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Coping with job insecurity: Exploring effects on perceived health and organizational attitudes

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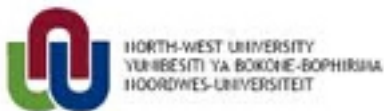
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Coping with job insecurity

Exploring effects on perceived health and organizational attitudes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the present paper is to investigate how employees' coping (problem, emotion and avoidance focused coping) may affect the reactions to job insecurity. Because the coping investigated in the present study addresses the stressor in different ways, the authors expect different moderating effects depending on the type of coping, which results in three different hypotheses.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 579 Swedish accountants was used to test these hypotheses via surveys.

Findings – The findings support the authors' assumptions that emotion focused coping weakened the relation of job insecurity and some of the outcomes. Both avoidance and problem focused coping strengthened the relation between job insecurity and some of the outcomes.

Research limitations/implications – As this study utilizes cross-sectional data and only one occupational group, it is important to test the relations using longitudinal data with different occupational groups in future research.

Practical implications – From these results some practical conclusions can be drawn as to which coping forms might be more beneficial, which can be helpful for organizations in order to develop intervention programs.

Originality/value – This study expanded the understanding of coping in the context of job insecurity by testing different forms of coping and including a variety of important outcomes of job insecurity.

Keywords Avoidance focused coping, Coping, Emotion focused coping, Job insecurity, Problem focused coping

Paper type Research paper



Even though coping with stress in general has received a good amount of research attention (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), we know less about the relationship between job insecurity, its outcomes and individual coping. This is surprising because job insecurity is one of the predominant work stressors employees have to deal with (De Witte, 1999; Fernández-Ballesteros, 2002). Even though we know that job insecurity is related to a great variety of negative consequences for individuals as well as their organisations, only a few studies (for example Bohets and De Witte, 2006) have specifically focused on individual coping in the context of job insecurity. Moreover, large variations in the strengths of the relations between job insecurity and its outcomes were found in two meta-analyses (Cheng and Chan, 2008; Sverke *et al.*, 2002), which indicates that moderator variables may play a role. Therefore it is important to identify factors that can possibly decrease the perception of job insecurity or at least diminish its negative effects, and individual coping may be such a factor. In addition, individual coping may be of specific importance in times of global uncertainty as in the long run, the identification of optimal or less optimal ways of coping with job insecurity can be helpful for organisations in their efforts to tailor interventions. These interventions may assist and provide employees with the necessary resources to best deal with uncertainty.

Consequently, the purpose of the present paper is to investigate how employees' coping (problem, emotion and avoidance focused coping) may affect the reactions to job insecurity. Our study has several strengths: first, we investigate three forms of individual coping and their potential positive as well as negative effect in the context of job insecurity. So far, Bohets and De Witte (2006) found that neither problem nor avoidance focused coping functioned as a moderator in the relation between job insecurity and well-being or job satisfaction. However, they only investigated two forms of coping and two forms of job insecurity outcomes, whereas the present study expands this. Second, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the potential effects of coping, the outcomes that were investigated in our study were chosen to represent different categories of consequences of job insecurity. In accordance with the categorisation that has been used in the meta-analysis of Sverke *et al.* (2002) our outcomes were chosen to represent individual, organisational as well as short and long-term consequences of job insecurity. For that reason, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover intention, as well as mental ill-health were studied. Thus, our study aims at expanding our understanding of coping in the context of job insecurity.

Job insecurity and its consequences

Job insecurity, which is frequently conceptualised as an important work stressor (Sverke *et al.*, 2002), refers to the overall concern about the future existence of one's employment (Cheng and Chan, 2008; De Witte, 1999; Jacobson, 1991; Rosenblatt and Ruvio, 1996; Sverke *et al.*, 2002). The negative effects of this work stressor have been well documented (see Cheng and Chan, 2008 and Sverke *et al.*, 2002 for meta-analytic reviews). The consequences identified are both those that primarily affect the individual such as decreased health, as well as those that may influence the organisational functioning, such as decreased performance or increased turnover intention.

