Job insecurity and its cross-domain effect on family satisfaction. The role of employee's impaired affective well-being and detachment

Beatriz Sora* & Thomas Höge**

* Open University of Catalonia, Spain
** University of Innsbruck, Austria

Abstract

Labor market developments have important implications for employees' job stability. Job insecurity is a work stressor associated with a large variety of negative outcomes. Research has dedicated a great amount of effort to examine these detrimental consequences of job insecurity. However, previous studies have mainly focused on the outcomes inside the work domain, and little attention has been paid to the spillover effects of job insecurity on variables in other life domains of employees. Likewise, little is known about the processes linking job insecurity and spillover outcomes. In the present paper, a moderated mediation model is proposed to explain the relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction. Data were gathered from 556 employees working in different Spanish organizations from the services sector. The results showed that job insecurity was directly and negatively associated with family satisfaction and affective well-being. However, the relationship between job insecurity and impaired affective well-being was moderated by psychological detachment. Job insecurity also affected family satisfaction indirectly via impaired affective well-being and contingent on psychological detachment.

Keywords

Job Insecurity – Family Satisfaction – Affective Well-being – Psychological Detachment

In the last few decades, an important number of transformations have occurred in the majority of the labor markets in Western countries (i.e., industrial restructuring, increasing global competition, economic recessions and radical technological shifts). In an attempt to maintain and increase their effectiveness and competitiveness in the market, organizations have taken several measures, such as downsizing, organizational restructuring, mergers, privatizations or flexible organization of work (Quinlan & Bohle, 2009; Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999; Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1991). This situation has been aggravated in the last few years by the recent economic crisis. The complex economic situation has forced many organizations to adopt more drastic means to reduce their costs. Therefore, unemployment and contingent employment rates have significantly increased in many European countries as well as in the US. One example is Spain, which has the highest unemployment and temporary employment rates in Europe, and the highest in Spain's recent history. As a result, the Spanish labor market is characterized by job instability and a higher risk of job loss. Hence, a sense of job insecurity is a widespread phenomenon among Spanish employees.

Against the background of common stress theories (e.g., Hobfoll, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), overall concern about the continued existence of one's job in the future, or job insecurity (De Witte, 1999), is conceptualized as a specific work stressor. The anticipation of possible job loss can be perceived as just as stressful as the job loss itself (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). As a work stressor, job insecurity is associated with a wide range of detrimental outcomes for employees (i.e. job attitudes, behaviors and health). Indeed, Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall (2002) as well as Cheng and Chan (2008), in their respective meta-analyses, reviewed the most outstanding consequences of job insecurity, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, affective well-being or intention to leave the organization.

The existing meta-analyses and reviews (Cheng & Chan, 2008, De Witte, 1999; Sverke et al., 2002) show that research on job insecurity has mainly focused on

examining its association with *work outcomes*. Thus, the possible effects of job insecurity outside the workplace (e.g., private life or family life) seem to be underestimated, even though some studies provide evidence that job security is important in establishing and maintaining strong families (e.g., Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994). Taking this backdrop into consideration, two relevant research needs can be observed. On the one hand, family outcomes should be paid more attention to when examining the possible detrimental effects of job insecurity. On the other hand, the scarce research in the field has mainly focused on the *direct effects* of job insecurity on family outcomes, overlooking the processes involved. Therefore, as little is known about the mechanisms through which job insecurity exerts its influence, it would be of greater interest to clarify how the effects occur by looking for a relationship chain. Thus, mediation processes, understood as processes through which some variables affect others via intervening or mediating factors, play an essential role in determining the effects between predictors and outcomes (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Barling and MacEwen (1992) suggested that the modest strength of the relationship between work stressors (i.e., job insecurity) and family outcomes could be explained by additional intervening factors. In this vein, the present study proposes that the relationship between job insecurity and family outcomes could be indirect and mediated by other variables.

