest here was the relationship between perception of co-worker support and its effect on job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit. The present research investigated the effects of co-worker support on job satisfaction and work stress and the consequent effects on an employee's intention to quit, with the objective of providing some insight into the importance of co-worker support in the retail industry. A retail setting is particularly appropriate for examining co-worker support due to its potentially stressful environment and the simultaneous interaction between employees, supervisors and customers (Babin & Boles, 1996). This means that interactions can occur among all three groups at the same time. Another reason for conducting the present study at

this time was the interest shown in this topic by a regional manager for one of the organisations eventually involved in the study who was working on various human resource management issues, including training and was interested in how important co-worker support was for job satisfaction and intention to quit. There was the potential that the results of this study could have an immediate application and could help to reduce high turnover of staff in the organisations that took part in the study.

### ***Overview of the Retail Environment***

In an industry that is continually going through increases and decreases in sales and revenue, retailers are constantly challenged to create a supportive environment and retain a competent workforce. Retailers must also work to dispel many negative perceptions of the industry such as low pay and long hours in order to attract staff. If retailers can provide a supportive work environment, they may be able to alleviate some work stressors such as the longer working hours (Knight, Cruisinger & Kim, 2006). The retail industry is a significant part of New Zealand's economy, employing 325,000 people, around twenty percent of the national workforce. Annual retail sales in New Zealand are more than \$50 billion and in the year ended September 2007 retail sales increased by 5.8 percent in dollar terms ([www.retail.org.nz](http://www.retail.org.nz)).

It is an obvious but sometimes disregarded point that you need staff to sell, in order to create a profit in this industry. It has been found that especially in restaurants there is a significant link between employees' perception of co-worker support and a commitment to the guests, which is ultimately related to the guests' satisfaction (Susskind, Kacmar & Borchgrevink, 2007). It is the employees delivering the customer service who influence how

customers feel about their service. By gaining an understanding about what keeps employees happy and productive it will help to ensure customers receive a high standard of service (Susskind, Kacmar & Borchgrevink, 2003).

As of June 2007 there were 98100 males employed in the retail industry and 121240 females. The turnover rates in retail have increased over the past year and are currently 20.7 percent for females and 18 percent for males (Personal communication, Ronald Mair, Statistics NZ, 11.09.08). This is above the national turnover rate of 17.5 percent and may be due to climb higher (Labour Market Statistics Report, 2007). Therefore, the present research provides valuable information about what effects employees' intention to quit, which immediately precedes turnover.

Turnover in the retail industry has always been high but it has never been a major problem due to the abundance of young people ready to step into a retail career. However, now with the increase in labour shortages and an aging workforce, industries such as retail are facing a large problem. In the March 2007 year, female employment levels were particularly volatile with the labour market participation rate and employment levels falling in the last quarter (Department of Labour, 2008). This is a worrying trend due to the fact that many females are employed in the retail industry. Therefore, it is necessary for organisations to be aware of what affects employee's decisions to remain with or leave an organisation. The present research investigated whether co-worker support has an effect on employees' intention to quit and also whether job satisfaction and work stress have any effect on intention to quit. As the participants are mainly female, the results will be extremely beneficial to organisations where they have a large number of female employees, in helping to reduce turnover.

It has been indicated that managerial philosophies and values influence an organisation's internal business practices, which, in turn, influence employee and customer interactions and behaviours. Employees are found to have a higher level of commitment to their customers when they have high perception of co-worker support (Susskind et al., 2003). In addition perceptions of co-worker support influences employee performance and attendance, and employees have been described as being more attentive and courteous when perceptions of co-worker support are high (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

An important finding made by La Rocco and Jones (1978) in their research on co-worker and leader support is that there was a positive correlation between co-worker support and a greater tendency to remain in the organisation. Given the high turnover rates in the retail industry as stated above, it is important to create a supportive work environment to help reduce this turnover rate while at the same time creating a competitive advantage over other retailers. Research has shown that people need to be seen as a source of strategic advantage and having a supportive work environment does help create a competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 2005). The present study explored the relationship between co-worker support and intention to quit, and investigated whether co-worker support can reduce an employee's thoughts of leaving an organisation.

Although there has been much research conducted on co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit as individual variables, there is limited information on how employee perceptions of co-worker support in a retail setting affect the other three variables. In such a competitive market this information will be beneficial for employers to gain an increased insight into how important employee's perceptions of support

are and provide them with information that could help to reduce turnover and improve productivity.

### ***Co-worker Support***

Co-worker support has the ability to make a working environment a pleasure or an unpleasant place to spend your time. There have been a number of studies done previously on social support in the workplace, in particular concentrating on supervisor support. As Hodson (1997) convincingly argued, the social relations of the workplace may make a key contribution to employees' job satisfaction, productivity and well-being. The present study however, places its focus on employee perceptions of co-worker support, as it is co-workers that employees are always in contact with on a day to day basis in a retail industry. Co-worker support refers to co-workers assisting one another in their tasks when needed by sharing knowledge and expertise as well as providing encouragement and support (Zhou & George, 2001). Material rewards such as pay, rank and influence over policy would increase perceived support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Co-worker support can also provide or fail to provide a basis for solidarity and united resistance to management. Along with this co-worker support has important affects outside the work place. For example, positive social relationships have been found to be linked to physical and mental health (Kaul & Lakey, 2003).

An opposing view to the research stated above is that co-worker support could in fact have negative interpretations. Co-workers' behaviours may be viewed as political or self-enhancing and therefore it may not always be associated with constructive work attitudes. Accepting support from co-workers may suggest incompetence on behalf of the person

accepting the support. Specifically, because peers are usually regarded as equal, support from co-workers may suggest a lack of ability or independence (Ng & Sorenson, 2008). Despite this, there is overwhelming evidence that co-worker support has many positive effects in the work place (Babins & Boles, 1996).

Interest in co-worker support has been heightened lately due to diversity in the work place and a growing focus on team forms of work organisations (Hodson, 1997). As the present research was focussed on retail organisations where working in teams occurs every day, the results are all the timelier. In an environment where co-worker support is high employees are able to discuss ideas more openly and honestly and there is a positive relationship to job satisfaction (Fass, Bishop & Glissmeyer, 2007). Co-worker support has been found to be an effective source of support especially when the subject is emotionally exhausted which can consequently affect work stress (Albar-Marin & Garcia-Ramirez, 2005). Co-worker support and its relationship with job satisfaction and work stress are examined here to see if the above evidence holds true in a retail environment.

