

JOB INSECURITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

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In the present climate, job insecurity has become one of the most relevant sources of stress for workers. It is especially serious in Spain due to the high unemployment rates in this period of crisis. An important body of research has been developed in an attempt to better understand this phenomenon. In recent years, the Institute of Human Resources Psychology, Organizational Development and Quality of Working Life (IDOCAL) has contributed to various of the most determinant dimensions of the research on job insecurity. The determinants have been identified as tenure, employability in the labor market, underemployment, and job self-efficacy. Furthermore, progress has been made in the research on the diversity of the types of contracts, job insecurity and the effects on workers. The studies that examine the role of the intervening factors are especially relevant. In this context, our research has identified that factors such as organizational justice, organizational justice climate, organizational support, employability, job dependence and psychological distancing explained the variability in job insecurity. Finally, IDOCAL's contributions have been especially important in examining job insecurity as a collective phenomenon and showing how it can affect employees' outcomes above and beyond their individual perceptions. On the basis of this research, a series of implications for professional practice has been presented in this article.

Key words: Job insecurity, Intervening variables, Job insecurity climate, Practical implications.

La inseguridad laboral se ha convertido en la actualidad en una de las fuentes de estrés más significativas para muchos trabajadores, siendo especialmente grave en España por las elevadas tasas de desempleo en este periodo de crisis económica. Una prolifera investigación se ha desarrollado al respecto en un intento por alcanzar un conocimiento más completo de este fenómeno. El Instituto de Psicología de los Recursos Humanos, Desarrollo Organizacional y Calidad de Vida Laboral (IDOCAL) ha contribuido a esta investigación en los últimos años en varias de sus facetas más significativas. En el ámbito de sus factores determinantes se ha identificado un papel significativo de la antigüedad laboral, la empleabilidad en el mercado laboral, el subempleo, y la autoeficacia laboral. Además se han realizado hallazgos de interés en relación con la diversidad de los tipos de contrato, la inseguridad laboral y sus efectos en los trabajadores. Son de especial interés los estudios que analizan el papel interviniente de distintas variables. En este contexto, nuestros estudios han puesto de manifiesto la relevancia de variables como la justicia organizacional, el clima de justicia organizacional, el apoyo organizacional, la empleabilidad, la dependencia laboral y el distanciamiento psicológico a la hora de predecir la variabilidad en la inseguridad laboral. Por último, las aportaciones del IDOCAL han sido especialmente relevantes al plantear el análisis de la inseguridad laboral como fenómeno colectivo y mostrar cómo la experiencia colectiva de la inseguridad tenía repercusiones sobre el bienestar de los trabajadores más allá de las producidas por sus percepciones individuales. En base a esta investigación se han propuesto en el presente artículo una serie de implicaciones para la práctica profesional.

Palabras Clave: Inseguridad laboral, Variables intervinientes, Clima de inseguridad laboral, Implicaciones prácticas.

Currently, the world economy is being affected by a strong economic and financial crisis that has transferred to the labor market in the form of job insecurity and job losses. This situation has hit hard in the whole of Europe, where there has been a significant increase in unemployment and temporality, reaching 10.6% and 13.7%, respectively, in 2012 (Eurostat, 2013). However, not all European countries

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have been equally affected by this situation. In fact Spain, along with other countries of southern Europe, has worryingly higher levels. In 2012, the unemployment rate reached 25.4% and temporary employment contracts reached 23.6% (Eurostat, 2013). For young people aged 16 to 24 years, these figures are twice as high. Consequently, concern about possible job loss or job insecurity among many Spanish workers, especially the youngest and oldest, has now become a characteristic feature of the labor market.

