

Job insecurity and outcomes psychology essay



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“ Job insecurity is a condition wherein employees lack the assurance that their jobs will remain stable from day to day, week to week, or year to year. Depending on the discipline and political leanings of authors, job insecurity can be referenced in a variety of ways. For instance, “ boundary less careers,” “ flexibility,” “ new employer-employee contracts,” and “ organizational restructuring” can sometimes be used as euphemisms for the dismantling of workplace protections for secure employment (Pollert, 1988; Sweet, Moen, & Meiksins, Forthcoming). But these terms can also be used to highlight positive aspects of job and organizational redesigns, some of which workers find liberating (Heckscher, 1988; Piore & Sabel, 1984) [1]”.

Considering all the changes that happened in the industrial world the past few years, we notice that everything is getting globalised and that new technologies are gaining ground. It is not to be forgotten that lastly, economies of countries suffered due to financial crisis. The frequency with which organizations have been downsized, restructured or merged has increased considerably the past two decade (Burke, 1988; Schabracq et al., 1996). Where for some people getting employed is tough, for others retaining their job seem to be hard. Employees are feeling stressed, anxious and insecure about their place in the organization. Thus, job insecurity is a topic which actually concerns many employees today. Job insecurity can be defined as the uncertainty of retaining their respective job from the point of view of an employee. The latter knows that he or she is going to lose his or her job sooner than the time expected.

By making inference to and looking to various theories, we come to the point that job insecurity can impact negatively on employees (Robinson, 1996;

Rousseau, 1990). The job holders know that in a given time, they are going to lose the psychological, material and social benefits associated with their work. As such, job insecurity may be the result of many reasons other than those mentioned earlier. Nowadays, more companies are shifting towards outsourcing which is profitable for them. When a company thinks of outsourcing part of its work, then, the work load in the main branch decreases. Hence, employees in the head office are going to work lesser. In this case, the company would think it wiser to sack few people from the company than paying them for the minimal work they are doing.

Another factor which could lead to job insecurity is the over qualified labour. As we are all aware, this is the technological era and everything is getting digitalized. As a result, most of the things done manually before are being done today electronically. Simple examples would be, the use of computers to store enormous amount of data, processing these data, advertising through web, e-commerce and e-banking. Therefore, either the employees acquire such knowledge to be competent in their job or they are left as they are. In the second case, if the employee in question is not able to follow the trend and update his skills, he will find himself with a handicap. Due to this, he would feel insecure about his job (Sverke et al., 2002).

In addition to all the above, there is one more cause of job insecurity; downsizing. When a company reduces its workforce permanently, it is known as downsizing. This may be corporate failure due to an economic failure and in turn the company chooses to reduce its number of employees. Company, then, dismisses employees to maintain its profitability or to decrease its costs. Downsizing may also occur when an organization merges with

another. The economy flattens as the service or product section is cut off. Even at times, people are not fired but rather they are employed on part-time or temporary basis. All this really cause an impact on the employees. They feel stressed and live in the fear of losing their job at any time. And when they are not sacked out of their jobs, the temporary jobs make them feel insecure.

Job insecurity may impact on people differently. Some may fight and excel in their job in order to be among the ones staying back in the organization. On the other hand, the remaining employees may be affected negatively. Outcomes of job insecurity may be health related problems such as hypertension, anxiety and depression. Moreover their mental health is also at risk and their family life is somehow disturbed. It is also to be noted that their work life balance may fluctuate to the point of reaching unsteadiness.

Figure 1 : Job insecurity over time (CYNTHIA ROCHA, JENNIFER HAUSE CROWELL, ANDREA K. MCCARTER, 2009)

Job insecurity and its mental and physical related outcomes:

Job insecurity is linked to health problems and this has been examined in many studies. Stress, anxiety, psychological problems and depression (Schreurs et al, 2010, adapted from, Roskies, Louis-Guerin, & Fournier, 1993), mental problem, and emotional collapse (Schreurs et al, 2010, adapted from Dekker and Shaufeli, 1995) can be considered as the outcomes related to health problems. According to a WHO (World Health Organisation) report issued from a Denmark projects, it is clearly mentioned that “ Job insecurity harms health even more than unemployment”. Job insecurity can

have a negative impact on employee's health and this can be confirmed by a study which had been carried out in the United States in the September issue of the peer reviewed journal (Science Daily August 28, 2009). Due to changes in the working condition in the United States, the relationships between the employees and employers have been weakened. Thus, this has result to an increase in the perception of job insecurity.

