

Do cognitive appraisals moderate the link between qualitative job insecurity and psychological-behavioral well-being?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to detect the association between qualitative job insecurity and well-being related outcomes and to determine the extent to which cognitive appraisals of job insecurity moderate this association. According to appraisal theory, it is anticipated a hindrance appraisal of job insecurity to amplify and a challenge appraisal of job insecurity to buffer this association.

Design/methodology/approach – To test the hypotheses, 250 healthcare employees from different departments of an Iranian large public hospital were recruited. Participants responded to scales on qualitative job insecurity, cognitive appraisals, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, absenteeism and presenteeism.

Findings – Results showed that qualitative job insecurity negatively influenced both psychological and behavioral well-being; however, this influence was greater for psychological well-being than for behavioral well-being. Besides, the moderation tests showed that only the hindrance appraisals of job insecurity amplified the link between job insecurity and psychological outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – This study sampled employees from a public hospital and did not include employees from private hospitals. This may limit the generalizability of the findings. Also, due to using a cross-sectional research design we encourage future studies to replicate the same findings using other different research designs.

Practical implications – The findings aid occupational health psychologists to design particular interventions for protecting those aspects of employee's well-being that are more vulnerable when qualitative job insecurity is chronically perceived.

Originality/value – Together, these findings suggest that the hindrance appraisals of qualitative job insecurity are more likely to moderate the link between job insecurity and well-being outcomes.

Keywords Job insecurity, Psychological well-being, Cognitive appraisals, Behavioral well-being

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The face and content of industries and organizations are dramatically changing (Sender *et al.*, 2016). These changes enable them to provide swifter services to customers and clients, to apply advanced technological innovations and to compete with their competitors (e.g. Ashford *et al.*, 1989; Falco *et al.*, 2008; Wan Yusoff *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli, 2016). Although these changes may aid employers to find a more stable position in the turbulent and competitive economy, it may also make employees feel insecure about what their job will look like in the future (Bidwell, 2013). Studies showed that this feeling of job insecurity leads to detrimental outcomes for workers in the US (e.g. Hamad *et al.*, 2015), Europe (e.g. László *et al.*, 2010), Africa (e.g. Turner and Lingard, 2016) and Australia (e.g. Turner and Lingard, 2016).

Consistent with this growing global concern, Iranian employees, after receiving international sanctions and restrictions against the nuclear program, have felt this job insecurity in the last twelve years (e.g. Setayesh and Mackey, 2016). These sanctions



negatively influenced the employment rate and the job features of many employees and made them feel insecure (e.g. Kokabisaghi, 2018). As such, the current situation provided an epidemiologically suitable context to study job insecurity, its impact on outcomes, and its potential cognitive moderators in a country in which job insecurity is highly an issue.

From an academic standpoint, job insecurity is a two-dimensional phenomenon that is divided into quantitative and qualitative job insecurity. Quantitative job insecurity is related to the overall concern of an employee about the continued existence of the job in the future (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2011). Qualitative job insecurity is introduced as the perceived threat of losing certain valued features of the job (De Witte, 2005) such as deterioration of working conditions, lack of career opportunities and decreasing salary development (Hellgren *et al.*, 1999). Although previous research has found that both types of job insecurity have harmful effects on work and life domains of employees (e.g. Çetin and Turan, 2013; De Witte *et al.*, 2010), this study focuses on qualitative job insecurity because this form of job insecurity is currently considered problematic in Iran and it has been in the center of employee's complaints during the last decade (e.g. Kokabisaghi, 2018; Setayesh and Mackey, 2016). As such, the first part of this paper investigates the association between qualitative job insecurity and both psychological and behavioral well-being.

Although reviewing current studies show that qualitative job insecurity is associated with negative outcomes, still lesser is known about moderators with the potential to buffer or amplify this association. To date, some scholars have suggested personal and organizational moderators that can reduce this association (e.g. Richter *et al.*, 2013; De Witte, 2005). Consistent with this line of research, this study proposes cognitive appraisals, namely, hindrance and challenge appraisals, as potential personal moderators that can moderate this association. As such, in the second part of this study we test the degree to which hindrance vs challenge appraisals of job insecurity can moderate the association between job insecurity and both well-being related outcomes. Moderation is indicated when a researcher wants to know how an independent variable might depend upon a moderator for a certain effect in the dependent variable (Hayes, 2013). Figure 1 displays a conceptual model of the relationships between the research variables.

Job insecurity – strains view

An employee concerned about losing job features may experience stress due to the anticipation of future problems such as being in a powerless position or ambiguity about what their job will look like in the future (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Vander Elst, De Witte and De Cuyper, 2014).