To further understand and explain job insecurity and its negative consequences and relate this work stressor to coping we use the transactional stress theory as a

theoretical framework. According to this framework stress processes can only be understood by taking the transaction between the individual and the environment into account (Dewe and Trenberth, 2004; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This transaction consists of employees' interpretation of their work situation, which is referred to as cognitive appraisal, and has two stages, namely primary and secondary appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Troup and Dewe, 2002). During primary appraisal, employees evaluate a specific situation and determine its importance for their personal well-being. Situations can be appraised as insignificant, threatening, harmful or challenging. In the case of job insecurity, employees most likely perceive potential job loss as a threat, since for the majority of people the employment is strongly connected to economic stability as well as to a person's identity. Additionally, work provides people with a social network and gives them the possibility to produce something they enjoy and value (see Jahoda, 1982). Job insecurity therefore entails a threat to a lot more than just the economic aspect of the job and concerns something highly valued to the individual. When the situation has been appraised in terms of what it entails for the individual, primary appraisal is followed by the secondary appraisal, where coping possibilities are assessed.

Coping and its consequences

Coping refers to behaviours and cognitions used to manage external and/or internal stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Coping efforts interact with the stressor and in doing so affect the relation between stressor and outcomes (Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2008). Hence, coping is directed at dealing with the demands placed on the individual and may act as a buffer. The transactional stress theory proposes that if a situation has been evaluated as challenging or threatening, coping is activated. If individuals appraise their coping possibilities as insufficient to address the stressor, i.e. that they cannot prevent or do anything to diminish the perceived threat of job loss, they will experience stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Although coping is a multidimensional construct, where coping processes can be of cognitive, behavioural or physical nature, it has frequently been divided into two groups (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). First, problem focused coping, which aims at changing or removing the source of the stressor (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Examples of problem focused coping in the context of job insecurity can be applying for new jobs, seeking instrumental social support, such as help from unions, or discussing the matter with the supervisor. The second category of coping is emotion focused coping which is aimed at decreasing the stress experience by altering the emotional response to the stressor (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Examples of emotion focused coping in the context of job insecurity can be trying to re-evaluate the importance of the job so it seems less important in case of job loss, or addressing the emotional reaction by use of substances or exercise.

However, some authors have suggested that coping is more complex and cannot be described with a two-dimensional structure. In response to this it has been suggested that the category of emotion focused coping can be further differentiated into strategies that deal with the problem through reappraisal, such as devaluation, and strategies that deal with the problem by avoidance (Billings and Moos, 1981; Endler and Parker, 1999). Therefore avoidance focused coping is included in the present study as a third category of coping. This coping form deals also with altering the emotional response to

the stressor but in a more passive way (Tamres *et al.*, 2002). Here employees suppress thoughts about a potential job loss and try to act as if the problem did not exist. In the case of job insecurity, employees might try to forget about the potential job loss or engage in other tasks to be distracted.

The three coping forms are related differently to well-being and other outcomes. Problem focused coping has been found to have stronger positive effect than emotion focused coping, for example on subjective well-being (Ben-Zur, 2009; Billings and Moos, 1981; Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2008). This effect can be explained by the aim of the different forms of coping. Problem focused coping aims to reduce the stressors, whereas emotion focused coping aims to increase the comfort level but does not affect the stressor overall. However, it has also been suggested that this effect varies according to what extent individuals perceive that the stressor is alterable (Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2008). For stressors that are perceived to be unchangeable emotion focused coping has been found to diminish the negative impact of the stressor more than problem focused coping (Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2008), whereas for stressors that were perceived as changeable problem focused coping was related to more positive outcomes. Moreover, emotion focused coping and avoidance focused coping were related to different kinds of outcomes (see Billings and Moos, 1981; Menaghan and Merves, 1984). For example coping consisting of reappraisal (emotion focused coping) was related to more positive outcomes (Parkes, 1990; Strentz and Auerbach, 1988; Vaillant, 1976), whereas coping by avoidance was related to more negative outcomes (Aldwin and Revenson, 1987; Collins *et al.*, 1983; Vitaliano *et al.*, 1985). Avoiding the problem has been suggested to be related to negative consequences regardless of the controllability of the stressor (Bowman and Stern, 1995). One reason for this may be that avoidance focused coping does not aim at resolving the stressful situation (Snow *et al.*, 2003) nor actively does it actively try to change the emotional reactions to the stressor, rather, the aim is to avoid thoughts about the stressful situation. This may make the stressor even more detrimental in the long run, as nothing has been done about the stressor or the individual's reactions to it. Even though research has shown that, in general, problem focused coping is the most beneficial (Baker and Berenbaum, 2007), followed by emotional and avoidance focused coping (Billings and Moos, 1981; Menaghan and Merves, 1984), the controllability of the stressors should also be considered. The "goodness of fit" hypothesis (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) suggests a matching of coping and the specific stressor depending on the stressor's controllability. It is more beneficial to use emotion focused coping and not to use problem focused coping when dealing with an uncontrollable stressor. In line with this, the importance of the controllability of the stressors in diminishing the effects of work stressors has been emphasised in the general stress literature (Karasek, 1979).