Job insecurity has been defined as "the perceived inability to maintain continued employment in a job risk situation" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p.438). The subject has been studied mainly from the framework of the stress theory (Lazarus

& Folkman, 1984), conceptualizing it as an important source of job stress. Perceived job insecurity involves the anticipation of a negative event, such as job loss, and its predominantly negative consequences for the economic, psychological and social development of these workers. In particular, the unemployment situation generally implies the loss or reduction of economic and social resources along with a breakdown in the stability and structure of time, and other functions that are usually provided by work and employment. Moreover, this uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the continuity of employment often make it difficult for the worker to adopt more effective coping strategies that are appropriate for managing the threat. The worker is not certain about how the possible unemployment situation might occur, so the most common strategies for coping with the condition of job loss cannot be used to their full extent and the employee remains in a situation of uncertainty. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have pointed out that the confusion about the occurrence of an event, such as the possible loss of employment, may be more stressful than the loss itself. In fact, The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2007) has pointed out that job insecurity is one of the main problems associated with job stress in Europe. Specifically, they presented this source of stress as the third largest psychosocial risk in the workplace after "precarious contracts in the context of an unstable labor market" and "the increasing vulnerability of workers in the context of globalization."

For this reason, various European organizations have highlighted the problem of job insecurity as one of the major challenges to be addressed in the European Union in the coming years (see e.g. UNICE, UEAPME and CEEP). In fact, in an attempt to protect jobs and ensure job security for workers, the European Union has already adopted several measures among which the promotion of flexicurity is included (e.g. Council Directive 1999/70/EC, European Employment Strategy). Consistent with this situation and the need for progress in the prevention of this important psychosocial work risk, considerable research activity has been carried out on issues related to this subject. There have been several reviews of the state of the art in this research (Cheng & Chan 2008; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall, 2002), and there have also been a considerable number of empirical studies examining various relevant aspects of labor insecurity.

Despite this important research activity, limitations have been detected in the understanding and prevention of this phenomenon, as well as gaps that require further research. In this context, the Institute of Psychology of Human Resources, Organizational Development and Quality of Working Life (IDOCAL) of the University of Valencia has been developing a line of research on this topic over the last decade. In this paper, we will focus on the analysis of the main issues this research has been addressing: (1) the determinants of job insecurity, (2) diversity in the perception of job insecurity in terms of the

population group, (3) the main factors that buffer its negative effects, and (4) the conceptualization of job insecurity as a collective construct: the climate of job insecurity. Afterwards the potential implications of this research for professional practice are discussed. Finally, some general conclusions are presented arising from the studies reviewed and other relevant papers on the subject.

DETERMINING FACTORS IN THE PERCEPTION OF JOB INSECURITY

The research on job insecurity is quite extensive. However, most efforts have focused on studying its impact on the well-being of workers, paying less attention to its determining factors, i.e., the factors that may explain the variability in the experiences of this source of stress (Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen, 1999). In the existing research, these antecedents can be classified into three groups (Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002; Sora, Pérez, Estreder & Caballer, 2006): (1) conditions of the environment and the organization (e.g., communication and participation; Vander, Baillien, Cuy-per & De Witte, 2010), (2) the characteristics of individuals and their position within the organization (e.g., gender, age, length of service within the organization and race; Dachapalli & Parumasur, 2012; gender, Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen, 1999), and (3) the personality characteristics of workers (for example, self-esteem, Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002).

The question of identifying the individual and contextual characteristics that are relevant to the experiences of job insecurity requires broad interest in view of the limited empirical evidence available. This is one of the areas in which IDOCAL has focused its research. Regarding the antecedents related to the characteristics of individuals and their position within the organization, the length of service in the organization influences the perception of job insecurity (Sora, Pérez, Estreder & Caballer, 2006). According to the human capital model (Becker, 1993), workers receive special training through which they develop a range of skills and competencies to carry out their work. These skills raise the productivity of the company, and thus employees are able to add value to the company and thereby reduce their chances of dismissal. Consequently, workers with greater length of service have lower levels of job insecurity. In this line, Peiró, Sora and Caballer (2012) also identified employability in the labor market and underemployment as determining variables of perceived job insecurity. Employability is therefore presented as one of the employment alternatives available to a worker in the labor market to reduce their experience of job insecurity. The most highly rated workers are offered better jobs and better working conditions (e.g., stable jobs), in order to attract and keep them in the organization; and this reduces the probability that they will experience insecurity. In addition, if they consider that the conditions offered by the company are not suitable, these workers can leave the



organization with the expectation of finding an alternative job with relative ease. Hence the most employable workers in the labor market experience lower levels of job insecurity. Underemployment includes over-qualification and underemployment in time. Overeducation is defined as a situation in which individuals have a surplus of skills, knowledge, education, experience or other qualifications that are not required or used in the job (Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró & Truxillo, 2011). Underemployment in time means that the employment relationship of the worker is not their preference, i.e., workers who work part time but would prefer full-time jobs, or workers with temporary contracts who would prefer permanent ones. This mismatch and the working conditions mean that these workers are not the most desirable or valuable resource of the organization, so they experience higher levels of job insecurity.