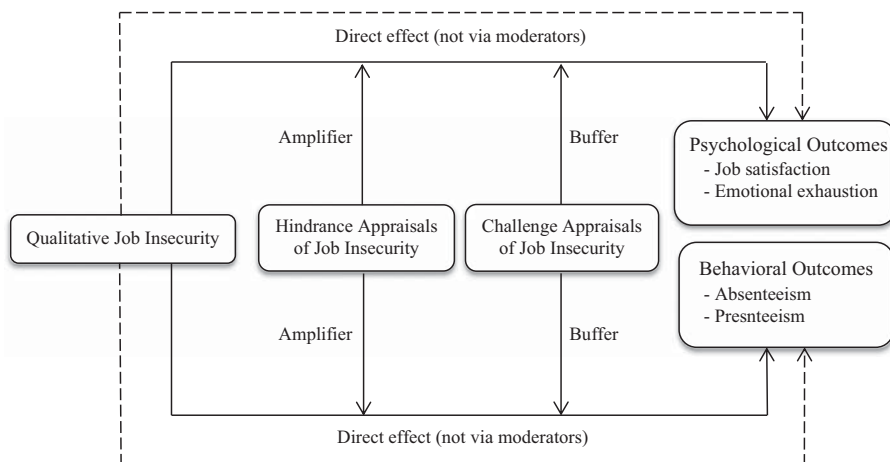


Figure 1.
A conceptual model of the association between research variables

Job loss and job insecurity are dissimilar in character. Although job loss or unemployment is more visible, perceived job insecurity is not a socially visible phenomenon, but rather a subjective experience for which there are no obvious responses or organizational supports (Låstad, 2015; De Witte, 2005). Employees who are experiencing job insecurity cannot employ appropriate coping strategies to deal/adjust with this stressor because they are uncertain whether the job loss will actually occur or not (Van Vuuren *et al.*, 1991; Hobfoll, 2001). This represents job insecurity as a chronic work stressor that individuals may continuously be dealing with at their workplace.

Further studies show that employees demonstrate different responses to perceived job insecurity. More specifically, they may experience short-term psychological outcomes such as anxiety, tension and dissatisfaction (Burgard *et al.*, 2009) or short-term physiological outcomes such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, increased catecholamine secretion and high self-reported morbidity (Ferrie *et al.*, 2001) and short-term behavioral outcomes such as drug use and absenteeism (Adekiya, 2015). These outcomes are not limited to short-term strains and the accumulation of these responses can also result in long-term outcomes such as poor mental and physical health (e.g. Gazzaniga and Heatherton, 2003; De Witte *et al.*, 2016). In this study, the outcomes are divided into psychological and behavioral outcomes and will be further discussed in the next section.

Qualitative job insecurity and psychological well-being

Studies show that job insecurity can significantly influence the psychological well-being of employees at the workplace (Sverke *et al.*, 2002). The uncertainty and ambiguity aspects of job insecurity provoke concerns about the job and its features in the future (Sverke *et al.*, 2006). There are only a few studies that considered the well-being related outcomes of the threat to job features. It might be because pioneer researchers such as Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) stated that the consequences of qualitative job insecurity might be less severe compared to those of quantitative job insecurity. Contemporary researchers, however, sometimes found that qualitative job insecurity had a stronger negative association with job attitudes than quantitative job insecurity, whereby quantitative job insecurity had a stronger positive association with health-related outcomes than qualitative job insecurity (Hellgren *et al.*, 1999). Others found that the strength of the association between qualitative job insecurity and job-related attitudes and behaviors was similar to the strength of the association between quantitative job insecurity and these outcomes (Ashford *et al.*, 1989). Also, De Witte *et al.* (2010) showed that both types of job insecurity have a similarly harmful impact on a variety of well-being-related outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, depersonalization, decreased personal accomplishment and psychosomatic complaints. These findings suggest that first, quantitative job insecurity is not more important than qualitative job insecurity as both job insecurity types can negatively influence job attitudes and well-being. Second, contradictory findings regarding the two types of job insecurity suggest that qualitative job insecurity should be considered more in future research. Based on the literature, most studies have reported job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion as the two most popular outcomes of qualitative job insecurity. In this study the association between qualitative job insecurity and the two outcomes is replicated by considering them as psychological outcomes. This impact can be explained using appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). According to this theory, stressful experiences are construed as person-environment transactions depending on the impact of the external stressor (i.e. job insecurity). When an individual encounters a situational stressor (i.e. a threat to job features), he/she makes a primary appraisal of the threat. Primary appraisal is an individual's decision about the significance of an event as positive, negative, controllable, challenging or stressful. Secondary appraisals address what an individual could do in this

stressful situation. Secondary appraisals concern evaluations of factors such as the personal resources to regulate the stressful situation (Barsky *et al.*, 2011; Weiss *et al.*, 1999; Vander Elst, Richter, Sverke, Näswall, De Cuyper and De Witte, 2014). Cognitive appraisal theory predicts that when individuals perceive a stressor as a hindrance they are more likely to experience negative outcomes (LePine *et al.*, 2005). Following this theory, when the features of the job are likely to change unfavourably (e.g. an increase in working hours, or a decrease in organizational benefits), the psychological well-being of employees may also unpleasantly reduce (e.g. De Witte and Näswall, 2003). As such, employees who are threatened by qualitative job insecurity are expected to report more reduction in their psychological well-being, as indicated in the following hypotheses:

- H1. Perceived qualitative job insecurity will be (a) negatively associated with job satisfaction and (b) positively associated with emotional exhaustion.

Qualitative job insecurity and behavioral well-being

The impact of qualitative job insecurity is not limited to psychological outcomes. Studies show that the experience of job insecurity, in a longer period, may lead to behavioral reactions (e.g. Adekiya, 2015; De Witte *et al.*, 2010; Shedden *et al.*, 2010). Absenteeism and presenteeism are considered as two behavioral reactions to perceived job insecurity (Chirumbolo and Areni, 2005; Johns, 2010). Empirical evidence shows that these two reactions are opposite to each other (Johns, 2010). Absenteeism is generally defined as not showing up for scheduled work due to illness (e.g. Harrison and Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 2010). Presenteeism characterizes the behavior of an employee who attends work while ill (physically or mentally), despite being able to claim sick leave (Bierla *et al.*, 2012). It is suggested that absenteeism and presenteeism should, as much as possible, be studied together (e.g. Probst, 2003). Studies show that although job insecurity can increase absenteeism (e.g. Collins *et al.*, 2005) and decrease presenteeism (e.g. Probst and Brubaker, 2001) simultaneously, presenteeism of employees may have a more harmful effect on organizational outcomes. Till now, most studies have used quantitative job insecurity to investigate the association between job insecurity and absenteeism and presenteeism (e.g. Johns, 2010; Probst and Brubaker, 2001; Heponiemi *et al.*, 2010; Caverley *et al.*, 2007; Bierla *et al.*, 2012). There was no study to test the association between qualitative job insecurity and absenteeism and presenteeism. This represents a research gap that this study intends to fill.