Job insecurity and coping

According to the conceptualisation of coping it consists of a dispositional and a situation component and in this study we approach coping from the dispositional perspective. We assume that coping represents a rather stable reaction to stressful situations in general as well as stressors such as job insecurity in particular (Carver *et al.*, 1989; Costa *et al.*, 1996). It has been argued that rather stable patterns, such as how we respond to stressors such as job insecurity, are likely to affect the reactivity to the stressors; hence, they moderate the effects of the stressful situation (Bolger and Zuckerman, 1995). Because the coping investigated in the present study addresses the

stressor in different ways, we expect different moderating effects depending on the type of coping, which results in three different hypotheses.

As job insecurity consists of the uncertainty about the future and is associated with high uncontrollability (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2011) because no clear stress source can be identified (e.g. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Jacobson, 1991), emotion focused coping may be a more appropriate coping strategy (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985; Göral *et al.*, 2006; Zakowski *et al.*, 2001), resulting in less severe reactions to job insecurity. This results in the following hypothesis:

- H1.* Emotion focused coping moderates the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes. The negative relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction, organizational commitment is weaker under the condition of high compared to low emotional focused coping. The positive relationship between job insecurity and mental ill-health and turnover intention is weaker under the condition of high compared to low emotional focused coping.

Avoidance focused coping on the other hand has been shown to have more negative than positive effects (Fortes-Ferreira *et al.*, 2006; Parasuraman and Cleek, 1984). This was the case in the context of uncontrollable stressors as well, in a study by Mantler *et al.* (2005) investigating the moderating role of avoidance focused coping on the relationship between uncertainty and stress experience. A theoretical explanation for this type of coping actually increasing the effect of job insecurity on its negative outcomes could be that work is of such importance in employees lives (Jahoda, 1982) that this type of threat cannot just be ignored in order to diminish negative effects. This results in the following hypothesis:

- H2.* Avoidance focused coping moderates the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes. The negative relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction, organizational commitment is stronger under the condition of high compared to low avoidance focused coping. The positive relation between job insecurity and mental ill-health and turnover intention is stronger under the condition of high compared to low avoidance focused coping.

Problem focused coping, aimed at eliminating the source of the stressor, might not be the most beneficial strategy in the context of job insecurity. The positive effect of problem focused coping is predicted to appear if the stressor is perceived as controllable, which job insecurity is not. Other studies, such as Patterson (2003), found that the use of problem focused coping in a high work stress context increased the magnitude of the stress-strain relationship. This is in line with the prediction that in situations which do not have an easy practical solution, and are hence perceived as uncontrollable, the use of problem focused coping increases the distress employees' experience (Folkman and Lazarus, 1991). This results in the following hypothesis:

- H3.* Problem focused coping moderates the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes. The negative relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction, organizational commitment is stronger under the condition of high compared to low problem focused coping. The positive relation between job insecurity and mental ill-health and turnover intention is stronger under the condition of high compared to low problem focused coping.

Previous studies have found that job insecurity levels vary according to age, gender and level of education (Cheng and Chan, 2008, see Näswall and De Witte, 2003). Moreover, research on job insecurity (for example see, Cheng and Chan, 2008; De Witte, 1999; Rosenblatt *et al.*, 1999), in similarity to research on coping (e.g. Ptacek *et al.*, 1994), has found some gender differences in the levels of job insecurity and coping, as well as in the relations between job insecurity and its outcomes (Richter *et al.*, 2010; Tamres *et al.*, 2002; Westman, 2000). This discrepancy in previous results makes it important to control for age, gender, and education in the current study.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were collected in April-May of 2008 among employees in an accountancy firm with offices all over Sweden. This company reported having periods with higher workload in the beginning of the year as Swedish taxes are due in May. The data collection was part of a larger project focusing on working conditions and well-being, where questionnaires were sent to the home addresses of all employees. Questionnaires were accompanied by letters from the company and the research team explaining the aim of the study, encouraging employees to participate as well as ensuring the confidential treatment of the responses. Even though the participation was voluntary, the company provided a voucher for a paperback book to encourage employees to participate, which was included with the first mailing of the questionnaire. Two reminders were sent out three and six weeks after the original questionnaire. Out of the 799 employees who received the questionnaire, 579 returned the questionnaire via postage-paid pre-addressed envelopes. This resulted in a response rate of 72.5 per cent. After listwise deletion of missing data in the study variables the effective sample for the present study was 558. The sample, where 71 per cent had a university education consisted of 63 per cent women. The average age was 41 years.

