

Article

# Perceived Job Insecurity and Sustainable Wellbeing: Do Coping Strategies Help?

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**Abstract:** For workers, perceived job insecurity represents a threat and an obstacle towards achieving a decent and sustainable dimension of wellbeing at work and in life. Using the theoretical background of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development, the aim of this study is to deepen the relation between subjective job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction considering the effect of personal resources, such as specific coping strategies that people may undertake facing job insecurity perceptions. The hypotheses were tested in a convenience sample of 769 employees in France. Data were collected with a self-report questionnaire and analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (IBM SPSS). Results showed that job insecurity was negatively related to self-reported health and life satisfaction; furthermore, problem-focused coping of the type of job, social support and training searching behaviors resulted in worsening this negative relationship. This study expanded the understanding of coping in the context of job insecurity and showed the limitations that proactive coping strategies have against job insecurity. These results encourage the debate on how far is it possible to attain sustainable wellbeing by relying on personal resources when job insecurity is experienced.

**Keywords:** job insecurity; decent work; sustainable wellbeing; coping strategies; self-related health; life satisfaction; psychology of sustainability and sustainable development

## 1. Introduction

Many changes in the nature of work and the global economy—the globalization process, the increase of the global competition [1], the advent of the technological revolution [2]; the “Great recession” of 2007–2009 with the rise in unemployment [3,4], the market flexibilization [5,6], as a way to promote employment and competition through a reduction of labour costs via organizational operations of privatization, outsourcing, mergers, acquisitions and downsizing [2,7] and finally the introduction and spread of atypical and low protective contract arrangements as a replacement of secure long-term contracts [8]—have put at risk people’s sustainable wellbeing at work and in general life. In other words, all these changes have made workers’ occupational situation more precarious and more uncontrollable by raising among them, as a result, feelings of perceived job insecurity [9]. Job insecurity is defined as a subjective perception that implies uncertainty about the future of the job itself or about the maintaining of some features of the job [10] with likely negative consequences on people’s work [11] and general wellbeing [12], which have been investigated by a growing number of researchers in work and organizational psychology over the last thirty years [13]. The “subjective” conceptualization of job insecurity relies on a personal experience of a job situation as uncertain and insecure just based on the subjective feelings reported by a person, thus regardless of an actual precarious situation, and it is distinguished from the “objective” conceptualization of job insecurity that is identified as the temporary employment or an imminent crisis on the job, where one’s

job situation is uncertain in itself and objectively insecure [14,15]. This study focuses on subjective job insecurity to which, from now on, we will refer to as “job insecurity”.

Job insecurity is not only considered as one of the most important work stressors of contemporary life [16] but it also represents an obstacle for people to achieve a quality of work and decent work in contemporary societies, characterized by an increasingly complex and unpredictable occupational context (International Labor Organization (ILO) [17–20]). Traditionally the concept of decent work has been analyzed by using a macro-level markets perspective [21] that neglected the psychological and individual point of view, for which decent work is strictly related to meaningful and purposeful work. In order to fill this gap, some recent industrial/organizational and vocational psychological studies have defined decent work by interviewing people on their subjective definition and experience of decent work. In doing so these studies have used the perspectives of the Psychology-of-Working Framework (PWF, [22]) and the Psychology-of-Working Theory (PWT, [23]) that place decent work at the centre of work experiences for all individuals and aim to explore the psychological nature of contemporary precarious and fragmented working experiences considering at the same time the individual and the socio-economical point of view, strictly connected to the access to decent work [22,24]. In other words, the Psychology-of-Working movement has shifted the focus of investigation from people who had some individual control over their career choices to people who, due to the fragmented and precarious nature of the contemporary working life, strive in the attempt to identify personal and psychological resources in order to counteract uncertainty and to find and define their career paths and narratives. According to this perspective along with the decent work one, work is a human right foundational to the preservation of mental health and wellbeing insofar it fulfils the fundamental needs of survival and power, social connection and self-determination [20,22–24]. Consequently, job insecurity, underlying uncertainty and lack of control of the future of one’s job, constitutes an impediment to the first basic need of survival and power since it implies a threat to the employment that is necessary to guarantee the fulfilment of people’s economic and social needs [25]. Furthermore, job insecurity makes job prospects more indefinable and unpredictable [26] and thus makes it difficult for people to live their present and to design their future. Considering the relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing by adopting a psychological working perspective of decent work represents an advantage since psychologists need to understand how these feelings may be counteracted by individuals in order to preserve and reconnect them at the most to a decent dimension of work. The issue of job insecurity and decent work is intertwined with the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development [27] whose focus aims to understand how far meaningful living and working experiences are possible for people that constantly face transitions, changes, fragmentation and challenges that characterize contemporary career paths.

The present study is built up on the theoretical framework of decent work [20,28–30], the psychological perspective of sustainability and sustainable development [27,28,31] and as well on the transactional stress theory [32] and the conservation of resources (COR) theory [33]. The common denominator between all these perspectives is the focus on the subjective experience of a situation and the promotion and optimization of the use of personal resources such as personal coping strategies when encountering stressful and challenging situations. Given the above, the present study investigates the relationship between subjective perceptions of job insecurity and general wellbeing outcomes, namely self-related health [34] and life satisfaction [35], considering the potential effect of personal coping strategies in this relationship.