Research from Lindorff (2001) shows that support from work colleagues is appropriate for work specific problems and can relieve work stress more so than non work support - such as the family. In general, the social support literature has emphasised the positive effect it has on work stress (McIntosh, 1991). As a consequence of these feelings of being valued and experiencing less stress, employees feel more satisfied with their job and are less inclined to have intentions to quit the organisation (Levy, 2006). Research shows that a company with higher levels of co-worker support is likely to be associated with enhanced organisational performance (Joiner, 2007).

Recently, interest has been shown in the ability of social support to moderate or ‘buffer’ the relationship between variables such as stress and intention to quit. A moderator is a variable that affects the direction and strength of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Both supervisor and co-worker support have been considered as moderators in past studies and have both been found to ‘buffer’ the effects of variables such as stress (Karasek, Triantis & Chaudhry, 1982), job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Stephens & Summer, 1993). There have also been a number of studies investigating moderator variables where support was mixed or not found to affect the direction and strength of the relationships between variables (Calson & Perrewe, 1999).

La Rocco and Jones (1978) found clear evidence of direct relationships between support variables and satisfaction but little support for the buffer hypothesis. They recommended future research in this area was necessary. It has been suggested that co-worker relationships could have larger social support effects than supervisors because the authority between supervisors and employees could limit trust (Homans, in Karasek et al., 1982). The present study focused solely on co-worker support and explored the moderator effects of this form of support.

The present research aimed to provide insight into how co-worker support affects job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit in a retail setting both directly and through a moderating relationship. This information will be particularly valuable to the two organisations involved in the study, as it will provide them with specific information on how their employees perceive their co-workers and how supportive the environment their

organisation provides is. Along with this, the present study will add to the existing knowledge around co-worker support.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Job satisfaction is one of the largest areas of research in Industrial and Organisational psychology partly because work is one of our major life activities (Levy, 2006). It is also one of the most widely studied constructs in sales force research. A lot of this interest originates from its relationships with job outcomes such as performance, intention to quit and turnover (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Job satisfaction is the degree of pleasure an employee derives from their job (Muchinsky, 2006). Employees tend to be satisfied with their job if they are getting what they want out of it (Levy, 2006). Some researchers have indicated that satisfaction depends on the difficulty of the job, the adequacy of management communication, training, promotion policies, supervision, demographic and situational variables and other factors, which would well include co-worker support (Anderson, 1984). A number of studies have shown a positive relationship between numerous types of support including co-worker support and job satisfaction (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayana & Schwartz, 2002). However, the focus of much research is often on supervisory support. In light of this, the present study highlights the importance of the relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction, and predicted a positive relationship between these two variables.

Research has shown that people develop feelings about their jobs as well as about chosen facets of their job. For example pay, co-workers and working conditions. (Muchinsky, 2006). Even in a non-stimulating occupation such as mop making, employees who

concentrate on working to the best of their ability show high job satisfaction compared with employees who are not as involved in similar occupations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, in Babin & Boles, 1996). Job satisfaction can influence one employee's decision to remain with an organisation and ultimately whether to remain in that career (Knight, Crutsinger & Kim 2006).

Research has also shown a link between age and job satisfaction, indicating that as people mature, job satisfaction increases and plays a much more important role in their lives. Mature workers become more aware of their needs and often make better choices. They also understand how the organisation functions and tend to have a better understanding of what is expected of them (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000). Clark, Oswald and Warr (1996) proposed a U-shaped trend in relation to age and job satisfaction, stating that younger workers start with high job satisfaction but this usually decreases at around 20 years of age and then increases again around 30 to 39 years of age. However, a negative relationship has been reported between age and job satisfaction when older workers are discriminated against (Orpen, 1995, in Lease, 1998). In the case of the present study, age was considered an interesting variable to look at in this regard as the people who work in fashion retail or retail tend to be younger workers and therefore it would be expected they have higher job satisfaction levels (Knight et al., 2006).

In 1995, Weeks and Nantel examined gender differences in job satisfaction for salespersons. They found that the males and females in their sample had similar levels of job satisfaction despite the fact that other research has shown that females especially in a managerial position are more likely to leave the organisation when there are limited career

opportunities (Lease, 1998). For both males and females, job satisfaction has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of intention to leave (Lease, 1998).

The current study will further the research on co-worker support, specifically focussing on the relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction. Due to job satisfaction having a large influence on an employee's intention to quit these results could be extremely important to reducing turnover (Tan, Tan & Tiong, 2007). The aim of the results was to explore how important co-worker support is to job satisfaction and to provide the organisations involved with specific information on how satisfied their employees are.

### ***Work Stress***

Both employees and organisations have become increasingly aware of the negative effects of work stress. Consequently, a large amount of research has been conducted on work stress to examine the causes, symptoms and consequences of work stress and interventions that could reduce the effect of stress on individuals (Muchinsky, 2006; Beehr, Jex, Stacy & Murray, 2000). Work stress is referred to as any force that pushes a psychological or physical function beyond its range of stability producing a strain with the individual (Levy, 2006).

Interest in stress at work and its relationship with social support really started receiving increased attention in 1975 when researchers at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health produced work on the buffer hypothesis, which explains the relationship between stress and support. This research was carried on by the likes of Pinneau (1975) and La Rocco and Jones (1978). While their research at the time did not find any evidence to support the buffering hypothesis, it did encourage future research due to the

direct relationships found between support and stress (Seers, McGee, Serey & Graen, 1983). Employees in a retail job are potentially in stressful positions as they try to meet the requirements of managers, co-workers and customers concurrently (Knight et al., 2006). It has also been reported that people with high levels of perceived support cope with stress more effectively (Kaul & Lakey, 2003). The present study investigated whether this is indeed true.

It is important to note that along with the negative effects mentioned above work stress can have potentially damaging and harmful health repercussions. For example, research shows that work stress has been linked with increased rates of high blood pressure and heart disease. Co-worker support can actually reduce blood pressure because it reduces social isolation (Karlin, Brondolo & Schwartz, 2003). Specifically workers reporting low job demands, high co-worker support and favourable combinations of autonomy and task complexity, have shown lower rates of certain health problems compared to all other groups (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). An aspect of work stress that is often measured in a work stress scale is role ambiguity. Brown and Peterson (1993) found that role ambiguity has a significant direct effect on intention to quit and on job satisfaction. It was also shown to have a negative impact on sales performance. The present research specifically focused on co-worker support and its relationship with work stress to test whether work stress had a similar relationship to co-worker support, as has been found when testing an aspect of it, such as role ambiguity. This will provide employers with information on how important co-worker support can be in influencing ones work stress levels and subsequently affecting an employee's job satisfaction and intention to quit.