Measures

Table I presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables, and includes the reliability coefficients of the scales, which were all sufficient. The only exception was organisational commitment with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.68. All scales with the exception of the control variables and mental ill-health were measured on a 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree) scale. The majority of the scales have been used in previous studies, such as job insecurity (Baraldi *et al.*, 2010; Klehe *et al.*, 2011), job satisfaction (Masia and Pienaar, 2011), organisational commitment (Stallworth, 2004), and mental ill-health (Hellgren and Chirumbolo, 2003; Isaksson *et al.*, 2002e).

Predictors

Job insecurity was measured using a three-item scale by Hellgren *et al.* (1999) focusing on the affective part of job insecurity. A sample item is "I am afraid I may lose my job in the near future". A high score on this scale represents stronger feelings of job insecurity.

Outcomes

Job satisfaction was assessed with a three item scale developed by Hellgren *et al.* (1997) based on Brayfield and Rothe (1951). A sample statement is "I am satisfied with my job". Higher scores indicate satisfaction with the job.

Table I.
Correlations and
descriptive statistics

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12
Age	40.78	10.99	–										
Gender (man)	0.38	0.48	0.21**	–									
Education	0.72	0.44	–0.14**	0.27**	–								
Job insecurity	1.58	0.81	–0.09*	–0.13**	–0.06	0.91							
Job satisfaction	3.82	0.87	0.24**	0.09*	0.00	–0.17**	0.88						
Turnover intention	1.86	1.03	–0.16**	–0.12**	–0.04	0.16**	–0.78**	0.87					
Organizational commitment	3.10	0.73	0.07	0.11*	0.16**	–0.10*	0.55**	–0.49**	0.68				
Mental ill-health	0.76	0.39	–0.17**	–0.10*	–0.02	0.26**	–0.46**	0.36**	–0.15**	0.83			
Problem focused coping	3.77	0.71	0.03	0.16**	0.27**	–0.14**	0.22**	–0.15**	0.25**	–0.25**	0.82		
Avoidance focused coping	2.38	0.94	–0.07	–0.11**	–0.14**	0.10*	–0.09*	0.11*	–0.06	0.15**	–0.15*	0.85	
Emotion focused coping	2.61	0.88	–0.04	–0.08	–0.08	0.04	–0.01	0.01	0.02	0.08	–0.10*	0.61**	0.84

Note: Listwise; $n = 538$, $*p < 0.05$; – = not applicable. The scales ranged from 1 to 5 except gender (women = 0 and men = 1), age (in years) and education (which was coded 1 = university education, 0 = lower levels of education). In the diagonal in italics: Cronbach's alpha

Organisational commitment was measured with a shortened version containing four items from a scale measuring affective organisational commitment developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). A sample item of this scale is: "I have a strong sense of affinity to the organisation I work for." High scores reflect a strong commitment to the organisation.

Turnover intention was assessed with a three item measurement by Sjöberg and Sverke (2000). A sample item of this scale is "I am actively looking for other jobs". High values in this context reflect a strong intention of leaving the job.

Mental ill-health was measured with a twelve item version of the General Health Questionnaire by Goldberg (1979). A sample item is "I feel constantly under strain." The response alternatives range from 0 (never) to 3 (always) and high scores measure a higher amount of mental ill-health.

Moderators

All coping behaviours were measured by scales developed by Guppy *et al.* (2004) capturing how respondents generally cope with stressors. Problem focused coping was measured by change coping in this study, which focuses primarily on changing the situation. An example item is "I try to change the situation to get what I want".

Emotion focused coping styles were assessed by devaluation coping, which deals with the re-evaluation of the situation so that the potential stressor represents something more positive. An example item is "I tell myself the problem wasn't so serious after all". Avoidance focused coping deals with ignoring the potential stressor so that worries do not come up. Avoidance coping focuses on not considering the problem. An example item is: "I try to keep my mind off the problem". High values on any of the three coping scales represent a high amount of that particular form of coping.

Control variables

Three demographic variables were included in the analysis, gender (0 = woman, 1 = man), age (in years) and highest level of education completed (0 = lower levels of education, 1 = university).