As a work stressor, job insecurity has been associated with many negative consequences on employees’ work-related and general wellbeing [13]. However, despite substantial literature has focused on the investigation of the consequences of job insecurity, the relations between job insecurity and some general wellbeing outcomes, such as general health [36] and life satisfaction [37], are still not clear and further studies are needed. Furthermore, since the results in the literature on the consequences of job insecurity are not convergent, it is important to identify potential factors, such as personal specific coping strategies [38,39], that may affect the negative relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing

outcomes not related to work. Therefore, this paper addresses, from an original perspective, namely the psychology of sustainability, the specific issue of job insecurity in relation to people's self-related health and life satisfaction, understood as general outcomes of wellbeing, less considered by the scientific literature on job insecurity compared to work-related outcomes. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the existent scientific literature on job insecurity by investigating to what extent the activation of personal resources such as coping strategies may buffer job insecurity perceptions and consequences.

### *1.1. Job Insecurity, Self-related Health and Life Satisfaction*

From a psychological point of view, perceived job insecurity is defined as a stressor since it implies workers' concerns about the potential job loss and the fear of unemployment [36,40]. Following the latent deprivation model [25], employment is fundamental to fulfil basic human needs such economic and social ones. The fear of losing the job and become unemployed involves frustration of these needs and the potential loss of economic and social resources [40]. Since the literature of stress suggests that the anticipation of a stressful event represents a source of stress equal or even worse than the event itself [32], job insecurity, as the anticipation of the job loss, may be as harmful as the actual job loss [41,42] and it is likely to decrease perceptions of health and life satisfaction. In addition, some authors [43] suggested that wellbeing is positively affected when people perceive they are in control of their environment. It follows that job insecurity, implying uncontrollability and unpredictability [10,41,44], may negatively affect employees' general health and life satisfaction due to the lack of self-determination and control that they perceive on their overall situation [45].

Regarding the association between job insecurity and health, results do not converge. Several studies have found a significant relationship between subjective perceptions of job insecurity and psychosomatic symptoms [46] and complaints [47], distress [48], self-related health and depressive symptoms [49] and mental health [50,51]. Other studies did not find a significant relation between job insecurity and somatic complaints [52] and physical health [51]. All the differences in findings between the studies may be due to the use of different measures of health that proposed specific items for specific health problems that respondents may not have at the time they participate at the study [34]. Nevertheless, among the studies that have measured health through the same one-item scale, results seem more congruent. All these studies have reported significant negative relations between job insecurity and perceptions of health [48,53–55]. However, in some studies the significant relation found was not strong and differ for some demographic characteristics, such as gender, age [56] and social class [48], for the length of the exposure to job insecurity [49] and the level of job insecurity reported [46].

In addition, fewer studies have deepened the relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction. By investigating the association between job insecurity and both job (dis)satisfaction and life (dis)satisfaction, Lim [57] found significant and negative relationships between job insecurity and both the outcomes and, in order to explain the negative relation between job insecurity and life (dis)satisfaction, he postulated the spillover hypothesis, by which attitudes towards work-life affect attitudes towards non-work life. In a more recent study, Silla and colleagues [45] have found significant correlations between job insecurity and health related outcomes, wellbeing and life satisfaction, in temporary and permanent workers. Furthermore, De Cuyper and colleagues [16] have found a negative relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction testing job insecurity as a mediator between employability and wellbeing outcomes. Moreover, Carr and Chung [58] have shown that job insecurity is negatively associated with life satisfaction especially in countries with not generous labor market policies, in which institutional labor market policies (active or passive) are not present or are low. In addition, two recent studies [59,60] have investigated job insecurity and life satisfaction finding significant negative relationships between them in adult (aged of 40 and more years old, [59]) and young workers (between 27 and 30 years old, [60]), even if permanently employed.

As presented above, different studies have focused on the investigation of the consequences of subjective job insecurity on general wellbeing outcomes. However, in general, between the studies that

have analyzed the effect of job insecurity, those on life related outcomes are still a minority compared to the majority that focused on work-related consequences [37]. Second, comparing the strength of the association between job insecurity, occupational wellbeing and general wellbeing, higher relations were found for work-related outcomes [42]. Third, not all studies that have investigated the association between job insecurity and general wellbeing outcomes have found significant associations and, even when the findings were congruent, the strength of the relations varies substantially between studies [36].

For all these reasons, in accord with the psychological perspective of sustainability and sustainable development [27,28] that brings back the focus of the investigation on the subjective and individual level, it is important to consider specifically the subjective experience of job insecurity in relation with some general wellbeing outcomes that demand more attention, such as self-related health and life satisfaction. Therefore, with regards on all the considerations above, in this study it is hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Job insecurity relates negatively to self-related health and life satisfaction.*