Contemporary researchers state that when the job is not secure, absenteeism may reflect the protest of an employee in regard to the job features/condition (Munro, 2007), whereas presenteeism may reflect evidence of loyalty and commitment (which may indicate a strong organizational citizenship or garner praise) of an employee to the employer (Johns, 2010; Bierla *et al.*, 2012). This view is consistent with the study of Probst and Brubaker (2001) that found employees with the perceptions of low security are more likely to engage in work withdrawal behaviors and report lower organizational commitment which often leads to employee's turnover. As such, when the features of the job are threatened the employees are anticipated to reduce their job commitment in terms of an increased absenteeism or a decreased presenteeism. As mentioned, in this study appraisal theory is used to further interpret these behavioral reactions to perceived qualitative job insecurity. According to appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) when employees are threatened to lose some of their valued job features they may show negative psychological reactions (e.g. job dissatisfaction or emotional exhaustion). The culmination of the negative psychological reactions, which are considered short-term outcomes, may spillover from work to home and lead to long-term outcomes in terms of increased absence due to illness (absenteeism) or decreased presence due to illness (presenteeism) (e.g. Golden, 2011; Garrow, 2016). As such,

employees who are threatened by qualitative job insecurity are expected to report greater absenteeism and lesser presenteeism as displayed in the following hypothesis:

- H2.* Perceived qualitative job insecurity will be (a) positively associated with absenteeism and (b) negatively associated with presenteeism.

Qualitative job insecurity and cognitive appraisals: amplifier or buffer?

Not all employees experience the detrimental impacts of job insecurity to the same extent (e.g. Probst, 2004). For example, studies show that employees with higher organizational positions might be less influenced by job insecurity (Schreurs *et al.*, 2010; Richter *et al.*, 2013). Dissimilar reaction of employees to the threat of their job features represents qualitative job insecurity as a subjective construct (De Witte, 2005; Sverke *et al.*, 2002). Similar to other subjective constructs, qualitative job insecurity could be appraised in various ways (Vander Elst, Van den Broeck, De Cuyper and De Witte, 2014). In other words, the appraisals of employees of perceived qualitative job insecurity may influence the effect size of qualitative job insecurity on the outcomes. To date, most studies tested the role of different moderators in the association between qualitative job insecurity and popular outcomes (e.g. Vander Elst *et al.*, 2010; Silla *et al.*, 2009). However, no study has considered testing the moderating role of cognitive appraisals of job insecurity in this association. According to appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), when individuals are faced with a situational stressor they may preliminarily appraise it as either a hindrance or a challenge. Based on this theory, we can divide cognitive appraisals into hindrance and challenge appraisals. Hindrance appraisals are mainly associated with the appraisal of threats as “losses or harms” that are predicted to happen but still have not occurred (Shoss, 2017), whereas challenge appraisals are associated with the appraisal of threats as opportunities for “growth or gain” in a situation that contributes to goal achievement and personal development (Barsky *et al.*, 2011). These appraisals determine if an event or aspect of the environment is perceived as a threat or an opportunity, and they are mostly used to explain the stressor–strain connection (Webster *et al.*, 2011). Because of the two different appraisals, an individual may interpret the same work stressor in two different forms (Hobfoll, 1989). For example, studies show that employees may appraise workload as a hindrance (Cavanaugh *et al.*, 2000) or a challenge (Marsh, 2001). Similarly, employees may not have the same appraisal of the same stressor when they encounter a threat posed to their job features (i.e. changes in salary or position). In doing so, when the features of their job are threatened they may appraise it in either way. As such, cognitive appraisals of individuals are assumed to moderate the association between qualitative job insecurity and well-being related outcomes. As the hindrance appraisal of job insecurity refers to perceiving threat as loss or harm, employees with high levels of this appraisal are more likely to perceive qualitative job insecurity as an unpleasant threat. This is consistent with the framework provided by appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). According to this theory, a hindrance appraisal of a stressor tends to provoke negative outcomes rather than positive ones. As such, we can predict that a hindrance appraisal of job insecurity can amplify the association between job insecurity and both psychological and behavioral outcomes, leading to the following hypothesis:

- H3.* A hindrance appraisal of job insecurity will amplify the association between qualitative job insecurity and (a) job satisfaction, (b) emotional exhaustion, (c) absenteeism and (d) presenteeism.