Analysis

To examine the moderating effect of the three forms of coping on the relation between job insecurity and the four outcome variables, moderated hierarchical regression analyses were performed. Following the procedure of Cohen *et al.* (2003), job insecurity and the coping variables were centred and the interaction terms were created by multiplying the predictor by each moderator. In the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis gender, age and education were entered as control variables. Step 2 included the predictor job insecurity. The moderators (problem, emotion and avoidance focused coping) were entered in Step 3. In the last step the interaction terms were entered. To indicate a moderating effect the interaction term had to be significantly different from zero. All interactions were graphically illustrated at high (1SD above the mean) and low (1SD below the mean) scores of the moderator variables.

Results

Table II presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis testing the moderating effect of the three different forms of coping on the relation between job insecurity and the four outcome variables (job satisfaction, organisational

Table II.
Results of hierarchical
regression analysis
(standardized regression
coefficients)

Steps	Variables	Job satisfaction	Organizational commitment	Turnover intention	Mental ill-health
Step 1	Age	0.23*	0.07	-0.15*	-0.16*
	Gender (man)	0.03	0.04	-0.07	-0.05
	Education	0.02	0.15*	-0.04	-0.04
	ΔR^2 (adj)	0.05*	0.03*	0.03*	0.03*
Step 2	Job insecurity (JIS)	-0.13*	-0.07	0.13*	0.23*
	ΔR^2 (adj)	0.02*	0.00	0.01*	0.05*
Step 3	Emotion focused coping (EC)	0.06	0.08	-0.09	-0.02
	Avoidance focused coping (AC)	-0.08	-0.05	0.12*	0.11*
	Problem focused coping (PC)	0.20*	0.21*	-0.12*	-0.20*
	ΔR^2 (adj)	0.04*	0.04*	0.02*	0.05*
Step 4	JISXEC	0.11*	0.10	-0.06*	0.00
	JISXAC	-0.07	-0.08	0.11*	-0.05
	JISXPC	-0.12*	-0.02	0.15*	0.01
	ΔR^2 (adj)	0.02*	0.00	0.02*	0.00
	Model R^2 (adj)	0.13*	0.07	0.08*	0.13

Notes: listwise $n = 541$. * $p < 0.05$

commitment, turnover intention as well as mental ill-health), while controlling for age, gender and education. Job insecurity was negatively related to job satisfaction and positively associated with turnover intention, and mental ill-health. However we did not find a relation between job insecurity and organisational commitment. Individuals who used avoidance focused coping to a greater extent reported higher levels of turnover intention and mental ill-health than those with lower levels of avoidance focused coping. Employees who reported using problem focused coping to a greater extent also reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment and lower levels of turnover intention and mental ill-health compared to employees using problem focused coping to a lesser extent.

Hypothesis 1 – moderating effect of emotion focused coping

H1, stating that emotion focused coping weakens the relation of job insecurity and its outcomes, was partly confirmed. Emotion focused coping was found to be a moderator for the relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction (a) and turnover intention (d). Figure 1 illustrates the results pertaining to *H1a*. There was no relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction under the condition of high emotion focused coping, whereas job insecurity was negatively related to job satisfaction under the condition of low emotion focused coping. Thus according to our hypothesis emotional focused coping seemed to be a beneficial factor and the strength of the relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction was diminished. For affective organisational commitment (b) and mental ill-health (c) no moderating effects were found.

Figure 1 illustrates *H1c*. There was no relation between job insecurity and turnover intention under the condition of high emotion focused coping, whereas job insecurity was positively related to turnover intention under the condition of low emotion focused coping. Thus, emotion focused coping seemed to be a beneficial factor in line with our