Job insecurity and its associated outcomes on health are now considered to be a vital aspect of the society. Due to the poor working conditions on job quality, this can affect people mental balance, that is, the mental health of the employees. According to the paper by Artazcoz et al, the authors know about the dangers that employees tend to become depressed and they are anxious. This is because they feel that their job is becoming less secure day by day. The effect of mental health can be an increased in depressive symptoms, a decline in the perceptions of competence and self-esteem. There might also be a high risk of suicide and higher levels of abusive behaviour towards others and this may impact negatively.

There was a study that can be considered as a great interest. Normally, this was carried out to analyse the practice of downsizing that is, reducing the amount of employees, in an organisation. The authors (Vahtera J. Kivimaki M, Pentti J, 1997) brought to close that downsizing is regarded as a danger to the employee health. According to a result of a survey done among the workers in Swiss, one employee upon ten has faced with elevated level job insecurity. With a middle level, there was one worker out of five and those with a low level of job insecurity were two upon three. Thus, this clearly

shows that those who are afraid to be unemployed can suffer from psychosocial stress and this can have a harmful effect on their health.

Employees can have psychosocial stress due to the fear of losing their jobs and this can have a great effect on their health (Adam and Flatau 2006, adapted from Hellgren et al. 2000). In Schnall et al (1992) and Ferrie et al (1995) studies, people anticipate the amendment in job as a result of making it redundant in the near future (Adam and Flatau 2006). So, they make a conclusion that the anticipation of being unemployed can affect workers health both mentally and physically even before they loss the job. One's life can be affected if there is continuous job insecurity. As a result this can lead to an increased of stress, pressure, sadness of losing the job, nervousness and hatred. For Moore et al (2003), a persistent and lasting downsizing can be worse on a worker mental health compared to those are exposed to a termination of employment (Adam and Flatau 2006). A rise in psychological agony is due when there is a decrease of job security and this has been reported in many studies (Adam and Flatau 2006, adapted from Burchell 1994; Bussing 1999; De Witte 1999; Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson 1999; Lim 1996; Dekker and Schaufeli 1995; Mohr 2000; Probst 2000). According to Dekker and Schaufeli (1995) and Kinnunen et al (1999), a disorder of mental, emotional and physically collapse can be a result of high level job insecurity.

In the article published by Robert Roy Britt on the 28th August 2009, thinking about losing job can affect health. The results of two long term studies find that

This means that employees who are losing their jobs are more depressed and having health problems than those who are unemployed. The sociologist Sarah Burgard at the University of Michigan also says that persistent job insecurity can affect health more than smoking or having hypertension in one of the group she has studied (Burgard, 2009).

Figure 2: Interactive effect of job insecurity and job control on impaired general health (B. Schreurs et al, 2010)

Figure 3: Anxiety and Depression Levels Over Time (CYNTHIA ROCHA, JENNIFER HAUSE CROWELL, ANDREA K. MCCARTER, 2009)

Over the recent years, job security has become a more significant concern. In order to plan health and social welfare policies in response to economic volatility and declines in the job markets, it is vital to establish the consequences of the change in the labour market along with the upshot of job insecurity, on one's social, psychological and physical health (Ferrie et al, 1999). Being a delicate subject for both employer and employees, it is not surprising that during financial crises and other critical economic phases, companies are averse to data collection and investigation on the effects these have on their staff's physical and mental health. Predictably, this is to avoid further anxiousness amongst the individuals and create further insecurity (Ferrie et al, 1999). Moreover, job insecurity is also reflected as part of a wider ambiguity that the present working population might feel during their lives (Ferrie et al, 1999).