Findings showed that there is a solid association between challenge appraisals and desire to grow and gain (Barsky *et al.*, 2011). As such, employees with high levels of challenge appraisal of job insecurity are more likely to perceive qualitative job insecurity in a less threatening light. This challenge appraisal of job insecurity encourages employees to better

adjust to new changes posed to their job features. According to appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), a challenge appraisal of a situational threat encourages employees to look at the threat as an opportunity to learn about new situations and to develop their career path. As such, they may appraise the threat less negatively. Therefore, challenge appraisals are expected to decrease the association between qualitative job insecurity and well-being related outcomes. A supplementary explanation is provided by Conservation of Resource (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this theory, individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources that they can apply to accommodate, withstand or overcome threats. They may use material sources (e.g. homes, clothes, food), personal resources (e.g. self-esteem, self-confidence and optimism), condition resources (e.g. status, social support and financial security) and energy resources (e.g. time, money and knowledge) to achieve this. Stress mainly occurs when these resources are lost or threatened. Indeed, traumatic or stressful events consume these resources and reduce the coping ability of individuals to react to stressors appropriately. Based on COR theory, individuals who are threatened by the potential or actual losses of resources are motivated to obtain, retain, foster and protect valued resources for future needs (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory allows us to consider challenge appraisals of job insecurity as personal resources which supply employees with additional resources to adjust to unpleasant changes imposed on their job features. In other words, challenge appraisals can help employees to deal with the perception of qualitative job insecurity through highlighting positive aspects of those changes implemented in their jobs. Therefore, a challenge appraisal of job insecurity is anticipated to lead to lesser psychological and behavioral strains toward perceived job insecurity. This leads to the following hypothesis:

- H4. Challenge appraisals of job insecurity will buffer the association between job insecurity and (a) job satisfaction, (b) emotional exhaustion, (c) absenteeism and (d) presenteeism

Method

Sample

To test the hypotheses, surveys were administered to 300 hospital personnel from a large public hospital located in the north-western region of Tehran, Iran. The reason for choosing this sample is that the hospital personnel have direct contact with patients and any work stressor that negatively influences their well-being may also negatively influence the quality of healthcare services to the patients. Participants were recruited based on a simple random sampling method. The response rate was approximately 83 percent ($n = 250$). Participants included 25 percent male and 75 percent female employees from different departments of this hospital. The mean age of the participants was 34 years ($SD = 7.92$) and their mean work record was 10 years ($SD = 7.58$). In total, 5 percent were professional employees (e.g. nurses, medical assistants, patient transferor, laboratory pathologist, radiologist), and 95 percent were staff employees (e.g. secretary, IT operator, shift planners). In total, 43 percent had a permanent contract while 57 percent had a temporary contract. Finally, 92 percent of respondents had received at least a college diploma while 8 percent had a high school diploma or less.

Procedure

To begin the data collection procedure from hospital personnel, an official approval was granted from the ethical committee of the Medical University of Shahid Beheshti in Iran. Based on this approval a large hospital was introduced for the data collection. Surveys were distributed to the supervisors of each medical department and they were provided with the required information and instructions on how to distribute the surveys among their subordinates and to collect them appropriately. Also, items of each scale were

practiced with the supervisors to ensure that all items are clear and understandable. Moreover, supervisors were informed about the voluntary and anonymous nature of the data collection from participants. They were requested to ask their subordinates to complete surveys preferably during working hours. To ensure that participants were comfortable responding to the questions, they were informed that only members of the research team would have access to the data. The Persian language is the official language in Iran. As such, all scales of this study were translated from English to Persian using back translation. All items were checked by a native English speaker and a native Persian speaker to ensure that items measure the same construct. The scales of this survey are introduced in the following section.

Measures

Qualitative job insecurity. This construct was measured with four items, tapping into similar aspects as the items of De Witte *et al.* (2010). This scale has previously been used in a study by Van den Broeck *et al.* (2014) and Urbanavičiūtė *et al.* (2015). An example of the items is "I feel insecure about the characteristics and conditions of my job in the future." All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). A higher score shows a higher level of qualitative job insecurity. Cronbach's α of this scale was 0.85.

Cognitive appraisals of job insecurity. These appraisals were measured using six items. Both hindrance and challenge appraisals were measured with three items. This scale was initially constructed in Belgium (Peeters, 2014) and its latest version was further developed by Charkhabi *et al.* (2015) in Italy and Iran. An item example of the hindrance appraisal component is "Job insecurity undermines my work efforts." An item example of the challenge appraisal component is "Job insecurity gives me the feeling that I can achieve something." Respondents were asked to rate the items on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Responses were scored such that higher scores reflect higher hindrance or challenge appraisal. Cronbach's α of the hindrance and challenge components were 0.85 and 0.87, respectively[1].

Emotional exhaustion. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach *et al.*, 1996) was used to measure emotional exhaustion. This scale has three sub-scales; however, only nine items of the emotional exhaustion subscale was used. An example of an item is "I feel used up at the end of the workday." All items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from "0" (never) to "6" (daily). High scores reflect higher emotional exhaustion. Cronbach's α was 0.93.

Job satisfaction. Four scale items of the job satisfaction scale developed by Price (1997) were used. An example of an item is "Most days I am enthusiastic about my job." Respondents were asked to rate the items on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Responses were scored such that higher numbers reflect higher job satisfaction. Cronbach's α was 0.83.

Absenteeism and presenteeism. These constructs were measured using the two items suggested by Guest *et al.* (2010). These items are "How often have you been absent from work due to your state of health over the last 6 months (pregnancy not taken into consideration)?" and "How often have you gone to work despite feeling that you really should have stayed away due to your state of health over the last 6 months?" for absenteeism and presenteeism respectively. Responses were recorded as a count of occasions ranging from never (0) to more than five times (5).

Data analyses

We used IBM SPSS-22 and IBM AMOS-22 to analyze the data. IBM SPSS-22 was used to calculate descriptive statistics (e.g. means and standard deviations) as well as to calculate

the internal reliability of the scales. IBM AMOS-22 was used to assess the factorial validity of the scale using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Also, process program (Hayes, 2012) was used to test the moderation effects over the relationships.