### *1.2. Job Insecurity and Coping Strategies*

Even if the literature on the consequences of perceived job insecurity is not convergent, several longitudinal studies demonstrated that subjective job insecurity causes reductions on health and wellbeing, instead of the contrary [13], thus it is assumed that perceived job insecurity is likely to lead detrimental effects on employee's wellbeing. Therefore the investigation of potential moderators becomes important for two reasons: first, it is important to individuate potential factors that may reduce and buffer the negative effects of perceived job insecurity; furthermore, since the magnitude of the effects of job insecurity on wellbeing outcomes differs across studies, it is necessary to take into account other factors as possible explanations when investigating the relationship between perceived job insecurity and its consequences [42,61]. Among the studies on the topic of job insecurity limited attention has been paid to possible moderators between job insecurity and employees' reactions, thus further studies are needed [62]. So far, the majority of the studies have focused on contextual resources as possible buffers (social support, job control, employability, justice etc.) rather than on personal resources such as coping strategies [38,63,64]. This line of research seems of particular interest in the debate of decent work and the psychology of sustainability because job insecurity is characterized by feelings of uncontrollability and unpredictability [10,41,44] and it goes beyond individuals' control. However, the new perspective of the psychology of sustainability suggests a positive and proactive approach that promotes wellbeing by enhancing people's not just organizational, but also individual resources, in order to better deal with complexity, uncertainty and instability [27]. This approach provides an overview on the analysis of phenomena and on possible interventions in a rationale of sustainability. In line with this perspective, instead of being passive, people by activating resources and coping strategies would actively answer to the threat imposed by job insecurity and may be able to counteract its negative consequences. Following the psychology of sustainability perspective, professionals are responsible to investigate how people react to job insecurity in order to find the best ways they can cope with it. Indeed, so far, some authors have started to explore personal coping strategies as possible moderators in the job insecurity-employees reactions relations [39,62,65].

Coping is defined by Lazarus and Folkman [32] as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141). The main categorization of coping strategies distinguished between two broad coping styles: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping [32]. Problem-focused coping implies behaviors that are addressed directly to deal with the stressor and aim to change it or other aspects of the situation, such as active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping and seeking of instrumental social support [66]. Emotion-focused coping are the attempts that address to manage, by alleviating and reducing, negative cognitions and emotions

connected to the stressor, such as seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, or denial [66]. Moreover, a further categorization of emotion-focused coping distinguishes between avoidance coping, such as to deny and escape from the situation, and positive re-appraisal, such as to reinterpret positively the situation.

According to the transactional stress theory [32], individuals facing the fear of a possible job loss react by drawing on their personal resources and by implementing coping strategies. However, some studies have highlighted that the effectiveness of coping strategies focused on emotions and coping strategies focused on the problem depends on the source of perceived stress [67,68]. When the source of stress is clear, problem-focused coping seems to be more effective, because the problem is clearly identified and thus can be contrasted directly. When the source of stress is unclear, emotion-focused coping would seem to be the best choice, since the source of stress is difficult to identify and therefore difficult to counteract [67]. De Witte [37] underlines that uncertainty about the future of the job, contrary to the certainty of dismissal, makes it hard to identify and utilize efficient coping strategies. In fact, the insecure worker fears the loss of his job but is not certain that it will happen till the exact moment in which he is effectively dismissed. Therefore, the source of stress is not the job loss itself but the constant fear that it might arrive. In this situation reactions could be very different: some people may anticipate the job loss starting to look for a new job; others may try to reinterpret the situation in a positive light; others might deny the possibility to lose their job or try not to think about it; and so on. What is evident is that job insecurity is not a clear problem that can be solved since it is a situation beyond individuals' control. In this case, the literature on stress suggests that the use of problem-focused coping strategies may result in a loss of resources [67].

Some studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have investigated coping strategies in the context of job insecurity but results are mixed and not always convergent.

Results from qualitative studies indicated that among many coping strategies to deal with job insecurity and the fear of unemployment, employees may engage in: job search behaviors [69], like looking for vacancies, networking and writing applications [70]; collective forms of behaviors [71]; organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) [69]; increased commitment, to avoid being picked out for dismissal [71]; behaviors oriented to enhance personal employability, namely accessing training and education, networking, and behaviors directed to improve personal wellbeing, such as focusing on own physical and mental health and positive reframing [72].

Concerning quantitative studies, the results are mixed. In a previous study Mantler and colleagues [38] investigated the role of coping strategies in buffering the relation between employment uncertainty and perceived stress. They verified that those in high uncertainty situation who used high emotional avoidance strategies reported more stress; however, neither problem focused coping nor emotional focused coping were found to moderate the influence of employment uncertainty on reported stress. In a more recent study Richter and colleagues [39] found avoidance coping to strengthen the relation between job insecurity and turnover intentions. Furthermore, in accord with the stress theory assumptions, they found that emotion-focused coping was beneficial in the relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