Family Outcomes: Family Satisfaction

Only a handful of studies have focused on examining the effect of job insecurity on employees outside the workplace. According to the spillover hypothesis (see Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Kabanoff, 1980), experiences from one life domain (e.g. life at work) can have corresponding influences in other life domains (e.g. family life). Therefore, workers' experiences on the job carry over into their non-work experiences, such as family life. There is empirical evidence for the relationship between experiences at work and family outcomes that provides strong support for the spillover theory (e.g., Bowling et al., 2010; Lambert, 1990). More specifically, positive work experiences (e.g., job satisfaction) are associated with positive family outcomes, whereas negative work experiences (e.g., work stress) are related to family dysfunction (see Barling, 1990).

In relation to job insecurity, the results obtained to date follow this same direction (see Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994; Westman, Etzion & Danon, 2001; Barling, Dupre & Hepburn, 1998). The literature focusing on the link between job insecurity and family outcomes may be classified into three branches, according to the family outcomes examined: (1) *family functioning*, measured in terms of general family functioning, quality of family communication, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, family problem-solving ability, family role clarity, behavior control and number of marriage and family problems (Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994); (2) *marital outcomes,* for example, marital adjustment (Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994), marital satisfaction (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999; Barling & MacEwen, 1992), sexual satisfaction and psychological aggression (Barling & MacEwen, 1992); (3) *cross-over outcomes:* the effect of job insecurity on *other family members' health, attitudes and behaviors* (i.e. spouse or children) (Barling, Dupre & Hepburn, 1998; Westman, Etzion & Danon, 2001). Nevertheless, there are still a significant number of additional family outcomes to consider. One example would be family satisfaction, which reflects „an affective state resulting from one's assessment of family aspects of his or her life in general" (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006, p. 1018).

The Mediating Role of Affective Well-being

Our line of reasoning for the mediator role of affective well-being in the job insecurity-family satisfaction relationship is also based on the spillover hypothesis, which states that „a person's work and relative placement in an organization can arouse a set of feelings that are brought home and affect the tenor and dynamics of family life" (Kanter, 1977, p. 47). Therefore, employees who perceive job insecurity tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, which will in turn increase the difficulty in carrying out their family responsibilities (Larson et al., 1994). This reasoning suggests an indirect effect of job insecurity on family outcomes through affective well-being (i.e., anxiety and depression), and it also agrees with the concept of *strain-based conflict* in the work-family literature (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). To our knowledge, no study has empirically examined such a mediator model for the relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction via affective well-being; although previous literature has already established precedents showing that the relationship between job insecurity and other family outcomes can be indirect. In this regard, we are aware of only two studies. Barling and MacEwen (1992) tested a four-stage model which showed how job insecurity could affect marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction and psychological aggression through concentration and depression. Mauno and Kinnunen (1999) found that the relationship between job insecurity and marital satisfaction was mediated by job exhaustion and psychosomatic symptoms.

The Moderating Role of Psychological Detachment

In the previous section, we proposed the indirect effect of job insecurity on family outcomes through affective well-being (i.e., depression and anxiety). However, if we review the literature on the job insecurity-well being link, we can observe that this relationship is often affected by other factors (Sora, Caballer, Peiró, Gracia & Silla, 2010).

Recent research has proposed the moderating role of psychological detachment from work in the job insecurity-detrimental outcomes association (see Kinnunen, Mauno & Siltaloppi, 2010). Psychological detachment from work means to disengage oneself mentally from work in non-work times (e.g. leisure). It implies to stop thinking about one's work and job-related problems or opportunities. Psychological detachment from work goes beyond the pure physical absence from the workplace during off-job time and abstaining from job-related tasks. „It implies leaving the workplace behind oneself in psychological terms" (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007, p. 205). Therefore, psychological detachment is conceptualized as an individual coping strategy to restore energy in a stressful situation and mitigate the strain process, according to stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Accordingly, individuals perceiving job insecurity should show differences in their strain reactions depending on their levels of psychological detachment. Employees with higher levels of psychological detachment could replenish their resources and maintain their well-being to a greater extent when they perceive job insecurity compared to employees with lower psychological detachment. In this regard, only Kinnunen, Mauno, and Siltaloppi (2010) provide certain empirical support. They showed that psychological detachment mitigated the negative effect of job insecurity on employees' well-being. However, unlike the two-dimensional conceptualization of affective well-being (i.e., depression and anxiety) adopted in this paper, Kinnunen et al. (2010) measured occupational well-being, understood as the need to recover, job exhaustion and vigor at work.