## *Intention to Quit*

As the labour market becomes more competitive, employers need to work harder to retain their employees (Miller & Wheeler, 1992). Women are of special concern as their turnover rates are believed to be higher than men (Schwartz, 1989). As the present study focuses on two women's retail companies where the majority of employees are female, the information gathered will be particularly valuable to the companies. There is however, a number of reasons associated with one's intentions to quit their job. For example work stress and job satisfaction correlate with commitment which impacts on one's decision to leave or stay with the organisation (Tan, Tan & Tiong, 2007). Perceived organisational support can reduce absenteeism, affects the commitment they feel to the organisation and their commitment to meeting organisational goals and influences turnover (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Rather than investigating organisational commitment or organisational support, an important question to ask is, can co-worker support, job satisfaction and work stress effect employees' intention to quit in the same way. This question was addressed in the present research.

In a study by McCalister, Dolbier, Webster, Mallon and Steinhardt (2006) on hardiness and support as predictors of work stress and job satisfaction they reported strong evidence for the vital role of perceived organisational support among nurses. When employees believed the hospital was committed to them, they were less likely to be thinking of leaving their job. Similarly, sales people who are committed to the organisation believe strongly in the goals of the organisation and will exert more effort for the organisation (Lau & Huang, 1999). It was expected that the results of the present study would find similar conclusions, that co-worker support can reduce an employee's intention to quit.

Intentions are the most immediate determinants of actual behaviour (Firth, Mellor, Moore & Loquet, 2004). For the purposes of this research, intention to quit is defined as the precursor of actually quitting (Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth, 1978). It is often the next step in the withdrawal process after experiencing dissatisfaction with one's job (Mobley, 1977).

Empirical research has consistently shown that intention to quit is an effective predictor of salesperson turnover and companies could benefit especially in the early stages of employment to establish an environment that encourages salespeople to see the benefits of remaining with the company (Johnston, Varadarajan, Futrell & Sager, 1987). Findings from Johnston et al (1987) also suggest that the facets of job satisfaction may be strongly related as an antecedent to intention to quit.

Voluntary turnover is not a desirable outcome in any organisation unless it removes under performers. The costs of replacing an employee can be significant for the organisation in both time and money. In a sales environment, there is also the process of establishing relationships with customers, some of which may have left to find another service provider elsewhere in the meantime (Chandrashekar, McNeilly, Russ & Marinova, 2000). By reducing one's intention to quit it is possible to consequently reduce the possibility of turnover.

The information provided in this study will not only provide further information on the link between co-worker support and employees intentions to quit for all retail organisations, but will also provide the organisations involved with specific information

about their own employee's intentions to quit. This could provide valuable information especially when combined with employee's levels of job satisfaction, to help reduce turnover in the organisation.

### ***Past Research Findings Related to Current Research***

Babin and Boles (1996) study investigated perceived co-worker involvement and supervisor support in the food service industry. They found that employee's perceptions of co-worker involvement reduced stress and increase job satisfaction. A supportive work environment generally equals more productive behaviours (Day & Bedeian, 1991). The results also suggested that an employee who perceives that the other workers are highly involved is likely to be a more satisfied employee. Babin and Boles (1996) commented on the appropriateness of the retail setting for examining job outcomes and employee attitudes due to working in a setting where employee and customer interactions are experienced simultaneously with employee and employer interactions. The present study furthers our understanding between co-worker support, job satisfaction and work stress and also provides additional information on the relationship between these three constructs and intention to quit.

In 2008, Eder and Eisenberger's research on perceived organisational support which investigated the finding that when employees co-workers exhibit higher levels of withdrawal, individual employees are more likely to withdraw from their own work. They found that perceived organisational support reduced the relation between work group withdrawal and individual withdrawal in a retail sales organisation. The findings suggest that individuals are less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviours in the presence of co-workers who withdraw if

it violates their positive exchange relationship with their organisation. As intention to quit is an antecedent to turnover, it is important to understand the relationship between co-worker support intention to quit in order to decrease these withdrawal behaviours and reduce turnover.

An important study for retail was done in 2006 by Knight, Crutsinger and Kim who examined the impact of work experience, career expectation and job satisfaction on retail career intention. Using a self administered questionnaire they targeted their sample at students enrolled in programs with a merchandising focus. The results show that a supportive supervisor related to every dimension of job satisfaction except for pay. Students were more likely to pursue a career in retail if they had a supportive supervisor and also when they perceived their co-workers were dedicated to their own jobs. From this study, it is shown that not only does a supportive work environment increase job satisfaction, it increases employee's tendency to remain in a retail career. It has also been suggested that as stress increases the beneficial effects of support become more apparent (McIntosh, 1991). Although supervisor support has been well researched this current study aimed to further our understanding of the effects that co-workers support can have on employee job satisfaction and following on from the past research described above, predicted that co-worker support would have a positive effect on job satisfaction and would be negatively related to work stress.

Another particularly relevant study was done by Chandrashekaren, McNeilly, Russ and Marinova (2000) on the formation of intentions to quit among sales people. A number of variables including stress and organisational commitment and job satisfaction were found to be related to intentions to quit (Chanrashekaren et al., 2000 and McCalister et al., 2006)

Chanrashekaren et al (2000) results show that doubt about one's intentions lowers the probability of intended behaviour. If organisations can increase commitment, they may be able to extend the time eventual quitters will remain in the organisation. This has important implications for reduced hiring and training costs especially in the retail industry where turnover rates are high (Masters, 2004). As co-worker support is viewed as helping create a positive work environment, (Babin & Boles, 1996) the present study examined the direct link between co-worker support and intention to quit.

In 2000 a study carried out by Ducharme and Martin (2000) investigating unrewarding work, co-worker support and job satisfaction, found that co-worker support, specifically instrumental support (material assistance in response to specific needs) has significant positive effects on job satisfaction. They state that regardless of the level of depressive symptoms or negative effect, the social support in the workplace significantly improves ones job satisfaction. They also found no support to suggest social support buffers the negative effects of job stress on job satisfaction contrary to earlier findings, which may have been due to the measures used in the analyses lacking specificity. Further research is required to investigate this relationship between social support, job satisfaction and work stress and this is specifically so for the retail industry.