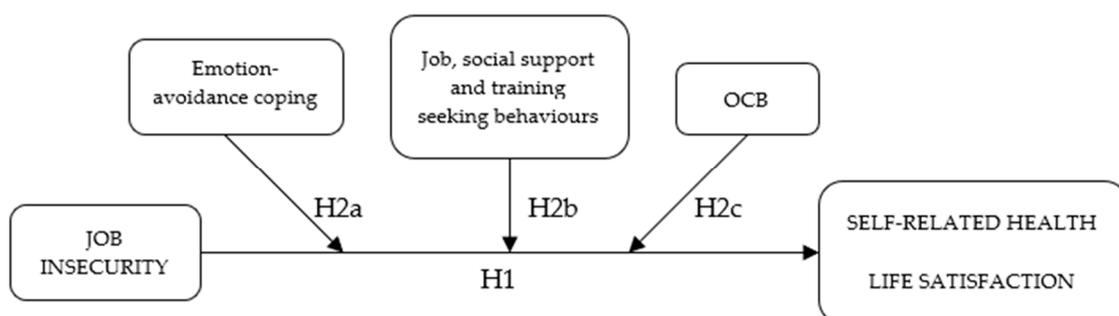
Some scholars, in accordance with the stress theory which states that due to the uncertainty of the source of stress, such as in the case of job insecurity, problem-focused coping strategies may result in a waste of resources [67], have found that problem-focused coping does not decrease and in some cases even increases the magnitude of the stressor-strain relationship [65,73]. Patterson [73] examined the effects of coping and social support on psychological distress in response to stressful work and life events among police officers. He found a "reverse buffering effect" where, when problem-focused coping was high and stressful work events were high, distress increased; thus, it may be that problem-focused coping efforts were ineffective in response to a greater number of work events because when problem-focused coping strategies were utilized in response to situations with no solution, distress was likely to increase [74]. He drew the conclusion that the use of only problem-focused coping in response to work events was unlikely to be effective for reducing distress. Furthermore,

Stiglbauer and Batinic [65] explored the role of proactive coping in relation to both positive and negative aspects of employees' wellbeing (happiness and depression) when confronted with job insecurity. Results showed that proactive coping was positively related to employees' wellbeing if the perception of job insecurity was low. However, in the case of high job insecurity, the beneficial effect of proactive coping was present only among employees with high work involvement thus, if a person experienced job insecurity, the efficiency of proactive coping might depend on the person's work-related attitudes and beliefs, such as work involvement, that served as coping resource.

On the contrary, some scholars have reported that problem-focused coping may be more beneficial in reducing the negative consequences of stress and job insecurity [39,68]. Pinquart and Silbereisen [68] investigated the relation of perceived demands associated with social change in the domains of work and family life with depressive symptoms. They found that individuals with higher numbers of family-related demands had higher levels of depressive symptoms and that more depressive symptoms were associated with lower levels of problem-focused coping and higher levels of distancing. Furthermore, Richter and colleagues [39] investigating the relation between job insecurity and some work-related outcomes, found that when problem-focused coping was high and job insecurity low job satisfaction increased and turnover intentions decreased.

To sum up, results from the literature, both from qualitative and quantitative studies, do not converge. These conflicting results may be related to the fact that people generally use different coping strategies in different situations: coping preferences are mostly contextual and related to a specific type of problem [75]. Consequently, the analysis of general coping strategies may not be the best way to understand how individuals face job insecurity and to investigate the potential role of coping in buffering the relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing. Therefore, it is important to identify specific coping strategies against job insecurity to deepen their role in the stress-strain process involving job insecurity. The majority of the quantitative studies that have investigated the ways in which people cope with job insecurity have used general coping measures that lack the complex reality of the multiple and specific ways people could actually cope with the perception of job insecurity. To better understand the role of specific coping strategies that people use facing uncertainty of job loss, it is important to refer to those studies that have deepened the analysis of coping strategies against job insecurity through qualitative approaches. Therefore, based on previous qualitative literature on job insecurity, job loss and coping, we have identified three specific coping strategies that people may use in dealing with job insecurity: some emotion-focused avoidance coping strategies—AC implying suspicion and distrust towards the professional future; and some problem-focused coping strategies differentiated in job, social support and training seeking behaviors—JSST-SB and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors—OCB.

Consistently with the findings that avoidance coping was not beneficial when facing job insecurity [38,39], the following hypothesis is formulated (See Figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Graphical representation of Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2a, Hypothesis 2b, and Hypothesis 2c.

**Hypothesis 2a.** *Emotion-Avoidance coping buffers the negative relationship between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction, so that the negative relationship between job insecurity and the outcomes is stronger under the condition of high compared to low emotion-avoidance coping.*

Furthermore, since the majority of the studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have found support for problem-focused coping as a good strategy to counteract job insecurity consequences [39,68–70], this study assumes as follows:

**Hypothesis 2b.** *Problem-focused coping of the type JSST-SB buffers the negative relationship between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction, so that the negative relationship between job insecurity and the outcomes is weaker under the condition of high compared to low problem-focused coping of the type JSST-SB.*

**Hypothesis 2c.** *Problem-focused coping of the type OCB buffer the negative relationship between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction, so that the negative relationship between job insecurity and the outcomes is weaker under the condition of high compared to low problem-focused coping of the type OCB.*

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants and Procedure

The research involved a convenience sample of 769 French workers contacted throughout snowball exercise. They filled out a self-report on-line questionnaire. Among participants 517 were females (67.2% of the sample) and 252 were males (32.8% of the sample). Their mean age was 29.79 (Standard Deviation, SD = 7.51, min 18 years old—max 66 years old); the 57% of the sample had an open-ended contract and the 43% a contingent contract (temporary, atypical or self-employed). Participant were from different occupational sectors, the 11.3% worked in the industry, the 17.3% in the commerce, the 10.5% in education and research and the 17.2% in health professions, remaining participants came from other different sectors (banking, assurance and finance; tourism; agriculture; craft; communications and IT; transports; social and environment sector; public administration etc.).