Results

CFA on appraisals scale

CFA was used to find the best factorial structure of the scale of hindrance vs challenge appraisals of job insecurity. Three models were tested and compared using CFA. Table I displays the results of this CFA and provides an overview of the fit indices for two different components of this scale. At first, the model with eight items predicted by one general factor (cognitive appraisal) was estimated (Model 1). This model showed poor fit indices (RMSEA = 0.24, CFI = 0.61, TLI = 0.46) and some very low factor loading (e.g. 0.35). Thus, a second model with two factors, including hindrance (HI) and challenge (CH) appraisals and covariance between them was tested (Model 2). This process was guided by the previous finding in the cognitive appraisals theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In Model 2, each factor contained four observed variables. Model 2 showed a great improvement in all fit indexes (RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94) but two items due to low factor loading (0.35) needed to be discarded (HI1 and CH1). As such, Model 3 was composed by six items and two latent variables. In this model, each factor predicted three items (Figure 2). For the hindrance component, the factor loading of items of HI2 (0.76), HI3 (0.73) and HI4 (0.83) were statistically significant. For the challenge component, the factor loadings of items CH2 (0.68), CH3 (0.83) and CH4 (0.78) were statistically significant (see Appendix). In Model 3, fit indexes were excellent (RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.96) and the factor loadings were satisfactory. Therefore, in the final model (Model 3) both components of this scale were thus reduced to three items instead of four.

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the scales (means and standard deviations) and the Pearson correlations between the variables are reported in Table II.

Qualitative job insecurity was significantly associated with both psychological outcomes. More specifically, job insecurity was negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.38, p < 0.01$) and positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$). These results are consistent with prior studies (e.g. Çetin and Turan, 2013; Urbanavičiūtė *et al.*, 2015). Further analysis on behavioral outcomes associated with qualitative job insecurity showed that qualitative job insecurity is not significantly associated with absenteeism, but there is a negative relationship between qualitative job insecurity and presenteeism ($r = -0.20, p < 0.01$). These results are consistent with similar studies (e.g. Probst and Brubaker, 2001) showing that an increase in job insecurity is consistent with a decrease in presenteeism. There was no association between challenge appraisals and both psychological and behavioral outcomes. However, the hindrance appraisals correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -0.15, p < 0.05$), emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.21, p < 0.01$) and presenteeism ($r = -0.16, p < 0.01$).

Models	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA ^a	SRMR	Δ CFI	Δ RMSEA
Model 1. One factor – Eight items	370.33	20	0.61	0.46	0.24	0.17	–	–
Model 2. Two factors – Eight items	40.09	23	0.96	0.94	0.08	0.04	-0.35	0.16
Model 3. Two factors – Six items	20.70	8	0.98	0.96	0.07	0.04	-0.02	0.01

Notes: $n = 250$. χ^2 , chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic; df, degrees of freedom; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized RMR, root-mean-square residual. ^aCI = 95% confidence interval

Table I.
Goodness-of-fit
indicators of
challenge-hindrance
appraisal scale

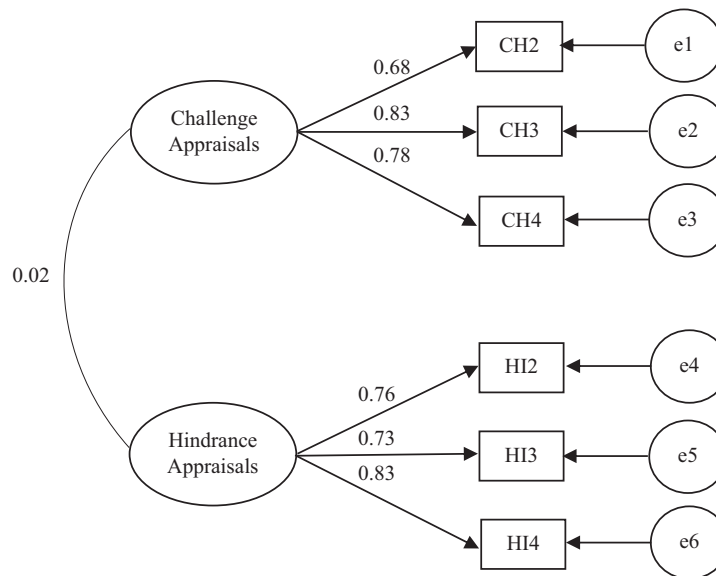


Figure 2.
A measurement model
of the challenge vs
hindrance appraisals

Variable	Items	\bar{x}	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Job insecurity	4	3.34	0.95	-	0.137*	0.449***	-0.389***	0.424***	-0.014	-0.202***
Challenge appraisal	3	3.09	0.90		-	0.243***	-0.033	-0.091	-0.098	-0.011
Hindrance appraisal	3	2.74	0.97			-	-0.156*	0.213***	-0.147	-0.166*
Job satisfaction	4	2.84	0.96				-	-0.727***	0.033	0.122
Emotional exhaustion	9	3.47	1.03					-	0.007	-0.262***
Absenteeism	1	1.02	2.03						-	0.278***
Presenteeism	1	3.97	4.05							-

Notes: $n = 250$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlations among
the variables

Test of the moderating role of hindrance appraisals

To test the hypotheses, a regression model according to Figure 1 was constructed. Model 2 of the process program (Hayes, 2012) was selected to investigate the simultaneous effects of both moderators in the association between qualitative job insecurity and psychological and behavioral outcomes. Following Probst *et al.* (2013) the standardized scores (z scores) were used to test the hypotheses. The results are displayed in Table III. As the table shows, qualitative job insecurity predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.45, p < 0.001$) and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$). Therefore, evidence was found for *H1a* and *H1b* and these two hypotheses are confirmed. Qualitative job insecurity did not predict absenteeism, but predicted presenteeism ($\beta = -0.51, p < 0.05$). Thus, evidence was only found for *H2b*. Referring to Table III, the test of moderation paths showed that the hindrance appraisals of job insecurity moderated the association between job insecurity and both psychological outcomes.