Lease (1998) reports on a number a studies done on co-worker and supervisor support. For example, Sager (1994) conducted a research on male salespersons and explored how perceptions of managers' support influenced perceptions of stress, satisfaction and intent to leave. Managers' support positively predicted satisfaction and work stress and job satisfaction influenced turnover intentions. Revicki, Whitley and Gallery (1993) found that work group support exerted a direct influence on job satisfaction and co-worker support

directly affected role ambiguity, which in turn influenced work stress. The present study sought to examine whether co-worker support can have similar effects on work stress, job satisfaction and intention to quit as support sources investigated in the studies mentioned above.

A study carried out by Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) surveying full time retail employees and their supervisors, investigated relationships of supervisors' perceived organizational support with subordinates' perceptions of support from their supervisors and performance. The results showed that in this study supervisors' perceived organisational support was positively related to their subordinates' perceptions of supervisor support. Subordinates' perceived supervisor support was positively associated with their perceived organisational support, in-role performance and extra-role performance. These results indicate that when supervisors feel supported they are more likely to respond with favourable treatment to their subordinates. By helping co-workers carry out their jobs more effectively, employees' efforts aid the organisation, as well as their co-workers, leading to greater productivity (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

As is shown above, the perception of support can be important for those in any industry including the retail industry. It is a source that can potentially impact a person both physically and mentally. This current study aimed to integrate and further the ideas from previous research and look specifically at employee perceptions of co-worker support in a retail setting and its effects on job satisfaction, work stress and intentions to quit. Although there is evidence that co-worker support can moderate the relationship between many variables including the other variables of interest in this study (job satisfaction, work stress

and intention to quit), there is limited research set in a retail environment. Based on this literature review, the hypotheses that this research was focused around are outlined below.

### *Hypotheses*

1. Perceived co-worker support will be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to work stress.
2. Perceived co-worker support will have a direct negative effect on intentions to quit.
3. Co-worker support moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and between work stress and intention to quit.

Keeping these hypotheses in mind, this research aimed to further our understanding of the relationship between perceptions of co-worker support and its effect on job satisfaction and work stress. It also aimed to investigate the consequent effects of an employee's intention to quit and to provide some insight into the importance of co-worker support as a buffering variable in the retail industry.

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## Method

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### *Choice of Methodology*

The choice to use questionnaires rather than another data gathering technique such as interviews was done for a number of reasons. Firstly, using such a quantitative method aggregating survey data helps to ensure the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of data (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). Secondly, questionnaires are also easy to distribute and are more cost effective than other methods such as interviews. The study used a quantitative research method as the research objective was known in advance of the data collection and all aspects of the study were designed before the data was collected. This is important as quantitative research is usually deductive meaning the study is testing theory rather than generating it like qualitative research would do (Hammersley, 1996). Quantitative data would also be more useful in testing the hypotheses of the research and the results would be able to be better generalised and used to make predictions.

Some of the advantages of using a quantitative method are outlined above but in addition to these, using a quantitative method allows the researcher to arrive at more objective conclusions than qualitative methods may allow. It also helps to achieve high levels of reliability of gathered data and the questionnaire is able to get a lot of information from a large number of people in a short period of time (Mateev, 2002). The limitations of this method include the fact that questionnaires can result in a low return rate and due to the researcher and the respondent not interacting, problems with the questionnaire cannot be corrected or answered (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). A quantitative method also means that the outcomes can be limited to those outlined in the research proposal due to the structured

format (Mateev, 2002). However, for the purposes of the current research this method of data collection was deemed the most appropriate.

### *Participants*

The participants used for this study were employees of two New Zealand Women's Fashion companies. The employees were either full or part time sales assistants, managers or head office staff. Surveys were distributed to one hundred and ninety employees, which with ninety eight being returned. This was a response rate of 52 percent.

Participants were made aware through an information sheet attached to the questionnaire that participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential and anonymous. As an incentive, participants were invited to enter a draw for a gift voucher from their respective organisation, organised through the researcher.

The average age of the participants was 27 years old with the range of ages between 16 and 65 years of age. By grouping the age variable, it was possible to see that the biggest group of participants (27.6%) were less than 19 years of age. This information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Age Groups of Participants*

Age	Frequency	Percent
< 19	27	27.6
20 - 21	16	16.3
22 - 24	16	16.3
25 - 36	20	20.4
37+	19	19.4
Total	98	100

Note: n = 98

As the two companies involved were female fashion companies, gender was not asked for in case it raised confidentiality issues. This was because the majority of employees were female and if a male responded he might have been easily identified. The average tenure of the employees was 22.6 months. When tenure was grouped the largest group of employees had been with the companies less than five months (28.6%) closely followed by six to ten months (26.5%). The majority of participants were employed in part time work (56%). Participants were grouped under five different job titles, which include full time employees, part time employees, head office staff, managers and assistant managers.

***Questionnaire***

The survey used for this study contained a cover page which included information on the study, contact details and instructions, followed by a demographic information section, and then four attitude measurement scales containing twenty two items in total. Participants had to rate how frequently a condition happened or how a statement best related to them on a rating scale between one and seven depending on the scale. The twenty two items related to

co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intentions to quit. The four scales are described further below.

The cover sheet also acted as the informed consent for the study. Participants were informed that “by reading this information you are giving your informed consent to participate in this project” (See Appendix). It was stated that participation was voluntary and all responses would be confidential and anonymous. The last page of the survey was an entry form into a draw for a gift voucher from each respective organisation. Participants from the first organisation entered a draw to win one of four, fifty dollar gift vouchers by writing their sales person numbers on the entry form and sending it back with the survey. They were assured that the questionnaire would be separated immediately from the entry form once it was returned to ensure the responses were kept anonymous and confidential. Participants from the second organisation entered a draw for one of six, twenty five dollar gift vouchers by writing their name on the entry form and returning it in a separate envelope to the questionnaire. It was up to each organisation as to how much the vouchers were for and how they felt it was best to distribute them. It was ensured that the incentive process was followed the ethical considerations of the research and was fair to the employees of each company.

The demographic section contained three questions which related to age, tenure and position in the organisation, for example store manager or part time sales assistant. The purpose of obtaining this information was to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants and to gain extra information that could be used when analysing the data from the four scales.