### 2.2. Measures

**Job Insecurity.** Job insecurity was assessed through the four items scale from De Witte's job insecurity measure [76], which had already been used in a previous study in France [77]. An example of job insecurity item was, "I feel insecure about the future of my job". The items were measured with a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in this study was 0.92.

**Specific coping strategies.** Specific strategies to cope against job insecurity were assessed by building ad hoc a scale composed of 11 items, taken and adapted from different scales already validated in the literature. Items from the original scales were adapted and translated into French following the translation/back translation technique [78]. Participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7) concerning which behaviors they would assume facing the fear of losing their job. Three dimensions were identified:

- 3 items to assess emotion-focused avoidance coping, adapted from the Precariousness of Life Inventory (PLI-9, brief version [79]), an example of item was "I would feel discouraged in looking for a new job". Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.82.
- 5 items to assess problem-focused coping, of the type job, social support and training searching behaviors, adapted from the Job Search Behavior Index [80], two examples of items were "I would actively commit to look for new job opportunities (on papers, web-sites, by going and introducing myself directly to the companies)" and "I would turn to people that could help me to find a job". Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.87.

- 3 items to assess problem-focused coping, of the type organizational citizenship behaviors, adapted from the Organizational Citizenship Behaviors scale [81], an example of item was “I would try to work more and I would intend to fulfil further work tasks”. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.82.

**Self-related Health.** Self-related health was assessed by using a single item scale [34], already used in a precedent French study [82]. Participants were asked to rate their health compared with their peers on a five-point scale (1 = Very poor, 2 = Not so good, 3 = Fair, 4 = Good, 5 = Very good).

**Life Satisfaction.** Life satisfaction was measured through 5 items of the satisfaction with life scale [35], already validated in a previous study in France [83]. An example of item was “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”. The items were measured with a seven-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was 0.88.

**Control variables.** Finally, demographic characteristics such as gender (dummy coded: 0 = male and 1 = female), age (continuous variable), education (dummy coded: 0 = below university degree and 1 = university degree), and contract type (dummy coded: 1 = permanent and 0 = contingent) were included as control variables as their relation with this kind of variables is well established [84].

### 2.3. Data Analysis

All the measures were available in French and have been successfully used in earlier studies, except for the coping scale of which the psychometric characteristics were tested. The overall sample ( $N = 769$ ) was randomly split into two subsamples. In the first subsample ( $N = 382$ ) an exploratory factor analysis (EFA – PC extraction) was performed by IBM SPSS software (IBM Corp. Released 2016. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 24.0. Armonk, NY, USA.) after the evaluation of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity, which results indicated that conducting factor analysis on the data was appropriate ( $KMO = 0.85$ ; Bartlett’s test = 2237.27 ( $df = 55$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )). Principal component (PC) and Varimax rotation analyses were used on the 11 items of the coping scale. Results of the exploratory factor analysis showed that the chosen factor solution for specific coping strategies resulted in three factors (based on the scree test, eigenvalues  $> 1$ ). This solution explained 73.59% of the variance. All the three factors showed acceptable saturations corresponding to all items, with factor loadings above the conventional cut-off value of 0.40 [85]. In the second subsample ( $N = 387$ ) a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA – ML maximum likelihood) was performed by MPLUS, version 7.3, a statistical modeling program edited by Muthén and Muthén [86]. According to the literature [87] several goodness-of-fit criteria were considered: the  $\chi^2$  goodness-of-fit statistic; the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); the Comparative Fit Index (CFI); the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI); the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Because the  $\chi^2$  is sensitive to sample size, the use of relative goodness-of-fit measures is strongly recommended [88]. The fit can be considered acceptable when the CFI and TLI are greater than 0.90 and the RMSEA is equal to or smaller than 0.08 [88,89]. The three-factor solution of specific coping strategies showed a satisfactory fit to the data:  $\chi^2 (39) = 117.38$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.07; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.06. Standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.70 to 0.91.

To test the hypotheses, moderated hierarchical regression analyses using the Process Macro 2.15 by Hayes [90] were performed through SPSS for self-related health and life satisfaction separately. The predictor (i.e., job insecurity) and the moderator variables (i.e., emotion-avoidance coping, problem-focused coping of the type job, social support and training search behaviors and problem-focused coping of the type organizational citizenship behaviors) were centered before calculating the interaction term by multiplying the predictor by each moderator [91,92]. In the first step, gender, age, education and contract type were introduced as control variables. In the second step job insecurity was introduced as a predictor. In the third step coping strategies were entered as moderators. Finally, the interaction terms were added in the fourth step. Finally, the direction of the significant interaction effects was explored and graphically illustrated by calculating the simple slopes

scores of job insecurity on the outcomes at high (1 SD above the mean) and low (1 SD below the mean) scores of the moderator variables.