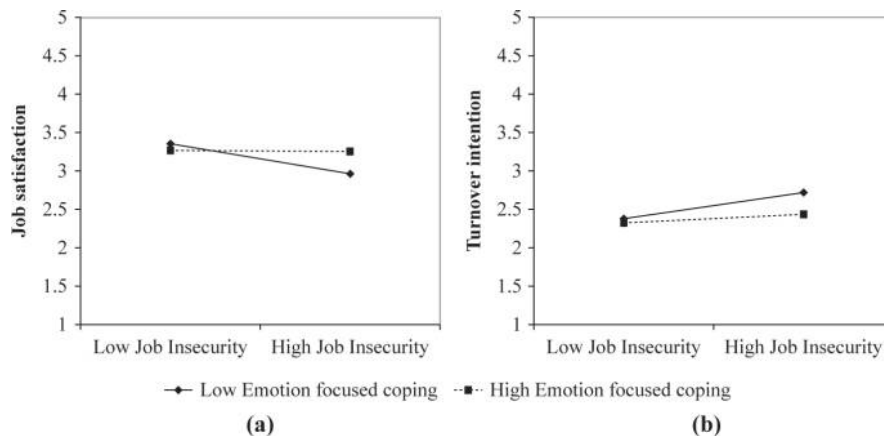


Figure 1. Emotion focused coping as a moderator of the relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction (a) and turnover intention (b)

predictions and diminished the strength of the relation between job insecurity and turnover intention.

Hypothesis 2 – moderating effect of avoidance focused coping

H2, predicting that avoidance focused coping strengthens the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes, could be partly confirmed. *H2d* was the only hypothesis regarding avoidance focused coping receiving support, where a moderating effect was found for turnover intention.

There was no relation between job insecurity and turnover intention under the condition of low avoidance focused coping, whereas a positive relation was found between job insecurity and turnover intention under the condition of high avoidance focused coping. In line with our predictions, avoidance coping was a less beneficial coping strategy in the context of job insecurity and the relation between job insecurity and turnover intentions was strengthened (see Figure 2).

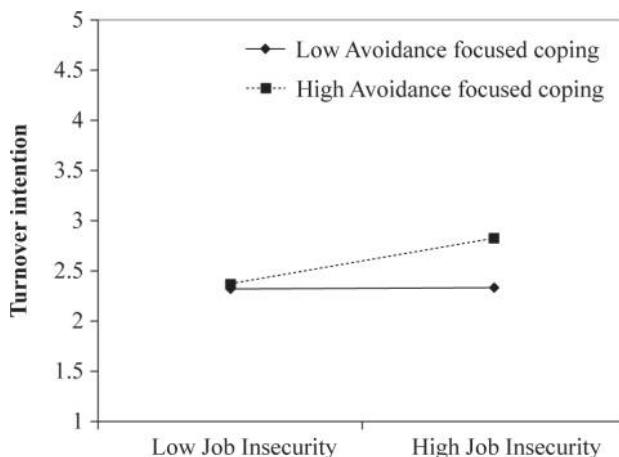


Figure 2. Avoidance coping as a moderator of the relation between job insecurity and turnover intention

The relation between job insecurity and the other three outcomes (job satisfaction [a], affective organisational commitment [b] and mental ill-health [c]) were not moderated by avoidance focused coping.

Hypothesis 3 – moderating effect of problem focused coping

H3, predicting problem focused coping to strengthen the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes, could be partly confirmed, as problem focused coping moderated the relation between job insecurity and (a) job satisfaction as well as (d) turnover intention.

Mixed results were found for H3a. No relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction was found under the condition of low problem focused coping (see Figure 3), whereas a negative relation was detected under the condition of high problem focused coping. Contrary to what was predicted, employees making more frequent use of problem focused coping reported higher job satisfaction than employees who did not use problem focused coping to the same extent. Hence problem focused coping was beneficial in the low job insecurity condition.

Similar results were found for H3d. No relation between job insecurity and turnover intention was detected under the condition of low problem focused coping (see Figure 3), but a negative relation was detected under the condition of high problem focused coping. Hence problem focused coping was beneficial in the low job insecurity condition.

For the other two outcomes (affective organisational commitment [b] and mental ill-health [c]) no moderating effects of problem focused coping were found.

Discussion

The main objective of the current study was to investigate the moderating role of individualized coping (emotion, problem and avoidance focused coping) on the relation between job insecurity and four well-known consequences. Well established outcomes based on the classification of outcomes of job insecurity presented in the meta-analysis by Sverke *et al.* (2002) were chosen. Job satisfaction, representing the immediate individual response to job insecurity, and affective organisational commitment, representing an organisational consequence, were the short-term outcomes. In addition, a long-term organisational consequence (turnover intention), as well as a