Below is a description of the four scales used in the questionnaire.

## *Questionnaire Scales*

### *Co-worker support*

The Social Support scale designed by O'Driscoll (2000) was used to measure co-worker support. This scale has a reliability of 0.89 (O'Driscoll, Brough & Kalliath, 2004) in past research and obtains responses on a point likert type scale ranging from 6 = all the time to 1 = never. An example item is, "indicate how often your co-workers provide you with clear and helpful feedback". This scale consists of four items and has a maximum score of 24 and minimum score of 4. A higher score indicates higher levels of co-worker support.

### *Job Satisfaction*

The construct of job satisfaction was measured using Brayfield and Rothes' (1951, in Fields, 2002) Overall Job Satisfaction scale. The six item version developed by Agho, Price and Mueller (1993) was used which has coefficient alpha levels ranging from .83 to .90 (Agho, et al 1993) in previous studies and obtains responses using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. An example item is "I find real enjoyment on my work" (Agho et al, 1993). The participants could get scores ranging from 6-30, a higher score indicating higher levels of job satisfaction.

### *Work Stress*

Work stress was measured using Parker and Decottiis (1983, in Fields, 2002) Job Stress Scale. The nine item scale as used by Jamal and Baba (1992) is used which in their study had an alpha level of 0.83. One dimension of the scale is time stress (feelings of being under constant pressure) and the second dimension is anxiety (job related feelings of anxiety). An example item is “I have too much work and too little time to do it in” and responses are obtained on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 5 = strong agreement to 1 = strong disagreement (Parker & Decottiis, 1983, in Fields, 2002). The possible range of scores went from 9-45 where a higher score indicates higher levels of work stress.

### *Intention to Quit*

Three items from the Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh (1979, in Cook, Hepworth, Wall & Warr, 1981) was used to measure intention to quit. This scale has a reported coefficient alpha of 0.83 and has been shown to correlate with relevant constructs. For example it correlates -0.58 with job satisfaction. Responses are obtained on likert type scale. Item 1 ranges from 1 = not at all likely to 7 = extremely likely and items 2 and 3 range from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. An example item is “I often think about quitting” (Cook, Hepworth, Wall & Warr, 1981).

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was pilot tested on ten students and five members of the public employed in full time and part time work before sending out to participants in order to get estimates of the completion time and to ensure the items were comprehensible. The surveys

were then distributed to the employees of the two organisations by post. The employees were informed through fax and email that the surveys were being sent out, what was involved in completing the survey and how long it would take. Instructions were also provided on how to enter the draw for a gift voucher as an incentive for completing the questionnaire.

After two weeks of sending the survey to the organisations, a follow up email or fax was sent to remind the employees to keep sending in the surveys up until the stated closing date. When the close off date was reached, the employees were emailed or faxed to inform them that any surveys or entry forms that were now returned would not be included in the results and to thank the employees who have returned a survey for their participation. Employees were also informed that the draw for the vouchers had been completed and the winners would receive their voucher by mail in the next week.

To ensure that neither anonymity or confidentiality were compromised the vouchers were sent to a representative of the respective organisations to distribute to the winning participants.

Survey data was entered into an excel spreadsheet initially and then transferred to SPSS to be analysed. There were ninety eight participant responses entered into the spreadsheet and they were all able to be used in the data analysis.

### *Analysis*

A reliability analysis was performed on each scale before running any other analysis to ensure the reliability of the four scales. Following this, descriptive statistics were

calculated on the data. Potential relationships and their direction were assessed using a correlation analysis. Following this standard and hierarchical multiple regressions were used to further test the hypotheses.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This research was conducted with the approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Using an anonymous questionnaire ensured the confidentiality of data and participants along with anonymity. Participant's names were only required on the entry form for the draw for the gift vouchers from one organisation and this was returned in a separate envelope to the questionnaire. The other organisation returned the entry forms with their sales person numbers for identification. Only authorised persons were able to view the data and it was stored appropriately to uphold the assurance of confidentiality. The research had the informed consent of participants before they completed the questionnaire and participation was voluntary. Participants were aware who the study was conducted by and the aims of the research. There was no risk to participants in this study.

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## Results

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Before analysing any data, each scale had a reliability analysis performed on it to ensure its internal consistency. The co-worker support scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.87. The job satisfaction scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.90 while the work stress scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.77. Finally, the intention to quit scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.90. These were all above the required minimum score of 0.70 (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). All four scales were found to be acceptable.

Descriptive statistics for all variables and frequencies for job title, age and time with the company were computed and showed a good range of participants in terms of age, tenure and job title. These results are described in the method section. Table 2 presents the mean score for the four scales. As can be seen from the raw data the participants report high levels of perceived co-worker support and relatively low levels of work stress. Job Satisfaction was also reasonably high and the mean score for intention to quit was quite low, however this scale does have a large standard deviation, indicating there was a wide spread of scores for this scale.

Table 2.

*Mean Score, Standard Deviation and Range of Scores for Four Questionnaire Scales.*

Scale	Mean	Std Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Co-worker support	17.03	4.09	4	24
Job Satisfaction	20.41	4.88	6	30
Work Stress	18.88	5.48	9	45
Intention to Quit	12.82	6.04	3	21

Note: n = 98

The relationship between the four variables of co-worker support, job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit was investigated using the Pearson product-moment correlation. A preliminary analysis was performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity. There was a strong negative correlation between job satisfaction and intention to quit  $r(96) = -0.68, p < 0.01$  and a positive correlation between co-worker support and job satisfaction  $r(96) = 0.25, p < 0.05$ . These results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

*Inter-correlations of the Study's Four Scales*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Co-worker support				
2. Job satisfaction	0.25*			
3. Work Stress	-0.11	-0.35**		
4. Intention to quit	-0.21*	-0.69**	0.51**	

Note: \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

These correlations provide support for hypothesis one and some support for hypothesis two. These hypotheses along with hypothesis three are explored in more detail below.

***Hypothesis 1: Perceived co-worker support will be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to work stress.***

There was a strong significant positive relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction  $r(96) = 0.25, p < 0.05$  and a negative relationship was supported between co-

worker support and work stress although these results were not statistically significant. To explore this relationship further, a multiple regression was carried out.