Figure 3 is displaying the moderating effects of hindrance appraisals in the association between job insecurity and job satisfaction. A hindrance appraisal of job insecurity moderated the association between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.01$). Also, following the recommendation of Dawson (2014), the moderator was divided into low and high values based on the outcome of process

Effect	β	SE	t	p
Direct effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction	-0.45***	0.07	-6.83	0.000
Challenge appraisal on job satisfaction	0.06	0.06	1.14	ns
Hindrance appraisal on job satisfaction	0.09	0.07	1.35	ns
Job insecurity \times challenge appraisal on job satisfaction	-0.09*	0.04	-1.97	0.04
Job insecurity \times hindrance appraisal on job satisfaction	-0.14**	0.06	-2.55	0.01
$R^2 = 0.19; F(5, 239) = 11.84, p < 0.000$				
Direct effect of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion	0.46***	0.06	7.11	0.000
Challenge appraisal on emotional exhaustion	-0.21***	0.06	-3.52	0.000
Hindrance appraisal on emotional exhaustion	0.003	0.07	0.04	ns
Job insecurity \times challenge appraisal on emotional exhaustion	0.09	0.05	1.93	ns
Job insecurity \times hindrance appraisal on emotional exhaustion	0.11*	0.05	2.12	0.03
$R^2 = 0.24; F(5, 239) = 15.16, p < 0.000$				
Direct effect of job insecurity on absenteeism	0.04	0.12	0.33	ns
Challenge appraisal on absenteeism	-0.09	0.11	-0.81	ns
Hindrance appraisal on absenteeism	-0.19	0.12	-1.55	ns
Job insecurity \times challenge appraisal on absenteeism	-0.17	0.09	-1.97	ns
Job insecurity \times hindrance appraisal on absenteeism	0.16	0.10	-1.56	ns
$R^2 = 0.044; F(5, 239) = 2.07, p < 0.000$				
Direct effect of job insecurity on presenteeism	-0.51*	0.24	-2.05	0.04
Challenge appraisal on presenteeism	-0.08	0.23	0.36	ns
Hindrance appraisal on presenteeism	-0.29	0.26	-1.12	ns
Job insecurity \times challenge appraisal on presenteeism	-0.05	0.18	-0.29	ns
Job insecurity \times hindrance appraisal on presenteeism	0.17	0.21	0.81	ns
$R^2 = 0.042; F(5, 239) = 2.12, p < 0.062$				

Notes: $n = 250$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table III. Regression results (standardized regression coefficients) predicting the outcomes

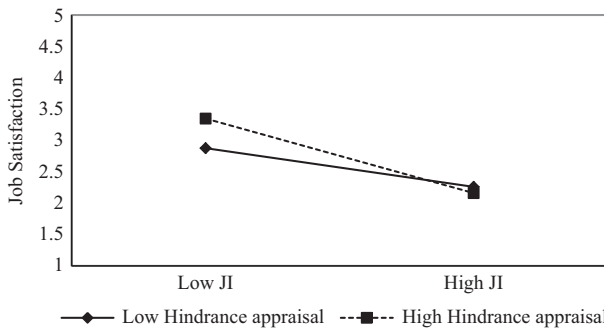


Figure 3. Interaction of qualitative job insecurity \times hindrance appraisals on job satisfaction

program in which low and high values for quantitative moderators are mean and minus/plus one SD from mean. The results showed that a low level ($\beta = -0.30, p < 0.0001$) and a high level ($\beta = -0.59, p < 0.0001$) of hindrance appraisals similarly amplified the link between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction. The two coefficients show that the association between job insecurity and job satisfaction is stronger when one scores high on hindrance appraisals compared to when he scores low.

Figure 4 is displaying the moderating effects of hindrance appraisals in the association between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. A hindrance appraisal of job insecurity moderated the association between qualitative job insecurity and emotional exhaustion

($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.05$). Following Dawson (2014), a low level ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.0001$) and high level ($\beta = 0.53, p < 0.0001$) of hindrance appraisals similarly amplified the link between qualitative job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. The two coefficients show that the association between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion is stronger when an employee scores high on hindrance appraisals compared to when one scores low.

Further analysis was performed to test the possible moderation effects of hindrance appraisals in the association between qualitative job insecurity and behavioral outcomes (absenteeism and presenteeism). The results showed that these appraisals did not moderate these associations. Therefore, evidence was only found for *H3a* and *H3b* and *H3c* and *H3d* were refuted.