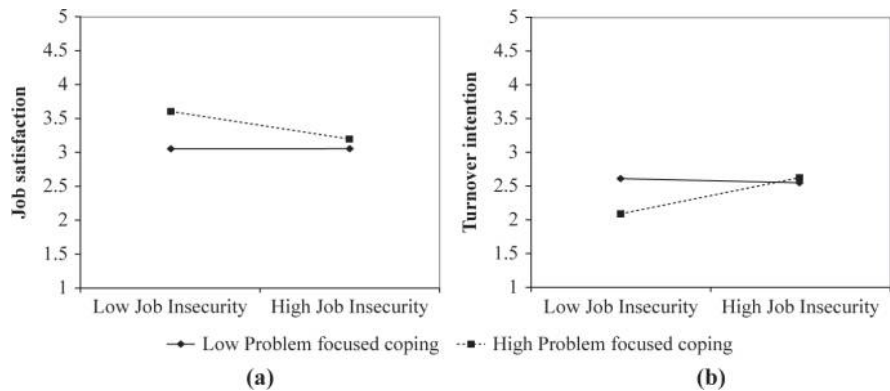


Figure 3. Problem focused coping as a moderator of the relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction (a) and turnover intention (b)

long-term consequence affecting the individual (mental ill-health) were included. As we aimed to study coping as a moderator coping was considered more as a dispositional, rather than a situational construct (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

In addition to the results specifically concerning our hypotheses we found some interesting results regarding the main effects. Even though we replicated previous meta-analytic findings of job insecurity being negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to turnover intention and mental ill-health (Cheng and Chan, 2008; Sverke *et al.*, 2002), we did not find any main effect of job insecurity on organisational commitment, which is contrary to results from previous studies. Sample based differences could be one explanation, where the employees perceiving job insecurity did not blame the organisation for their job insecurity and might instead have seen job insecurity as a structural problem. Moreover, the reliability for the commitment scale was somewhat low, which could also have contributed to these findings.

Regarding our hypotheses, we predicted that emotion focused coping would be beneficial for those reporting job insecurity due to the uncontrollable nature of job insecurity, and because it would be more fruitful to address one's emotional reactions than trying to change the situation (*H1*). Furthermore, we proposed that avoidance focused coping would be a less beneficial way of coping in the context of job insecurity, exacerbating the strength of the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes (*H2*). In addition we hypothesised that problem focused coping, similarly to avoidance focused coping, would be less beneficial due to the uncontrollability of the job insecurity experience, and the difficulties associated with addressing the problem (*H3*).

Altogether we received mixed support for our hypotheses. The first hypothesis was supported: emotion focused coping did have a beneficial effect at least for job satisfaction and turnover intention. When emotion focused coping was high there was no relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction, whereas under the condition of low emotion focused coping a negative relation was detected. This finding is in line with the goodness of fit hypothesis (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) as well as the suggestion of Pinquart and Silbereisen (2008) predicting that emotion focused coping is more beneficial when dealing with situations that are uncontrollable, because it is difficult to address the problem itself. Job insecurity would classify as a rather uncontrollable threat as it consists of the uncertainty about the future and employees often experience a feeling of powerlessness (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984).

However, we only found our hypothesis confirmed for job satisfaction, which is the individual short-term outcome and for turnover intention, the long term organisational outcome. One may speculate that individual coping may only be helpful to certain extents.

Our next hypothesis (*H2*), predicting an aversive effect of avoidance focused coping on the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes, was also partially supported. There was no relation between job insecurity and turnover intention under the condition of low avoidance focused coping, whereas a positive relation was found under the condition of high avoidance focused coping. As predicted, avoidance oriented coping made individuals react more negatively to job insecurity, and can be considered a vulnerability factor. Similar to our first hypothesis we did only find these effects for one of our four outcomes that were investigated in this study. The result is in line with previous findings on the main effects of avoidance focused coping such as Mantler *et al.* (2005) or Fortes-Ferreira *et al.* (2006), who also found avoidance focused coping being

related to negative outcomes. Potentially, job insecurity may be too severe of a stressor that has too many major consequences for the everyday life of employees. For instance, financial security is highly connected to the employment of individuals, which makes it difficult to ignore threats to employment.

In our third hypothesis (*H3*) we predicted that problem focused coping is a less beneficial way for individuals to cope with job insecurity, resulting in stronger relations between job insecurity and its outcomes. Mixed results were found for job satisfaction and turnover intention. There was no relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction, or between job insecurity and turnover intention, under the condition of low problem focused coping. However, there was a negative relation between job insecurity and job satisfaction, and a positive relation between job insecurity and turnover intention, under the condition of high problem focused coping. The level of job satisfaction were the highest, and the levels of turnover intention the lowest, when problem focused coping was high in combination with low job insecurity. This was not expected, however the low job insecurity levels could explain these findings, as they are in line with previous research. In previous studies, problem focused coping has been related to primarily positive results when the stressors were controllable (Ben-Zur, 2009; Billings and Moos, 1981; Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2008).