A standard multiple regression was conducted with job satisfaction as the dependent variable and age, and co-worker support as the independent variables. These variables were chosen due to the relationships proven in past research between co-worker support, age and job satisfaction and the strong correlations above.

The results from the regression analysis are presented in Table 4. The overall regression model was significant  $F(2,95) = 8.40, p < 0.001$  and accounted for 15% of the variance in job satisfaction. Of the independent variables regressed on job satisfaction, both age and co-worker support are significant predictors. These results indicate that age is making a slightly stronger statistically significant unique contribution to explaining job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.30, p < 0.05$ ) than co-worker support ( $\beta = 0.23, p < 0.05$ ).

Table 4.

*Results of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis Regressing Job Satisfaction on Co-worker Support and Age*

Variable	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -level
Age	0.13	0.30	3.17	0.00
Co-worker support	0.27	0.23	2.40	0.02

Note:  $R^2 = 0.150$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.132$

Although work stress does have a negative correlation with co-worker support, a multiple regression demonstrates co-worker support does not make a significant contribution to explaining work stress.

The results from these analyses partially support hypothesis one.

***Hypothesis 2: Perceived co-worker support will have a direct negative effect on intentions to quit.***

The correlation analysis showed there is a significant negative relationship between co-worker support and intentions to quit  $r(96) = -0.21, p < 0.05$  indicating that the more co-worker support one perceives the less likely they are to quit.

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to further test this hypothesis. The results from this regression analysis are presented in Table 5. Intention to quit was the dependant variable and job satisfaction, work stress, age, tenure and job title were the independent variables in the first step. In the second step of the regression analysis, co-worker support was included as another independent variable. The overall regression model was not significant  $F(6,91) = 21.149, p = ns$ , and co-worker support did not make a statistically significant contribution to explaining intention to quit, indicating that co-worker support has no direct effect on intention to quit. The results show that job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.525, p < 0.01$ ), job title ( $\beta = -0.528, p < 0.01$ ) and work stress ( $\beta = 0.302, p < 0.01$ ) make the strongest significant unique contribution to explaining intention to quit.

As a result of these findings hypothesis two is not supported.

Table 5.

*Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Regressing Intention to Quit on Job Satisfaction, Co-worker Support, Work Stress, Age, Tenure and Job Title*

Step	B	$\beta$	t	p-level
<b>Step 1:</b>				
Job Satisfaction	-0.67	-0.53	-7.17	0.00
Work Stress	0.33	0.30	4.09	0.00
Age	-0.09	-0.17	-1.85	0.07
Job Title	-0.48	-0.07	-1.06	0.23
Tenure	0.00	0.03	0.32	0.75
<b>Step 2:</b>				
Job satisfaction	-0.65	-0.53	-6.80	0.00
Work Stress	0.33	0.30	4.09	0.00
Age	-0.09	-0.16	-1.78	0.08
Job Title	-0.53	-0.08	-1.15	0.25
Tenure	0.00	0.02	0.20	0.84
Co-worker support	-0.08	-0.05	-0.75	0.46

Note:  $R^2 = 0.582$  for step 1.  $\Delta R^2 = 0.555$  for step 2.

***Hypothesis 3: Co-worker support moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and between work stress and intention to quit.***

A hierarchical multiple regression was performed on the data to investigate whether co-worker support was acting as a moderator between job satisfaction and intention to quit and work stress and intention to quit. The variables involved were centred before the analysis was performed to as this helps to minimise the problems of multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

The first hierarchical multiple regression used to test this hypothesis was conducted with intention to quit as the dependent variable and job satisfaction and co-worker support as

the independent variables at the first hierarchical step. At the second step, the interaction variable was entered as another independent variables. Table 6 summarises the results of the regression analysis. The overall model was not significant  $F(3,94) = 28.42, p = ns$ . The results show that the interaction term was statistically non-significant ( $\beta = -0.076, p = 0.32$ ) indicating co-worker support is not acting as a moderator between job satisfaction and intention to quit. The small change in variance accounted for ( $R^2$ ) suggests that the interaction term did not explain anymore variance than job satisfaction and co-worker support could alone.

Table 6.

*Results of Moderator Regression Analysis, Regressing Intention to Quit on Co-worker Support, Job Satisfaction and their Interactions.*

Step	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -level
<b>Step 1:</b>				
Job Satisfaction	-0.83	-0.67	-8.72	0.00
Co-worker Support	-0.07	-0.05	-0.63	0.53
<b>Step 2:</b>				
Job Satisfaction	-0.843	-0.679	-8.77	0.00
Co-worker Support	-0.059	-0.04	-0.52	0.60
Job Satisfaction x Co-worker support	-0.023	-0.076	-1.01	0.32

Note:  $R^2 = 0.47$  for step 1.  $\Delta R^2 = 0.46$  for step 2

The second regression analysis was conducted to test whether co-worker support was acting as a moderator between work stress and intention to quit. In the first step of the regression intention to quit was entered as the dependant variable and co-worker support and work stress were entered as the independent variables. At the second hierarchical step the interaction term was entered as an independent variable. Table 7 summarises the regression analysis results. The model overall was not significant  $F(3,94) = 13.63, p = ns$ . The interaction term entered at the second step of the regression was non-significant ( $\beta = 0.12, p$

= 0.18) indicating that in this instance co-worker support was not acting as a moderator between work stress and intention to quit. As with the regression above the small change in variance accounted for ( $R^2$ ) suggests that the interaction term did not explain anymore variance than job satisfaction and co-worker support could alone.

Table 7.

*Results of Moderator Regression Analysis, Regressing Intention to Quit on Co-worker Support, Work Stress and their Interactions.*

Step	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -level
<b>Step 1:</b>				
Work Stress	0.55	0.50	5.70	0.00
Co-worker support	-0.24	-0.17	-1.85	0.07
<b>Step 2:</b>				
Work Stress	0.54	0.49	5.59	0.00
Co-worker support	-0.25	-0.17	-1.91	0.06
Work Stress x Co-worker support	0.03	0.12	1.37	0.18

Note:  $R^2 = 0.29$  for step 1.  $\Delta R^2 = 0.28$

The results from these regression analyses do not provide support for hypothesis three that co-worker support moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and between work stress and intention to quit.

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## Discussion

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The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of co-worker support on job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit. This study investigated the relationship between these variables in a retail setting. The results from the data analyses had some important theoretical and practical implications.