In sum, it is plausible to suggest that psychological detachment may play a moderator role in the relationship between job insecurity and affective well-being (i.e., depression and anxiety).

Research Objective and Hypothesis

Based on the review of the literature and predictions of spillover theory, the purpose of the present study is threefold: (1) to examine the possible direct relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction; (2) to investigate the moderator role of psychological detachment from work in the relationship between job insecurity and affective well-being; and (3) to examine the indirect effect of job insecurity on family satisfaction through affective well-being (depression and anxiety). However, given that affective well-being can be determined not only by job insecurity but also by the interaction between job insecurity and psychological detachment, it also seems relevant to consider this interactional effect on affective well-being in order to explain its role in the mediation model in greater detail. The combination of the moderated and indirect relationship leads to the suggestion that affective well-being (depression and anxiety) mediates the relationship between job insecurity and family outcomes, contingent on psychological detachment from work. The hypotheses are stated and specified by the numbered paths in the model presented in Figure 1.

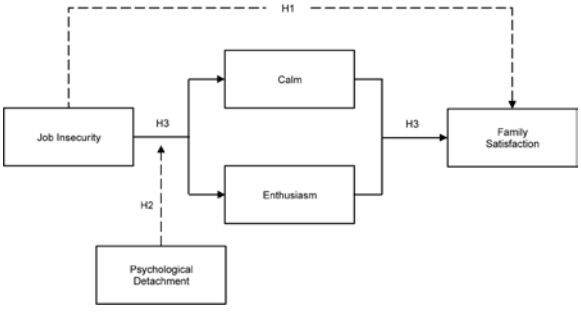


Figure 1: Hypothesized moderated mediation model.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were gathered in 2008 from 556 employees of 53 organizations from the Spanish services sector. Researchers contacted the Human Resources Departments of organizations to explain the aims of the research and ask for collaboration. Once the organizations had agreed to collaborate, researchers distributed questionnaires among the employees in their workplace. The completed questionnaires were directly returned to researchers. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Of the participants, seventy percent were women (N = 391), and twenty-eight percent were men (N = 156), with an average age of 40.65 (SD = 10.43). Twenty-two percent were temporary workers (N = 122), and seventy-six percent were permanent workers (N = 420). There were 14 missing data for type of contract (2.5 %) and 9 for sex (1.6 %).

Measures

Job Insecurity was measured with the 4-item scale developed by De Witte (2000). It includes: „Chances are, I will soon lose my job". The response range was from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .82.

Psychological detachment was assessed with four items from the scale by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). Participants were asked to respond to the items with regard to their free time after work. For example: „I distance myself from my work". The response range was from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .87.

Affective well-being was measured with 12 adjectives (e.g., „enthusiastic", „gloomy"), and we used the following instruction: „In the past few weeks, how often have you felt each of the following regarding your work?" (Warr, 1990). This scale measured two facets of well-being: *anxiety-calm* and *depression-enthusiasm,* with a response range from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Therefore, higher scores on these scales reflected higher levels of affective well-being. Cronbach's alpha was .83 for calm and .86 for enthusiasm.

Family satisfaction was assessed using a 5-item scale (SWFL, Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Example: „I am satisfied with my family life". The response range was from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .89.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses (i.e., descriptive analysis and correlations) were computed. Our model and hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). According to Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes' (2007) as well as Preacher and Hayes' (2008) guidelines for moderated multiple mediation models, we tested the significance of conditional indirect effects, that is, „the magnitude of an indirect effect at a particular value of a moderator" (Preacher et al., 2007, p. 186). Thus, in our structural equation model: (1) the mediator variables (calm and enthusiasm) were regressed on the independent variable (job insecurity), the moderator variable (psychological detachment) and the interaction between the independent and moderator variables; and (2) the dependent variable (family satisfaction) was predicted from the independent variable (job insecurity), the moderator variable (psychological detachment), and the interaction between the independent and moderator variables and the mediator variables (calm and enthusiasm). In other words, this model made it possible to examine the indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator variables at certain values of the moderator variable. The different values of the moderator variable (psychological detachment) were defined as one standard deviation above and one below the mean score (Preacher et al., 2007). We used grand-mean centered scores to solve the possible problem of multicollinearity (see Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Graphical representations were plotted for a better understanding of the nature of the interactions (Aiken & West, 1991). For parameter estimation, the bootstrapping method was applied. These analyses were conducted with the statistical program Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2007).

Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables are shown in Table 1. From the bivariate perspective, job insecurity was unrelated to psychological detachment but showed significant (negative) associations with calm (r = -.25, p < .01), enthusiasm (r = -33, p < .01), and family satisfaction (r = -.24, p < .01). The two dimensions of well-being, calm and enthusiasm, showed a strong overlap (r = .75, p < .01). Moreover, calm and enthusiasm were significantly related to family satisfaction (r = .29, p < .01; r = .36, p < .01).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlations.

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job Insecurity	2.17	.93	-				
2. Psychological detachment	3.16	1.00	-.04	-			
3. Calm	3.21	.50	-.25**	.36**	-		
4. Enthusiasm	3.86	.73	-.33**	.22**	.75**	-	
5. Family satisfaction	5.20	1.28	-.24**	.17**	.29**	.36**	-

**p < .05, **p < .01, two-tailed.*

The structural equation results showed an appropriate global fit for the moderated multiple mediation model, except for the Chi-squared index. The Chi-squared value was significant ($\chi^2 = 10.359$, $p < .05$), pointing out a poor fit between the observed covariance matrix and the hypothesized model. However, this is probably due to the sample size. Both the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) showed an excellent fit, as their values were lower than .08 (RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .02) (Browne & Cudek, 1993). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) reflects the discrepancy per degree of freedom for the model. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) presents the standardized difference between the observed covariance and the predicted covariance. The Comparative fit index (CFI) and The Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) values were .99 and .98. They also constituted a good fit, as they surpassed .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Comparative fit index (CFI) presented the fit between the hypothesized model and a model that specifies no relationships among variables. The Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), also known as the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), compared the proposed model's fit to a null model.

Table 2 presents a summary of the results for the moderated mediation model. Job insecurity was significantly and negatively associated with family satisfaction. Thus, employees who perceived higher job insecurity experienced lower levels of family satisfaction. Similarly, results showed a significant and negative relationship between job insecurity and affective well-being (i.e. calm and enthusiasm). The interaction term between job insecurity and psychological detachment further explained the variance in calm and enthusiasm. In other words, psychological detachment moderated the relationship between job insecurity and affective well-being. Figures 2 and 3 showed the nature of the interaction effects. Specifically, they revealed that calm and enthusiasm levels descended when job insecurity was perceived. However, this effect was less pronounced for employees who presented high levels of psychological detachment.

Table 2: Summary of Structural Equation Model.

	Calm		Enthusiasm		Family satisfaction	
	PE	SE	PE	SE	PE	SE
Direct effects						
Job Insecurity	-.30**	.03	-.43**	.05	-.19**	.06
Psychological Detachment	.06**	.01	.06**	.01	-	-
Calm					-.18	.13
Enthusiasm					.61**	.11
Moderator effect						
Job Insecurity*Psychological detachment	.06**	.01	.06**	.01		
Conditional indirect effects of job insecurity via calm and enthusiasm on different levels of psychological detachment (Mean ± 1 SD)						
Calm						
Low Psychological Detachment					.06	.05
High Psychological Detachment					.04	.03
Enthusiasm						
Low Psychological Detachment					-.22**	.04
High Psychological Detachment					-.15**	.03

**p < .05, **p < .01, two-tailed.*
Note: PE – parameter estimate. SE – standard error.

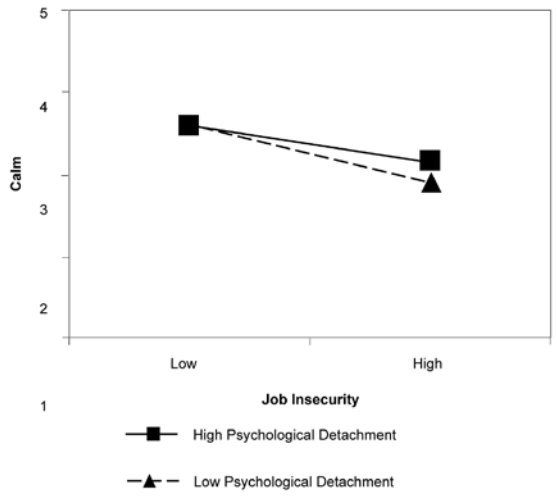


Figure 2: Interaction between job insecurity and psychological detachment in predicting calm.