Test of the moderating effects of challenge appraisals

In the second part, the moderating impact of challenge appraisals in the association between qualitative job insecurity and both psychological and behavioral outcomes was tested. As Table III shows a challenge appraisal of job insecurity moderated the association between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.09, p < 0.05$), but it did not moderate the association between qualitative job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Figure 5 displays the moderating effect of a challenge appraisal in the association between job insecurity and job satisfaction. As the figure shows a challenge appraisal of job insecurity, unexpectedly, amplified the association between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.05$). Following Dawson (2014), a low level ($\beta = -0.28, p < 0.0001$) and high level ($\beta = -0.49, p < 0.0001$) of challenge appraisals similarly amplified the link between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction. Opposite to the hypothesis, the challenge appraisals, similar to hindrance appraisals, amplified the association between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction. Therefore, evidence was not found for the *H4a*, and *H4b*, and they were refuted.

Figure 4.
Interaction of qualitative job insecurity \times hindrance appraisals on emotional exhaustion

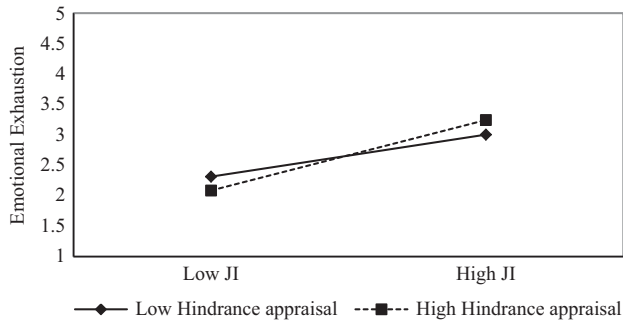
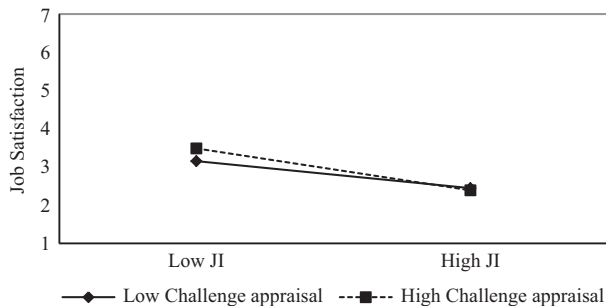


Figure 5.
Interaction of qualitative job insecurity \times challenge appraisals on job satisfaction



Further analysis was performed to test the moderation effects of challenge appraisals in the association between qualitative job insecurity and both behavioral outcomes (absenteeism and presenteeism). Results showed that a challenge appraisal of job insecurity did not moderate the job insecurity-absenteeism association and the job insecurity-presenteeism association. Overall, no evidence was found for *H4c* and *H4d*, and therefore they were refuted.

Discussion

The current study, on the one hand, aimed at a detailed inspection of the association between qualitative job insecurity and psychological and behavioral well-being, and on the other hand, examined the extent to which hindrance and challenge appraisals of job insecurity can moderate this association. As the regression analysis suggested, qualitative job insecurity was significantly associated with decreased job satisfaction and increased emotional exhaustion. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found when employees are worried about losing their job features (e.g. salary, position, colleagues), they report more psychological or behavioral strains (e.g. Hellgren *et al.*, 1999; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014). In support of this finding, appraisal theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) predicts that stressful life/work events (e.g. losing the features of the job) are likely to decrease positive outcomes or increase negative outcomes. This reaction to threat would be indeed an emotional disagreement or effort to protect their job features against the attacking threat. The rather similar correlation (in strength) between qualitative job insecurity and both psychological outcomes may indicate that either reaction could be expected when employees are unable to predict what their job will look like in the future. The correlation coefficient results also showed that the impact of qualitative job insecurity on behavioral outcomes is not similar.

Qualitative job insecurity appeared more detrimental for presenteeism and not for absenteeism. As an explanation, according to the study of Bierla *et al.* (2012), presenteeism is considered to indicate the commitment and loyalty of employees to their employer (Bierla *et al.*, 2012). When employees are threatened with losing some of their job features, they are more likely to reduce this commitment and loyalty to their employer through behavioral withdrawal reactions such as presenteeism (Probst and Brubaker, 2001). In all, these correlations provided empirical support that qualitative job insecurity negatively influences well-being related outcomes (Sverke *et al.*, 2002; De Witte *et al.*, 2010).

The results of the moderation test reveal that the cognitive appraisals of employees do not moderate the association between qualitative job insecurity and studied outcomes similarly. The hindrance appraisals of job insecurity amplified the association between qualitative job insecurity and psychological outcomes, but they did not moderate the association between qualitative job insecurity and behavioral outcomes. This finding can be supported by appraisal theory (Folkman and Lazarous, 1984). Accordingly, the anticipation of losing the features of the job may predict the incidence of a bigger loss (e.g. the job itself) in the perception of employees. Put in other words, a small loss (e.g. losing job features) would predict that a bigger loss (e.g. losing job itself) may also occur. In doing so, a hindrance appraisal of losing job features not only may intensify the feeling of insecurity among employees, but also it may provoke employees to overestimate that threat (due to the anticipation of a bigger loss) and react negatively. This is well matched with this finding that hindrance appraisals of a threat, by increasing the negative anticipations about what the job will look like in the future, may result in negative outcomes (Barsky *et al.*, 2011; Weiss *et al.*, 1999). This may even be more likely an issue when the employees do not have sufficient levels of personal resources to deal or adjust with this threat (De Witte, 2005; Sverke *et al.*, 2002). This situation can be exemplified when a lack of perceived control, as a personal resource, undermines the coping ability of employees to deal with perceived job insecurity (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2011). Lack of moderating role of hindrance appraisal of job insecurity in the association between job insecurity and behavioral outcomes could also be

due to contextual reasons. For example, finding a new job in public sectors of Iran is not easy and most employees prefer to hold their current jobs even though they lose some of their job features. Another reason could be related to the heavy penalties of public organizations for absent employees. In Iran, any absence without an official permission is not legally permitted. Employees who do not respect this rule may be penalized by a decrease in their salary or delay in their career development. In some cases, the employer may even decide to fire them as well. Regardless of whether employees highly appraise qualitative job insecurity as a hindrance or not, these contextual factors may encourage employees to voice their concern through their psychological reactions (e.g. decreased job satisfaction) than with their behavioral reactions (e.g. absenteeism). As such, a hindrance appraisal of job insecurity may additionally reinforce psychological reactions and deter behavioral reactions.