The correlation matrix showed that there was a positive relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction and work stress and intention to quit and negative relationships between co-worker support and work stress, co-worker support and intention to quit, job satisfaction and work stress and between job satisfaction and intention to quit. This last relationship had the largest correlation. These results were in line with previous research investigating these variables. In the section below the three hypotheses are restated and the results of these hypotheses are discussed with reference to the relevant literature.

The first hypothesis stated that perceived co-worker support would be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to work stress. The correlation analysis found a significant positive relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction. However, although the relationship between co-worker support and work stress was negative as expected, it was not significant.

A multiple regression confirmed that co-worker support was indeed making a significant contribution to explaining job satisfaction indicating that the more co-worker

support an employee perceives the higher their job satisfaction. This relationship has a large amount of support in the literature, for example, Babin and Boles, (1996); Ducharme and Martin (2000) and Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan and Schwartz, (2002). The findings from the present study combined with others, such as Ducharme and Martin (2000) who found that social support from co-workers significantly contributes to the overall job satisfaction of employees, reinforces how important co-worker support is for job satisfaction.

A separate multiple regression confirmed that co-worker support did not make a significant contribution to explaining work stress. One reason for this may be due to the fact that overall the participants did not have very high stress scores. The mean score for the work stress scale was 18.8 from a possible score of 45. It has been suggested that people only begin to really appreciate or notice the effects of social support when they are undergoing a stressful event. Therefore, for people experiencing low levels of stress the use of this resource would be unnecessary (Jenkins in Seers et al, 1983).

Another possible explanation may be that co-worker support is not the most effective resource to reduce work stress in this environment. For example, some studies have found supervisors are more effective in reducing ones stress than support from co-workers (McCalister et al., 2006). This is because a supervisor can often provide informational support, which can be particularly valuable when the individual is faced with confusing or vague situations. Although there is a negative relationship between work stress and co-worker support the results show that co-worker support does not make a significant contribution to explaining work stress. Therefore, further research is required to investigate this relationship in both high and low work stress environments to see if it is the source of support or the intensity of stress that affects this relationship.

It was predicted in hypothesis two that perceived co-worker support would have a direct effect on intentions to quit. The correlation analysis showed that there was indeed a significant negative relationship between these variables suggesting that the less co-worker support one perceives the more likely they are to have intentions of quitting.

However, the results from the hierarchical regression showed that there was in fact no direct relationship between co-worker support and intention to quit. This analysis showed that job satisfaction, work stress and job title were making the largest contribution to explaining intention to quit. This could perhaps be because employees need to have other factors present, in combination with support from their co-workers to reduce their intention to quit. For example, the correlation analysis showed job satisfaction and intention to quit had the highest correlation between the four scales and the multiple regression supported this relationship. In 2004, Firth, Mellor, Moore and Loquet found that the major impact in reducing employees' intention to quit came from a sense of commitment to the organisation and from a sense of job satisfaction. They interpreted this to mean that the more satisfied individuals are with their job, the more committed they will be to the organisation. It may in fact be that co-worker support is necessary for organisational commitment but that organisational commitment is more necessary to reduce employees' intentions to quit (McCalister et al., 2006). This will be discussed further below.

The third hypothesis predicted that co-worker support moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit and between work stress and intention to quit. The results indicated that on this occasion co-worker support does not moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit. A possible explanation for this

might be that in this instance co-worker support can increase or decrease job satisfaction but no matter how much support one receives it will not change the direct relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit. In other words if a person has low job satisfaction their intention to quit will not be altered by the amount of co-worker support they perceive.

A further explanation could be due to the measures used in the study. The present literature suggests that moderating effects are more likely to be seen when there is a match between an individual's specific needs and the type of support available (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This is because co-worker support is often called on as a response to a specific need. Unfortunately the measure used in this study may lack the preciseness to capture the moderating effects as anticipated (Ducharme & Martin, 2000).

The moderator analysis also found no support for co-worker support acting as a moderator between work stress and intention to quit. This may be a result of a low scale mean for work stress indicating that for the participants involved support may be of a lesser concern as they are not experiencing a significant amount of stress (Seers et al, 1983). This suggestion, that it is not until stress levels rise that support starts acting as a moderator is supported in a study by McIntosh, (1991) on the main and moderating effects of social support properties.

It is also possible as mentioned above that there was not enough preciseness in the measures of co-worker support and work stress to capture the anticipated moderating effects (Ducharme & Martin, 2000). Also the sample size in this study was not large which can reduce the ability to find moderator effects (Beehr, Jex, Stacy & Murray, 2000). Stone-

Romero and Anderson, (1994) found that unless a sample of size of at least 120 was used even medium and large moderating effects could remain undetected.

### *Limitations*

One potential limitation to this study may be the use of two retail companies where the majority of employees are female. To establish a more complete picture it might have been beneficial to have included an organisation with more males to be able to make comparisons between males and females as to whether co-worker support has a bigger impact on one gender or the other. Research from Geller and Hobfoll (1994) showed that males and females report similar levels of co-worker support, but found that men benefit more from this support. However, in another study females were found to perceive higher levels of support and to utilise co-worker support more often than men do as they talk more to one another (Greenglass, Burke & Konarski, 1998). Thus, due to the inconclusive results on this topic further research is required to see if co-worker support does indeed affect more on one gender or the other.

Secondly the present study relied solely on the response from a self administered questionnaire. One problem associated with this is the issue of participants responding in a socially desirable fashion. It is possible that participants may have exaggerated the amount of co-worker support they perceive especially if they thought only of friends they work with and not support from other people in the organisation. However this survey was anonymous so this should have eliminated a lot of the social desirability bias.

Another problem associated with using a self report survey is that due to the researcher and the participants having no interaction, problems with the questionnaire cannot

be corrected and people may interpret questions differently. Therefore, two participants may in a way be answering two different questions.

Finally the size of the sample may have been a limitation especially when considering the moderator analysis. As mentioned in the discussion a small sample size can reduce the ability to find moderating effects. Given this information a larger sample may have had more likelihood of detecting the moderating effects of co-worker support and therefore future research may wish to explore this relationship and see if sample size does indeed make a difference.

### ***Future Research***

Considering the retail industry does have a high turnover rate, continued research in this area is important. In particular future research could benefit from including other support variables in the study such as supervisory support and another antecedent to intention to quit, for example organisational commitment. It would be useful to know whether the different sources of support have different effects or if one source of support is in fact perceived as more important to increasing an employees' job satisfaction, reducing their work stress and ultimately reducing their intention to quit.