With respect to personality characteristics, the perception of the possibility of job loss as a source of stress depends on the worker's individual evaluation according to the theory of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This individual valuation (or primary and secondary appreciation) is conditioned by personality differences, employment history or the current employment status of the individual (Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990). Based on the conceptualization of self-efficacy by Bandura (1997), who defines it as an individual's beliefs regarding their ability to perform a particular action or behavior successfully, Sora et al. (2006) have demonstrated the association between job insecurity and work self-efficacy and they also point out that this relationship varies depending on the workers' time served in the organization. Workers with high job self-efficacy and a greater number of years worked reported lower levels of job insecurity than other workers.

Perceived job insecurity in different population groups

In research conducted at IDOCAL, we have paid special attention to the different types of contract that exist in today's job market and how they might impact on job insecurity. Often, research on this issue has considered temporary workers as a single group. However, very different concepts, situations and contractual conditions are included under the label "temporary contract". Hence, we have proposed a more elaborate distinction regarding the different types of temporary contracts. Following Marler et al. (2002), Silla, Gracia & Peiró (2005) identified four types of temporary workers, taking into account two dimensions (whether or not they prefer a temporary contract and employability): traditional temporary, "permanent" temporary, transient temporary and boundaryless workers.

The workers classified in the different groups showed no significant differences in the perception of job insecurity, although the groups with low employability showed higher levels of job insecurity than the groups with high employability. In addition, the authors compared the perceived job insecurity

of these temporary groups with that of permanent workers, finding that the latter have lower levels of job insecurity than any of the temporary groups. It was also found that levels of life satisfaction were lower in traditional temporary than in the other groups, including permanent workers. Using these same four groups of temporary workers and one group of workers with permanent or indefinite contracts, Gracia, Ramos, Peiró, Caballer and Sora (2011) found that boundaryless workers and permanent workers had lower levels of job insecurity than other workers with temporary contracts. Furthermore, they found that transient workers were less satisfied and less committed to their work. The intention of abandonment was higher in boundaryless workers and transient workers. With regards to self-efficacy and perceived job performance, the results showed that the traditional temporary workers had the lowest scores on both variables. No differences were found between the groups in relation to their health. The results of both articles point to the idea that transient temporary workers have the most negative attitudes towards work and the organization.

In another study, Isaksson, Peiró, Bernhard-Oettel, Caballer, Gracia & Ramos (2010) analyzed the differences between temporary and permanent workers in seven countries from the perspective of the employer, finding significant differences only in certain countries such as Germany and Israel with regards to the employers' levels of satisfaction with the workers, this being greater with respect to temporary than permanent workers. It is interesting to note that in the UK the result is precisely the opposite. It is therefore important to consider domestic factors that may be affecting this relationship. Regarding equal treatment to both groups, employers indicated that temporary workers were treated the same as permanent workers, although many of them indicated that there were small differences and a minority indicated that the differences were large in areas such as better opportunities for training or career development for permanent workers. Employers also reported that certain HR practices were applied more among permanent than temporary workers, such as performance evaluation, the provision of training and development or performance-related pay. In addition, Pérez, Caballer and Sora (2008) also analyzed psychological well-being considering the type of contract from the perspective of permanent employees. The results show that civil servants had greater negative effects than other permanent workers when the job they had was not their preferred choice.

Finally, Sora, González, Caballer and Peiró (2011) analyzed the possible influence of the occupational group on the relationship between job insecurity and its possible consequences such as job and life satisfaction, organizational commitment and perceived performance, finding evidence to support this hypothesis. Less skilled workers showed lower scores on life satisfaction and perception of performance than more qualified workers. However, white-collar workers showed lower levels of job satisfaction than the rest.