On the other hand, challenge appraisals of qualitative job insecurity did not buffer the association between job insecurity and both emotional and behavioral outcomes. That may show the moderator is not that strong or relevant to buffer these associations, as hypothesized. Surprisingly, a challenge appraisal of job insecurity amplified the association between qualitative job insecurity and job satisfaction. That means insecure employees who even have a positive anticipation toward the future of their job features tended to report less satisfaction. Although this amplification effect was weak and opposite to the hypothesis, it still can be justified: employees with high levels of challenge appraisals are predicted to show greater positive anticipation toward what their job will look like in the future, however, they may report lower job satisfaction to their employer to prevent the possibility of losing job features in the future. Comparing both appraisals, it seems the impact of the amplifying role of a hindrance appraisal of job insecurity is more tangible than the impact of the amplifying role of a challenge appraisal of job insecurity. More specifically, this shows that two cognitive appraisals did not have an equal impact on both psychological outcomes. This along with similar studies (e.g. Sverke *et al.*, 2002) shows although both psychological outcomes are affected by qualitative job insecurity, job satisfaction seems to be a more vulnerable outcome than emotional exhaustion when one worries about losing the features of the job in the future. Additionally, a challenge appraisal of job insecurity did not moderate the link between qualitative job insecurity and behavioral outcomes. On the one hand, this may show the importance of cognitive appraisals for psychological outcomes rather than behavioral outcomes. On the other hand, it may show that employees are more likely to react to perceived qualitative job insecurity through their psychological reactions than their behavioral reactions.

Strengths and limitations

The findings of this study contribute to the test of outcomes associated with qualitative job insecurity within the framework of stress theories such as cognitive appraisals theory and conservation of resources theory. This study also replicated the impact of qualitative job insecurity on well-being related outcomes for the first time in Iran. This consistent replication provided more evidence on the negative association between job insecurity and employees' outcomes. Also, this study identified how cognitive moderators such as hindrance and challenge appraisals can amplify or buffer the dynamism of these associations. Three out of eight interaction effects were significant but only two of the three significant interactions were in line with the research hypotheses. Therefore, this showed that the cognitive appraisals of employees hardly play a moderating role in the association between qualitative job insecurity and its psychological and behavioral outcomes.

This study also contains some limitations that are addressed here. First, the generalization of these results might be limited because the sample of this study only represents employees from the public sector (Çetin and Turan, 2013). There are also great numbers of employees who are employed in private hospitals in Iran, but this study did not consider them. Therefore attaining a more diverse and representative sample would be recommended for future studies.

Second, as the current findings are based on a cross-sectional study, it is recommended future studies to use a longitudinal study to check whether the impact of qualitative job insecurity on various outcomes is consistent over time. Third, the answers of the respondents might be biased by social desirability bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). This may happen due to applying a self-reported survey in this study. Although the research team emphasized that the answers only will be used for academic purposes, still participants may have had the desire to answer based on the expectations of hospital supervisors. As such, it is recommended future studies to replicate these findings using methods, such as experimental studies or interviews, which can reduce the social desirability. Fourth, in this study the role of demographic information such as gender or education as well as the organizational rules such as organizational penalties or rewards was not considered. It is recommended future studies to take these two factors into consideration when they use absenteeism and presenteeism as behavioral outcomes.

Conclusion

This present study expanded empirical evidence on qualitative job insecurity, its impact on psychological and behavioral well-being, and its cognitive moderators in Iran. This added additional support for the view that qualitative job insecurity, as a chronic work stressor, is associated with employees' psychological and behavioral well-being related outcomes. The main finding is that insecure employees are more likely to show their concern through their psychological reactions than their behavioral reactions. Besides, job insecure employees with hindrance appraisals may additionally react to perceived qualitative job insecurity and get emotionally exhausted or dissatisfied from their job. As the challenge appraisals did not appear to have the same influence in this association, we may conclude that they cannot be considered as a protective cognitive factor in the job insecurity-wellbeing association.

Note

1. These reported reliabilities are related to the final version of this scale in which each component is measured by three items. This will be further explained in the CFA section of the results part.

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Further reading

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De Beer, L.T., Rothmann, S. Jr and Pienaar, J. (2016), "Job insecurity, career opportunities, discrimination and turnover intention in post-apartheid South Africa: examples of informative hypothesis testing", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 427-439, doi: 10.1080/09585192.2015.1020446.

Appendix

Challenge appraisal

Job insecurity provides opportunities to improve my job skills	Confirmed
Job insecurity makes me focus on my work so that I can perform well	Confirmed
Job insecurity gives me the feeling that I can achieve something	Confirmed

Hindrance appraisal

Job insecurity undermines my concentration on my job	Confirmed
Job insecurity limits me in performing well	Confirmed
Job insecurity undermines my work efforts	Confirmed

Table A1.
Confirmed items obtained from CFA for the challenge vs hindrance scale

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