### 3. Results

Table 1 illustrates means, standard deviations and correlations among the variables of the study. Results indicated that job insecurity was negatively related to the type of contract ( $r = -0.31, p < 0.001$ ), thus those with contingent contract reported higher job insecurity; furthermore, job insecurity was negatively related with self-related health ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.001$ ) and life satisfaction ( $r = -0.23, p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients of the Variables in the Study (N = 769).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	-	-	-									
2. Age	29.79	7.51	0.03	-								
3. Education	-	-	0.19 ***	-0.04	-							
4. Contract	-	-	-0.03	0.35 ***	-0.07	-						
5. Job Insecurity (1–5)	2.08	1.03	0.02	-0.06	-0.03	-0.31 ***	0.92					
6. Self-related Health (1–5)	4.52	1.28	-0.03	-0.03	0.13 ***	0.02	-0.14 ***	-				
7. Life Satisfaction (1–7)	3.59	0.96	0.01	0.06	0.11 **	0.10 **	-0.23 ***	0.48 ***	0.88			
8. AC (1–7)	4.38	1.51	0.14 ***	0.08 *	0.03	0.07	0.12 **	-0.02	0.02	0.82		
9. JSST-SB (1–7)	5.19	1.40	0.15 ***	0.10 **	0.07 *	0.22 ***	-0.09 *	0.21 ***	0.28 ***	0.30 ***	0.87	
10. OCB (1–7)	4.25	1.46	-0.01	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	0.00	0.27 ***	0.29 ***	0.19 ***	0.42 ***	0.82

Notes. AC, avoidance coping; JSST-SB, job, social support and training searching behaviors; OCB, organizational citizenship behaviors. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Items response scales are presented between parentheses. Figures in the diagonal are Cronbach’s alpha coefficients.

Table 2 shows results of hierarchical regression analyses testing the effect of specific coping strategies on the relation between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction, while controlling for gender, age, education and contract type. Results suggested a low, positive relation between educational level and perceived health ( $\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01, \Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.001$ ) and between educational level and life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01, \Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.001$ ). Just in the first step of the regression, contract type resulted weakly related with life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.10, p < 0.01, \Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.01$ ), thus those with an open-ended contract reported more life satisfaction, but when introducing job insecurity, the relation became not significant ( $\beta = 0.02, p = 0.59$ , not significant (ns),  $\Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 2.** Summary of hierarchical regression analyses: moderation by coping strategies. Dependent variables: self-related health and life satisfaction.

	Self-Related Health				Life Satisfaction			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Gender (0 = men, 1 = woman)	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03
Age	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.06
Education (0 = < university, 1 = university)	0.12 **	0.11 **	0.11 **	0.10 **	0.12 ***	0.11 **	0.11 **	0.10 **
Contract (0 = contingent, 1 = open ended)	0.04	-0.01	-0.02	-0.05	0.10 **	0.02	-0.04	-0.02
JI		-0.14 ***	-0.12 **	-0.13 **		-0.22 ***	-0.21 ***	-0.21 ***
AC			-0.08 *	-0.09 *			-0.05	-0.06
JSST-SB			0.14 **	0.14 ***			0.17 ***	0.18 ***
OCB			0.22 ***	0.21 ***			0.23 ***	0.23 ***
JI x AC				-0.06				-0.05
JI x JSST-SB				-0.08 *				-0.09 *
JI x OCB				-0.05				-0.02
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.14	0.02	0.07	0.17	0.19
$\Delta R^2$	0.02 *	0.01 ***	0.09 ***	0.02 ***	0.02 **	0.05 ***	0.10 ***	0.02 ***

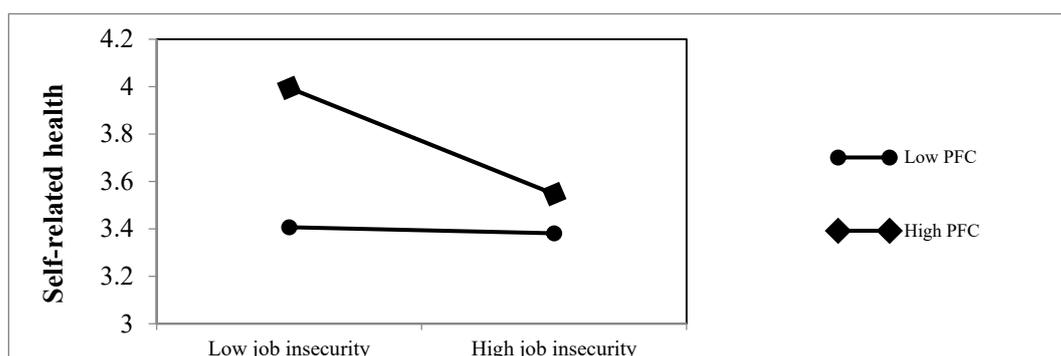
Note: JI, job insecurity; LS, life satisfaction; AC, avoidance coping; JSST-SB, job, social support and training searching behaviors; OCB, organizational citizenship behaviors; R<sup>2</sup> is the coefficient of determination, such as a measure of the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables;  $\Delta R^2$  is the change in R<sup>2</sup> values from one model to another. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Hypothesis 1.** Results showed a weak, negative, direct relation between job insecurity and self-related health ( $\beta = -0.14, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.01, p < 0.001$ ) and a moderate, negative direct relation between job insecurity and life satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.22, p < 0.001, \Delta R^2 = 0.05, p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore,

employees who used problem focused coping strategies, both the type of job, support and training searching behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors, reported better health and higher life satisfaction; whilst those who used emotion-avoidance coping reported less self-related health. No significant relation was found between the use of emotion-avoidance coping and life satisfaction.