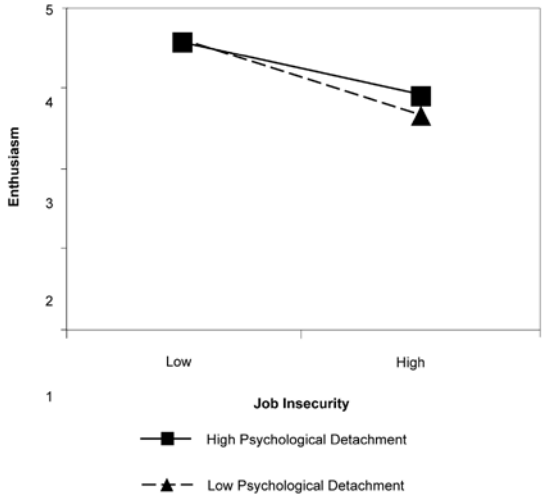


Figure 3: Interaction between job insecurity and psychological detachment in predicting enthusiasm.

Results showed that only enthusiasm mediated the relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction. This mediation was moderated by psychological detachment. Table 2 shows that the negative indirect effect of job insecurity on family satisfaction via enthusiasm varies depending on the level of psychological detachment. The indirect effect is stronger at the lower level of detachment than at the higher level of detachment. To conclude, concerns about job insecurity can detrimentally affect employees' enthusiasm, which can in turn deteriorate family satisfaction, but this relationship is contingent on the level of employees' psychological detachment. It is also true that this moderated mediation is only partial, due to a significant direct effect of job insecurity on family satisfaction. However, we did not find this moderated mediation effect for the calm-dimension of affective well-being.

Finally, results show a significant and direct relationship between psychological detachment and affective well-being (calm and enthusiasm). The higher the psychological detachment was, the higher the levels of calm and enthusiasm.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide certain support for a cross-domain research model linking job insecurity to family satisfaction, by examining the contributions of various moderator and mediator factors. Specifically, it was a moderated model that hypothesized the mediator role of affective well-being (calm and enthusiasm) in the relationship between job insecurity and spillover outcomes (family satisfaction), contingent on psychological detachment.

Results from structural equation modeling showed that there was a relationship between job insecurity and employees' family satisfaction. These findings provide evidence that the perception of job insecurity not only affects employees in the workplace, but it can also have consequences for them outside the workplace (i.e., family life). Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which predicted a relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction, was supported. Accordingly, the results supported, on the one hand, the traditional view that job insecurity can be understood as a work stressor with detrimental outcomes for employees (i.e., Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte & Näswall, 2003; Sora, Caballer & Peiró, 2010; Sverke et al., 2002) and, on the other hand, earlier research related to job insecurity and spillover theory which points out the negative consequences of job insecurity outside the workplace (e.g., Larson, Wilson & Beley, 1994; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994; Westman, Etzion & Danon, 2001; Barling, Dupre & Hepburn, 1998).

Since our results also support the second hypothesis, we replicated the main effect of job insecurity on affective well-being, as found in the literature (i.e., Daniels, 2000; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Sora, Caballer, Peiró, Gracia & Silla, 2010). However, unlike these studies, we also examined the potential moderating role of psychological detachment in this association. Results showed that psychological detachment buffered the detrimental effect of job insecurity on employees' well-being. Employees' capacity to disengage themselves mentally from work could decrease the negative effect of concerns about the possibility of job loss on well-being. This mechanism can act as a coping strategy for job insecurity perceptions, as it allows employees to distance themselves mentally from work and, specifically, from their concern about the possibility of job loss. Thus, these findings lend support to prior research that conceptualized psychologi-

cal detachment as a buffer of work stress, and more specifically, job insecurity (i.e., Kinnunen et al. 2010).