BUFFERING FACTORS OF JOB INSECURITY

Job insecurity, when analyzed as a source of stress at work, has been associated with a significant deterioration of workers' physical and psychological health (e.g., cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety; Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen, 1999), attitudes (such as job satisfaction or employee engagement, Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999) and behavior (leaving the organization, productivity, Hellgren et al., 1999). However, the magnitude of this relationship varies among the different empirical studies that have been conducted (Sverke et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 2008).

A plausible explanation for this inconsistency is based on the possible presence of other intervening variables, which either buffer or enhance the effect of job insecurity. The relationships of individuals faced with sources of stress are sometimes influenced by factors other than the source of stress in question, and they can explain the different reactions of individuals to the same source of stress. These could be individual factors, such as those related to the environment, that help individuals to cope with sources of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In the case of job insecurity, several different studies have analyzed the moderating role of social and organizational characteristics such as social support (Lim, 1996, Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), flexicurity (Burchell, 2009) and cultural values (Probst & Lawler, 2006), and individual variables such as personality characteristics (Näswall, Sverke & Hellgren, 2005), positive affect (Vander, Bosman, De Cuyper, Stouten & De Witte, 2013) and emotional intelligence (Cheng, Huang, Lee & Ren, 2012).

As part of IDOCAL's research, we have analyzed the role of some of these variables as potential mitigating factors of perceived job insecurity.

Sora, Caballer and Peiró (2011) provide empirical evidence on the role of organizational support as a buffer against the negative effects of job insecurity on job satisfaction, psychological health and workers' intentions to leave the organization. Organizational support is conceived as a coping strategy in the literature on stress and is considered a source of emotional resources (sense of belonging, sense of control) and practical and informational resources (funding for assistance, guidance) (Greenglass, 2000), which allows employees to better cope with stress and experience fewer harmful consequences (Witt & Carlson, 2006).

The fairness of the organization perceived by their employees and the climate of organizational justice (i.e., the fact that all or most workers share these perceptions of fairness regarding the distribution of resources, procedures and personal attention of the company) are based on the premise that employees use their perceptions of justice when faced with an uncertain situation, such as the possibility of job loss, to decide how to act, according to the theory of management uncertainty (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). The ability to achieve certain security or certainty through justice or a climate of justice improves the attitudes and intentions of employees (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to quit) (Silla, Gracia, Mañas & Peiró, 2010; Sora, Caballer & Peiró, 2010).

In relation to the individual characteristics that can make a difference when experiencing the consequences of job insecurity, our research has focused on employability, job dependency and recovery.

Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiró and De Witte (2009) show how the ability of workers to find a job with relative ease (employability) affects their emotional well-being, and more specifically, how they were able to mitigate the negative impact of perceived job insecurity as part of this well-being. Workers with lower employability reported lower emotional well-being compared to those workers with greater employability. In this line, Sora, Caballer and Peiró (2010) presented "job dependency", defined in terms of employability and economic necessity, as a situational variable that plays an important role as a buffer in the relationship between job insecurity and its consequences (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to leave the organization). Workers with less chance of finding a job and whose main source of income came from their current job were more "dependent" than workers with greater employability and alternative sources of income. Therefore, sensing the possibility of losing their jobs (job insecurity), the more dependent workers experienced more negative consequences than those that were less dependent. Finally, Sora and Hoeye (2012) developed a model that showed how job insecurity negatively affected the emotional well-being of workers, but this effect was mitigated by a recovery strategy: psychological detachment. Workers who perceived job insecurity and used this strategy of psychological detachment experienced a reduced decline in their emotional well-being and this positively impacted their family life, specifically their family satisfaction.