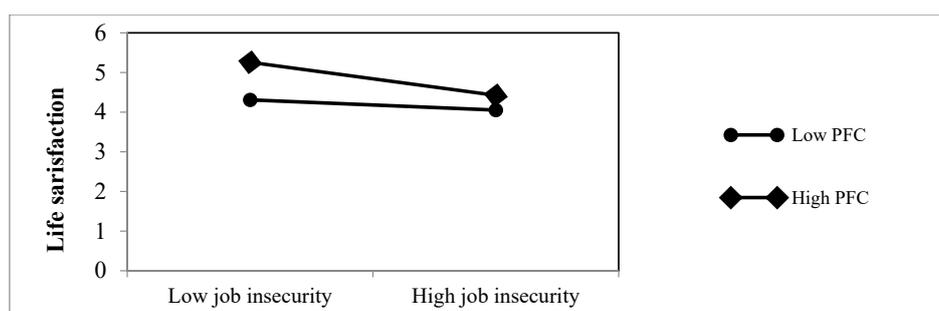
**Hypothesis 2a.** Regarding the interaction between emotion-avoidance coping and job insecurity in relation to self-related health and life satisfaction, results showed that the interaction term was not significantly related to the outcomes (self-related health,  $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $p = 0.13$ , ns; life satisfaction,  $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $p = 0.14$ , ns) hence no moderating effects were found and H2a was not supported.

**Hypothesis 2b.** The Hypothesis 2b predicted the interaction between problem-focused coping of the type job, support and training searching behaviors and job insecurity in relation to self-related health and life satisfaction. More specifically, it was expected that the negative relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing outcomes would be weaker when employees put in place more job, support and training searching behaviors. Results did not support this hypothesis, however the interaction term between job insecurity and problem-focused coping of the type job, support and training searching behaviors was significantly related to the outcomes (self-related health,  $\beta = -0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; life satisfaction,  $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The simple slope analysis showed a moderate and negative relationship between job insecurity and self-related health among employees with high problem-focused coping of the type job, support and training searching behaviors (+1 SD;  $b = -0.22$ ,  $t(765) = -4.25$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a not significant relationship when problem-focused coping was low (-1 SD;  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t(765) = -0.20$ ,  $p = 0.84$ , ns) (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Interaction between job insecurity and problem-focused coping of the type of job, support and training searching behaviors on self-related health.

Furthermore, the simple slope analysis showed a strong and negative relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction among employees with high problem-focused coping of the type job, support and training searching behaviors (+1 SD;  $b = -0.42$ ,  $t(765) = -6.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a not significant relationship when problem-focused coping was low (-1 SD;  $b = -0.13$ ,  $t(765) = -1.45$ ,  $p = 0.15$ , ns) (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Interaction between job insecurity and problem-focused coping of the type of job, support and training searching behaviors on life satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 2c.** Concerning the interaction between problem-focused coping of the type organizational citizenship behaviors and perceived job insecurity in relation to self-related health and life satisfaction, results showed that the interaction term was not significantly related to the outcomes (self-related health,  $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $p = 0.22$ , ns; life satisfaction,  $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $p = 0.58$ , ns), hence no moderating effects were found and H2c was not supported.

#### 4. Discussion

The European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks [93] has pointed out that job insecurity has become a constant concern for workers, who nowadays constantly face the threat and challenge of job transition [36,59,94] finding themselves personally responsible of their career insofar organizations are not able anymore to guarantee a life-long employment [94,95]. Based on the decent work perspective [20] and the Psychology-of-Working movement [22,23] along with the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development [27], this study analyzed to what extent people, in this climate of widespread job insecurity, may be able to preserve their health and life satisfaction through the activation of personal resources, such as coping strategies. According to the previous literature, Hypothesis 1 (H1) supposed that job insecurity would negatively relate to self-reported health and life satisfaction. Results showed that job insecurity related negatively to both self-reported health [48,53–55] and life satisfaction [16,45,57,59], thus H1 is confirmed. These results confirmed that feeling uncertain in a job situation represents a high stress for people that report less health and satisfaction in life probably because they feel threatened in their need of survival and power [22,24]. As in previous literature, the relationships found between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction are weaker compared to relationships presented in the literature between job insecurity and work-related wellbeing outcomes (less than 0.25) [37]. Nevertheless, these results are important because they highlight that job insecurity is a stressor that autonomously affects broader aspects of wellbeing [13].

With regard to the effect of coping strategies, accordingly to the previous literature [38,39], Hypothesis 2a (H2a) predicted that emotion-avoidance focused coping would not be a beneficial strategy to cope against job insecurity and would strengthen the negative relationship between job insecurity and general wellbeing. Results did not support H2a. Job insecurity is a stressor that negatively impacts general wellbeing, probably because, as previous authors stated [25,37,42] in line with the decent work perspective and the Psychology-of-Working movement, it threatens important life needs, such as economic, financial and social ones. Thus, it is a difficult stressor to be ignored and people prefer to engage in active coping strategies to deal with it, such as problem-focused coping.