The relationship between co-worker support and intention to quit deserves further investigation. This present study found a significant negative correlation between these two variables, however the regression results did not uncover any further support of a direct relationship. It would be informative to see if another variable such as organisational commitment has any effect on this relationship.

Along with this, as mentioned in the limitations section it would be beneficial to see what effects, if any a combination of both male and female participants would make to the results. This inclusion of males would also be useful in increasing the sample size and allowing for the potential moderating relationships to come through in the results.

Another suggestion for future research is to look into the possibility of using a combination of both perceived and received support. While there is a lot of support for using perceived co-worker support there have been suggestions made that received support may more accurately reflect actual support provided if participants are made to recall specific examples (Haber, Cohen, Lucas & Baltes, 2007). It would be interesting to see whether these support measures are related and how different the correlations are between the two measures with job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit.

Future research may also benefit from the use of multiple data gathering instruments. As mentioned in the limitation section self administered questionnaires do have some disadvantages and therefore, it may be useful to consider including some form of an interview into the data collection where possible. This would allow the researcher to get more in-depth answers to questions if required.

### ***Theoretical and Practical Implications***

This research has highlighted a number of important theoretical and practical implications. It has reinforced the relationships between the variables as shown in previous research and has raised questions for future research, importantly with regard to the possible

moderating effects of co-worker support. The results from this study reinforce how important co-worker support is in a working environment. This is especially true when discussing the relationship between co-worker support and job satisfaction. Co-worker support is able to increase or decrease an employees' job satisfaction, which consequently effects intention to quit. If organisations are able to create supportive working environments they can potentially reduce ones intentions to quit. Although the results do show that co-worker support alone cannot reduce an employees' intention to quit.

This has important practical implications for organisations especially with regard to human resource management practices. For example, in the training process employees' could be trained in how to give constructive feedback to their co-workers. By demonstrating the importance of co-worker support from the beginning of employment, employees' will have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Not only this, but a supportive situation creates a better learning environment. If all employees are given the same training there should be consistency throughout the organisation, which may in fact reduce stress from feeling of inadequacy. This is a suggestion that could be pursued in future research.

Furthermore, in this instance, the participants did not report considerably high stress levels and co-worker support did not significantly explain work stress. Therefore, organisations would be wiser to spend their resources addressing the direct sources of stress, such as reducing sources of conflict rather than trying to fix this issue through co-worker support.

Finally, although no direct interaction was found between co-worker support and intention to quit there was still a significant negative correlation between these two variables.

Retail organisations should be aware of this relationship and work on creating supportive working environments. If employees' intention to quit can be reduced there are large potential savings to the organisation in relation to hiring and training costs.

### ***Conclusion***

This research was ultimately aimed at getting a deeper understanding of co-worker support. It addressed the relationship co-worker support has with job satisfaction, work stress and intention to quit. The results of the present study confirmed the direction of the relationships between the variables and reinforced the importance of co-worker support in the work place especially with regard to job satisfaction. Although no moderator effects were found, this may have been due to sample size and is an area that should be given attention in the future. It would also be useful to see what results are uncovered when other variables such as, organisational commitment are included in the research. Overall, this study has provided additional valuable support to the current co-worker support literature while raising possible questions for the future and important practical and theoretical implications. Retail organisations should be conscious of the importance of perceptions of co-worker support and work with employees to create a supportive working environment.

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## **Appendix**

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## **XXXXX Employee Survey**

You are invited to participate in a research project exploring attitudes and behaviours in the retail sector. This survey is being conducted by Gemma Bateman of the Psychology Department at the University of Canterbury in order to fulfil the requirements of her Applied Psychology Masters degree. You can contact her by email at [gfb29@student.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:gfb29@student.canterbury.ac.nz). The research is being supervised by Dr Linda Trenberth who can be contacted with any queries at [linda.trenberth@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:linda.trenberth@canterbury.ac.nz).

Participation in this survey will require you to complete a questionnaire containing twenty two items. Please ensure you read each statement carefully and pay particular attention to the response format. Your answer will represent the frequency with which the condition happens to you or how the statement best relates to you. All responses are obtained on a numbered response type scale but it is important you read each scale carefully before beginning.

Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. No participant will be able to be identified in this research. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage.

When you have completed the questionnaire you can fill in the attached slip to enter the draw for a \$50 XXXXX gift voucher and return the questionnaire and entry form in the postage paid envelope. Entry forms will be separated immediately from the questionnaire to ensure responses are kept anonymous and confidential.

By reading this information you are giving your informed consent to participate in this project.

## Demographic Information

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title e.g manager, full time sales assistant, part time sales assistant \_\_\_\_\_

Number of months at XXXXX \_\_\_\_\_

*Using the response scale below, please indicate how often your colleagues provide you with each of the following in the **past three months**.*

Items	Never	Very occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Very often	All the time
<b>1. Helpful information or advice</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>2. Sympathetic understanding and advice</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>3. Clear and helpful feedback</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>4. Practical assistance</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6

*Using the response scale shown below please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.*

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>5. I am often bored with my job</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>6. I feel fairly well satisfied with my job</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>7. I am satisfied with my job for the time being</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>8. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>9. I like my job better than the average worker Does</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>10. I find real enjoyment in my work</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>11. I have too much work and too little time to do it in</b>	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. I sometimes dread the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job-related	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel like I never have a day off	1	2	3	4	5
14. Too many people at my level in the company get burned out by my job demands	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job	1	2	3	4	5
16. My job gets to me more than it should	1	2	3	4	5
17. There are lots of times when my job drives me right up the wall	1	2	3	4	5
18. Sometimes when I think about my job I get a tight feeling in my chest	1	2	3	4	5
19. I feel guilty when I take time off from my job	1	2	3	4	5

*On the response scale below, please indicate how likely item number 20 is.*

Items	Not at all likely		Somewhat likely		Quite likely		Extremely likely
20. How likely is it that you will actively look for a job in the next year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

*Using the response scale shown below please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.*

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
21. I often think about quitting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I will probably look for a job in the next year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Entry Form

The winner of this draw will win a \$50 XXXXX gift voucher. Simply write your sales number in the space provided and return this form with your completed questionnaire. There will be four draws. Entry forms will be separated immediately from the questionnaire to ensure responses are kept anonymous and confidential.

Salesperson number \_\_\_\_\_