**FIGURE 1
TYPOLOGY OF TEMPORARY WORKERS**

		Preference for contract	
		Low	High
Employability	High	Transient	Boundaryless
	Low	Traditional	Permanent

JOB INSECURITY AS A COLLECTIVE PHENOMENON: THE CLIMATE OF JOB INSECURITY

As previously noted, there has been a proliferation of research on job insecurity in recent decades. However, the achievements have a major shortcoming since they have been directed exclusively at the individual aspects of job insecurity, without considering the employment context. Individuals are framed within the teams, organizations and labor markets that influence



them and their behaviors and perceptions; therefore they are the result of the combination of the influence of the context and individual differences (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Hence, adopting a multilevel perspective, which enables the consideration of both individual and collective perceptions, is crucial to achieving a greater understanding of this stressor. The research group IDOCAL has been a pioneer in adopting this perspective in order to attain more comprehensive knowledge regarding job insecurity.

From this perspective, Sora, De Cuyper, Caballer, Peiró and De Witte (2012), Sora, Caballer, Peiró and De Witte (2009) and De Cuyper, Sora, De Witte, Caballer and Peiró (2009) empirically demonstrated the existence of a collective perception of job insecurity within organizations, called a "climate of job insecurity." More specifically, these studies showed that, through their interactions, the individuals in an organization share their individual perceptions of job insecurity, in a way that their perceptions tend to be homogenized, and a climate of job insecurity emerges as a contextual phenomenon. Thus, the climate of job insecurity reflects the collective concern of the possible loss of jobs in an organization. This concern, according to stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), is as stressful for workers as the loss of jobs itself. Hence the climate of job insecurity is seen as a source of contextual stress. In fact, the studies mentioned (Sora et al., 2009a; 2009b, 2012) show the climate of job insecurity as a strong contextual stressor, with an adverse effect on workers beyond their individual perceptions. In other words, the results of these studies are proof of the greater impact of the job insecurity climate on attitudes (job satisfaction and organizational commitment), behavior (intention to leave the organization) and workers' health, in comparison to the individual perception of job insecurity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The current labor market situation makes it practically impossible for widespread concern about job loss to disappear. Consequently, it is necessary to take additional measures to consider the stressor of job insecurity from both the individual and collective (job insecurity climate) perspectives. It is important to adopt measures to improve recruitment strategies and the situation in the labor market to increase the employment positions with reasonable levels of stability to reduce the insecurity. It will be of interest, therefore, to contribute to the effectiveness of organizations so that they create jobs and it is also necessary to promote entrepreneurship in order to expand the corporate sector, creating quality employment.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to adopt effective measures to facilitate preventive coping with the adverse effects of job insecurity. These actions may be planned and carried out at various levels. For example, interventions can be developed at governmental, organizational and individual levels. From the various national and European government agencies, steps

have been taken with the aim of securing employment on the one hand, and addressing various psychosocial risks such as the sources of stress, on the other. However, while this set of measures indirectly affects the perception of job insecurity, other measures are essential to directly address workers' perceptions of possible job loss and the harmful consequences of this perception. Additionally, organizational measures in accordance with the psychosocial research should be aimed at mitigating the organizational factors that promote the perception of job insecurity and supporting the factors that contribute to lowering the levels of this stressor. An example of this would be measures aimed at changing organizational practices and policies that help individuals to perceive job insecurity as a less stressful phenomenon, and the creation of efficient communication channels and a climate of organizational support and justice. Finally, the individual measures would be aimed at providing employees with various coping and stress management strategies, helping them to perceive their job insecurity as a less stressful phenomenon.

In summary, the actions that can be carried out in the field of psychology must consider the contribution to the improvement of the labor market and job creation in their involvement in making organizations both more humane and productive and at the same time, in turn, workers present high job performance when they are satisfied and happy in their work (see the work of Peiró et al. on psychological well-being at work in this issue). Moreover, analyzing the subjective experiences and identifying the factors that directly affect them or act as a buffer also has an important role in the research on this subject.

CONCLUSIONS

Job insecurity is one of the most damaging stressors that workers face in today's reality. This is why researchers have devoted significant efforts in trying to understand this phenomenon and thus provide a knowledge base that can serve as a basis for intervention in the professional field. In this framework, the research developed by IDOCAL has addressed some of the determinants of job insecurity (such as perceived employability, underemployment or self-efficacy at work), the different perceptions of job insecurity among different types of workers (depending on the contract type or occupational group), some of its mitigating factors (organizational support, perceptions of fairness in the relationship with the company) and its collective conceptualization as a climate of job insecurity.

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