Generally speaking, within studies made on this subject, job insecurity tends to have a proportional relationship with an employee's nervousness and

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apprehension in the workplace (Putnam, 1993; Karasek, 1981; Purser et al, 1992, adapted from Ferrie et al, 1999). A decrease in the factor is associated with a drop in psychosomatic signs (Putnam, 1993, adapted from Ferrie et al, 1999). Whilst taking into consideration individuals' diverse traits, applying multivariate logistic regression in studies shows that when the subjects are set within a deep sense of insecurity relative to their jobs, their health tends to worsen (Domenighetti, 1999). In particular, this is apparent for the following indicators: poor general health, elevated stress levels, low self esteem, and regular intake of tranquilizers, frequent lower back pain, frequent smoking, and shunning medical treatment (Domenighetti, 1999).

Worryingly, results also show that people with high job insecurity tend to avoid consulting a doctor 3 to 4 times more than the average person (Domenighetti, 1999). This tends to happen because the former tries to avoid giving the impression that they are weaker than other people in the same situation as them (Domenighetti, 1999). This might also confirm why people in a same control group tend to have equal number of medical consultations, regardless of whether they have a high or low level of job insecurity (Domenighetti, 1999). Low physical (Ferrie et al, 2001; Heaney et al, 1994, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005) and particularly mental health have often been connected to job insecurity, (Dekker and Schaufeli 1995; Ferrie et al, 1998, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005) in an increasing number of researches, which combined with the rise in the number of vulnerable jobs, could mean serious health repercussions for employed people.

Most surveys and researches around job insecurity have reflected its detrimental effect on psychological and mental state (Barling and Kelloway 1996; De Witte 1999; Dekker and Schaufeli 1995; Ferrie et al. 1998; Kuhnert and Vance 1992; Pelfrene et al, 2003, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005). The correlation between people's physical health and their job insecurity compared with ones that have more secure employment, has been analysed to a lesser extent though findings have shown that this is also a factor that contributes to deterioration in general health and in particular (Ferrie et al, 1995; Kasl et al, 1972; Kasl et al, 1975; Pelfrene et al. 2003, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005), physical indicators (Ferrie et al. 1998; Heaney et al, 1994, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005), and cardiovascular factors (Arnetz et al, 1991; Ferrie et al. 2001; Kasl and Cobb, 1970; Mattiasson et al, 1990; Siegrist et al, 1988, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005).

Employees exposed to extended periods of job insecurity are prone to endure harmful health symptoms due to the body's release of hormones that result from increased stress levels, which in turn can have an impact on the individual's organ systems (Gazzanizga and Heatherton 2003, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005). Studies have also shown that stressful incidents and contributors can limit the functioning of the body's immunity system which consequently leads to an increase probability of poor health (Cohen et al, 1998; McEwen, 2002, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005). Changes in the individual's habits and actions as a result of the stress from job insecurity could well be a contributor to the fall of the said person's health condition but there is not much substantiation from studies to show that job insecurity

causes variations in tobacco and alcohol consumption (Jenkins et al, 1982; Mattiasson et al, 1990, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005).

There is not much to support the fact that continuous concern about job insecurity has a bigger effect than that of a shorter period. There is a little evidence that shows chronic fears may have more impact on job insecurity than those which last in a short term (Heaney et al, 1994, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005), however little research have been made in this part. Theoretically, constant high levels of stress should be more harmful to health than changeable levels, this is because when stress keeps increasing, a person's capability to handle things will break down (Lazarus, 1966, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005). Heaney and his colleagues (Heaney et al, 1994, adapted from Burgard et al, 2005), suggest that for a short period of time, side effects to the stress caused by job insecurity could be emotional (tension, anxiety, dissatisfaction), mental (High catecholamine secretion) and behavioural (poor concentration, more absenteeism, drug addiction) though in a longer period of time, an increase of these side effects could aggravate physical health conditions.

However, the outcome of job insecurity on the rate of cardiovascular health disease varies by the social support within the job environment and job control. Without the support of managers and colleagues, stress from a job with no control shows an increase in the risk of cardiovascular health disease amongst women with poor job security, particularly over short periods (Karasek et al, 1990; Bosma et al, 1997, adapted from Lee et al, 2004).