Furthermore, our findings confirmed hypothesis 3 by supporting the moderated mediation model for the job insecurity-family satisfaction link. Job insecurity showed effects on family satisfaction, mediated by affective well-being (enthusiasm) and contingent on psychological detachment. Therefore, job insecurity, as a work stressor, produces strain in employees, such as an increase in depression or in other words, a decrease in enthusiasm levels. This low level of employees' well-being associated with the workplace is transferred to the family context; therefore, it may also affect family satisfaction. However, given that the detrimental effect of job insecurity on employees' affective well-being can be buffered by psychological detachment, this detrimental spillover outcome is ameliorated by employees' psychological detachment. These results coincide with those from other studies that examine processes through which job insecurity affects employee outcomes, identifying potential intervening factors (e.g., Barling & MacEwen, 1992; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Nevertheless, it is also important to mention that the relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction is not fully explained by the moderated mediation, because our results also showed a significant and direct association between job insecurity and family satisfaction. Indeed, the findings support Preacher and Hayes' (2008) recommendation to understand mediation models as the sum of both direct and indirect effects to explain outcomes. Finally, to conclude, these results showed that family satisfaction can be explained through a moderated mediation model which specifies that job insecurity influences family satisfaction directly and indirectly, via enthusiasm.

A rather unexpected finding had to do with the non-significant indirect relationship between job insecurity and family satisfaction through calm and contingent on psychological detachment. One explanation could lie in the high correlation between the calm and enthusiasm dimensions. The two dimensions are strongly related, so that there seems to be overlapping between these two forms of affective well-being. Therefore, it is possible that the explained variance of family satisfaction by the moderated mediation model via enthusiasm contains the mediator effect of the calm dimension as well. Further research is warranted to clarify this relationship.

Although our results contribute to clarifying the research on the job insecurity-spillover outcomes link, some limitations must be kept in mind. The design of this study was cross-sectional, so that it is not possible to draw conclusions about causal relationships. A longitudinal design would be necessary to infer causal relations and identify the changes in the relations over time. Furthermore, we relied on self-reports to assess all the study variables, which can lead to common variance problems (Avolio, Yammarino & Bass, 1991; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003).

Finally, the results also suggest several theoretical and practical implications. This study provides a more complete understanding of how job insecurity influences employees, by revealing its influence process. It also has an additional value because it shows how job insecurity influences employees' outcomes outside the workplace. Likewise, this study demonstrated the complexity of this relationship, showing how other additional factors can intervene in the job insecurity-spillover outcomes relationship. Regarding practical implications, this study highlights the fact that paying attention to the level of job insecurity in organizations should be a priority. Human resources policies and practices should take this work stressor into consideration and develop the necessary mechanisms to reduce its emergence and effects. One example of these potential mechanisms would be communication systems. Clear, objective and timely information from organizations could reduce uncertainty about the continuity of jobs as well as possible rumors about job loss. Appropriate and formal communication in organizations could ameliorate the emergence and detrimental outcomes of job insecurity. Furthermore, interventions for developing employees' coping strategies could be also recommendable. Coping strategies, such as psychological detachment, could provide employees with the necessary tools to deal with the job insecurity experience. Therefore, employees could react in an appropriate way when job insecurity is perceived, and it would be not as detrimental for them.

Future research could examine the role of job insecurity in a wider range of spillover outcomes (e.g., family cohesion or family adaptability). Likewise, in this study, psychological detachment has been examined due to its innovative nature in the literature on job insecurity and, especially, its relationship with affective well-being. However, not much is known about the situational and personal antecedents of the ability to detach psychologically from work (Sonnentag & Kruel, 2006). Likewise, other coping strategies could also ameliorate the negative indirect association between job insecurity and spillover outcomes. Future research is also warranted to examine additional potential buffers in this relationship.

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Correspondence to:
Beatriz Sora
Faculty of Psychology
Open University of Catalonia
Rambla Poblenou 156
08018 Barcelona
Spain
bsora@uoc.edu