According to the previous literature, Hypothesis 2b (H2b) assumed that problem-focused coping of the type job, social support and training searching behaviors could help people to gain new resources and thus buffer the negative relation between job insecurity and general wellbeing outcomes. Results showed that problem-focused coping of the type job, social support and training searching behaviors increased the negative relationship between job insecurity, self-related health and life satisfaction, thus H2b is not confirmed. In particular, these specific behaviors increased the negative effects of job insecurity on wellbeing when job insecurity was high, while they reduced the negative relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing when the perception of job insecurity was low. In line with previous studies that found active coping to reduce the negative relationship between job insecurity and work-related outcomes [39], these results showed that the fact of practicing active job, social support and training seeking behaviors has a positive effect on general wellbeing in a situation of low job insecurity, whilst when employees are highly insecure being engaged in job, social support and training seeking behaviors enhance the negative relation between job insecurity and wellbeing. According to the transactional stress theory [32] and to the COR theory [96], job insecurity is a source of stress that people interpret as a threat and they draw on their resources in the attempt to counteract it, to limit its negative consequences and to preserve their wellbeing. The COR theory [33,96] assumes that people strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources. To counteract stress, individuals need

to gain new resources and restore the threatened or lost resources. When job insecurity is low, it is likely that be engaged in job, support and training searching behaviors to counteract the fear of a possible job loss results in a gain of resources. But when job insecurity is high be engaged in job, support and training searching behaviors may be a “double cut weapon” because by implementing behaviors to counteract it, people would just decrease their resources without new gain, especially if the expected results are not achieved (for example, finding a more secure job). These results are in line with the general literature on coping, according to which the use of problem-focused coping strategies in situations where the source of stress is unclear and difficult to counteract would result in a loss of resources [67].

Furthermore, Hypothesis 2c (H2c) predicted that problem-focused coping of the type of organizational citizenship behaviors would be a beneficial strategy to cope against job insecurity because it may help people to feel more in control on their job context and would weaken the negative relationship between job insecurity and general wellbeing. Results did not support H2c. Since job insecurity is a source of stress that people cannot control, it is likely that putting in place organizational citizenship behaviors relies on contextual resources that are not under people’s control and instead of a gain on control it might represents for them just an extra-effort and a loss of energies that does not guarantee in turn the certainty of being employed [69].

This study has several limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study that does not allow stating causal relationships between the investigated variables. Future studies, longitudinal or diary, should look at the effects of job insecurity over time, testing the possible moderation of specific coping strategies. Secondly, the use of the self-report questionnaire could lead to “inflate” the relationships between the observed variables due to the common method bias [97]. Specifically, when testing interactions, common method variance is likely to attenuate rather than to strengthen interaction effects [98]. However, this means that the interactions found may be quite robust. A third limitation of the study is the convenience sampling method that has allowed to collect a heterogeneous sample, although not representative of the active population in general, thus results cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the construction of the coping scale may pose some problems due to the selection of items that represent only some specific coping strategies among all the ways people could actually cope with job insecurity. Future studies should replicate these findings taking into account more specific coping strategies against job insecurity, drawn from the qualitative literature on job insecurity, for example volunteering, go to see a professional etc. Nonetheless, these results are important from a theoretical perspective as they can be considered as a contribution in expanding the research of possible job insecurity moderators to personal specific coping strategies against job insecurity rather than considering only contextual resources such as, for instance, social support, organizational justice or employability.

## 5. Conclusions

Since the majority of the studies focused on the relation between job insecurity and work-related outcomes [37], this study deepened the relation between job insecurity and general wellbeing outcomes by showing that job insecurity relates independently from work-related outcomes to self-reported health and life satisfaction. Even if the strength of the relationships found in this study is not considerable (less than 0.25), these results suggest that researches in work and organizational psychology should not neglect the impact of job insecurity on general wellbeing outcomes and should deepen these relationships through longitudinal studies to observe how the effects of job insecurity on general wellbeing outcomes develop not just over time but also may last over time and impact life choices and trajectories.

Furthermore, the originality of this study was the investigation of specific coping strategies against job insecurity as potential factors that may affect the job insecurity-general wellbeing outcomes relationship. In particular, results showed that the use of job, social support and training searching behaviors may compensate for resource loss and may be important for gaining new resources for

those who reported low job insecurity, whilst it may consume additional resources [99,100] for those who were highly job insecure. These findings have several practical implications. First, they highlight the importance to consider specific coping strategies against job insecurity, rather than just general coping styles. Future studies should complement these findings by examining the role of other specific coping strategies against job insecurity. Secondly, these results demonstrated that the activation of personal resources is not enough to counteract job insecurity and in highly job insecurity situations it even worsens the effect of job insecurity on wellbeing. However, as pointed out by Stiglbauer and Batinic [65] the effect of active coping may change over time: it might have adverse effects in the short term (due to consumption of resources), but beneficial effects in the long term (due to gain of new resources). Since this study is cross-sectional, it does not allow drawing any conclusion on these effects. Further longitudinal studies should replicate these findings to observe the buffering effect of specific problem-focused coping strategies over time.

In conclusion, considering the decent work and the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development perspectives, these findings demonstrate to what extent job insecurity is a barrier that exists in attaining decent work and sustainable wellbeing [27,28,31,101–104]. Therefore, job insecurity perception and its consequences should not only be contrasted by relying on personal resources but also by promoting a sustainable working environment that could represent a source for people to gain resources and to perceive themselves more in control of their working and personal life and thus less job insecure. In the light of the psychology of sustainability, this could be done for instance by promoting the Corporate Social Responsibility [105] policies, targeted at employees, such as support practices, training, resources for work-family balance and social equity [106].

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