There are many ways in which job insecurity may affect the inception of cardiovascular health disease. First of all, the stress-related aspects caused by job insecurity may directly affect the cardiovascular health. Moreover an increase of stress hormones that occurs as a part of allostasis in a human body may also encourage coronary atherosclerosis, fat deposition and increase in serum lipids (Allan et al, 1996, adapted from Lee et al, 2004). Next, mental stress linked with job insecurity may have an indirect impact on the occurrence of cardiovascular health disease with changes in lifestyle such as unbalanced diets and smoking habits. As a final point, job insecurity may also lead to an increase in unfavourable working conditions for those who are still employed, for instance: an increased in workload, pressure, disputes and competition between colleagues. Working under these conditions may cause an increase in job stress and lack in social support thus increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

How does job insecurity lead to a work life imbalance in people's life?

As it is mentioned above job insecurity is causing poor health, anxieties and stress but it is not the only consequences. It is caused by many other circumstances, including threat of job loss, changes in job description, added responsibilities because of dismissal of co worker, forced relocation, loss of potential for promotion.

All these situations have a negative impact not only on the employee but also on marital and family functioning which lead to a work life imbalance. When work interferes with family life it also reduces the satisfaction from job and from life as a whole (Adams et al, 1996).

Work life imbalance happens when an individual cannot pay much attention to his family as well as his work. This happens when an employee is conscious that his job is at risk and increasing fear of losing job in the employees may affect the whole family.

Employees are more affected by job insecurity than to be unemployed (Voydanoff, 1990; Wilson et al, 1993). Moreover job insecurity had a great influence on employee physical well being and self-esteem than those who get job satisfaction or others benefits from the company.

Voydanoff and Donnelly (1998) is the only researcher who had studied about job insecurity and family. In their studies, they have found how many couples had faced a marital and family satisfaction negatively.

A job contains an emotional environment which is transferred to a family. The tenors and dynamics of a family can be affected by the feeling that the worker arouse in his work. (Kanter, 1977)

Job insecurity and Work-Family outcomes

Job insecurity can be described as a function of both the objective situation (e. g., labour market characteristics, organizational change) and the individual's subjective characteristics (e. g., family responsibility, employability).

It has been noted that throughout the 20th century, job insecurity has been an all-encompassing problem for workers who laboured in the secondary labour market mainly.

This can be explained by the fact that traditional values may prompt men to experience higher levels of job insecurity than women, since this role conventionally requires the latter to be the breadwinner of the family. Thus it means that men are more vulnerable to the threat of job loss, as it would not only threaten their source of income, but also their identity, to a higher degree in comparison to women.

The presence of a partner, which forms part of family-based support, has been found to act as a buffer against some of the negative consequences of job insecurity (Lim, 1996). Sverke et al., 2004, found it is likely that living with a partner may remove some of the pressure to bring in an income, but however very few studies have investigated how family status affects the level of job insecurity experienced.

Besides, we can also see that the rate of divorce is also increasing due to the fact that more men are losing their jobs and thus, their family life is affected negatively. Nowadays it is common to have single parent families in our society. Consequently we can see that the results are questionable and thus more research with more adequate measures is needed.

Moreover more evidence show that reactions to job insecurity may have consequences for the individual's family, and even influence children's attitudes toward work, as they see their parents experiencing and reacting to work stressors (Barling, Dupre, & Hepburn, 1998; Lim & Leng Loo, 2003). Likewise the children are affected on their performance at school and they are also discouraged to study further due to the fact that their parents are

being made redundant despite having required qualifications, experience and skills for their work.

For instance, Lim (1996) found that nonwork-based support (i. e., support provided by family and friends) are protected against the negative effects of job insecurity on life satisfaction, while work-based social support also is protected against the negative effects on job satisfaction, proactive job search, and noncompliant job behaviours.

Conclusion

To conclude, we see that job insecurity is an important matter in today's working environment and many people are being affected either mentally or physically or both mentally and physically. It also has a great effect on employee's family life. Thus, affecting his work life balance. On a larger scale, it has a great impact on the society.