Altogether, we received support for most of our hypotheses and found that emotion focused coping was the most beneficial in the context of high job insecurity; whereas avoidance focused coping exacerbated the negative effects for those experiencing job insecurity. It should be noted that we found moderating effects only for two out of the four outcomes included, namely job satisfaction and turnover intention, which might give us an indication that the forms of coping included might not be relevant for commitment and for health outcomes, but that other types of coping might be more relevant. One conclusion might be that the individualized coping investigated in this study does not have a strong influence on the long-term outcomes that concern the individual, such as mental health, or for short-term organisational outcomes, such as commitment. Further research is necessary to determine whether specific coping strategies may be more appropriate for these outcomes. Moreover, the source of the insecurity perceptions may be rather vague, as it is based on the employee's interpretation of various cues in the environment, which makes it difficult to determine the most appropriate coping approach.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has potential limitations which should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First of all, this study relies solely on self-reported data, which implies that results can be inflated due to common method bias (Spector, 2006). However, it also has to be taken into consideration that job insecurity is a subjective phenomenon and that self-reports are the most accurate way to measure it. In order to reduce common method bias different methods of separation were used, such as proximal separation. To achieve this, different sections of the survey were dedicated to different topics and were introduced by a short text to help employees transition from the previous section to the next (see Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

In addition, it should be taken into consideration that the job insecurity levels in this study were not very high. However, despite the levels being rather low, findings regarding the main effects of job insecurity from previous research could nearly all be

replicated, which indicates that job insecurity is a relevant stressor. It is plausible that stronger effects would be observed in an objectively more uncertain situation, such as during a phase of downsizing, or if the employees had reported higher levels of job insecurity. In addition, the moderating effects, even if they are significant, are rather weak. Replications in other samples are recommended to gain further understanding of the impact of coping on reactions to job insecurity in different populations. This could also be a problem of the measurement of coping. The research community has discussed that the measures of coping are rather diverse, however, none of them measures coping in its whole essence including the situational as well as the dispositional component (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). This is a question that needs further addressing in the future.

As this study utilizes cross-sectional data, it is important to test the relations using longitudinal data in future research. For the present study it was deemed appropriate to use only data from the same wave, as the study constitutes a preliminary test of the relations between job insecurity, coping and the outcomes by using a cross-sectional design. However, it should be a goal of future research to test these relations over time, since this will help determine the stability of coping behaviours, and if this can be related to changes in job insecurity reactions over time (see Frese and Zapf, 1988). Perhaps more positive strategies are used at the earlier stages while after some time, with alleviation of the uncertainty, other forms of coping are used such as emotion focused coping to modify the emotional response to the stressor. However, as this area of job insecurity is rather new it is important to establish cross-sectional results first, before going into more complicated models including longitudinal data.

The present study did not control for the employee's position in the company and their perceived influence on organisational happenings. These are factors which may be important to take into account in future research, as the organisational position might be related to a certain control of potential sources of insecurity. Another factor which may influence job insecurity perceptions and how effective different forms of coping are may be how employable employees perceive themselves to be in terms of how attractive they are to the organisation (Berntson, 2008).

Concluding remarks

The present study contributes to the existing research in a number of ways. Some forms of individual coping were found to be beneficial in order to reduce the negative consequences of job insecurity, in particular emotion focused coping. Other coping strategies, here avoidance focused coping, exacerbated the negative effects of job insecurity. The study also replicated results from previous studies regarding the negative relation between job insecurity and its outcomes.

From these results we can draw some practical conclusions. Organisational interventions might be training programs in order to increase the employees' perception of employability and by that reduce job insecurity (Pruijt and Dérogée, 2010). Moreover, an open communication as well as including employees in restructuring processes in order to increase their ownership and control might be an important method (De Witte, 2005). In terms of individual coping, the organisation can provide room and encourage employees to ventilate emotions about their work situation for instance with a counsellors or the supervisor. However it should be noted that this kind of coping is only a short term solution (Taylor and Stanton, 2007). In

addition this paper make some theoretical contribution by testing three of the most common forms of coping and could confirm that they are working in line with previous research even in the context of job insecurity. In the future, different kinds of coping should be tested, in order to investigate whether they might be useful to reduce the negative effects of job insecurity on health.

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