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Perceived job insecurity climate in uncertain times: Implications for work-related health
among leaders versus non-leaders

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Abstract

Purpose. Previous studies have demonstrated that perceived job insecurity climate denotes an individual-level stressor. The present study reiterated this notion, and investigated whether leadership responsibility moderated the association between perceived job insecurity climate and work-related strain, as measured about one year into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach. We recruited a sample of full-time workers ($N = 1,399$) in the US, comprising 663 leaders and 763 non-leaders. Employing a cross-sectional design, we hypothesized that perceived job insecurity climate would be associated with work-related strain (i.e., burnout, absenteeism, and presenteeism), and, that these associations would be stronger for employees with leadership responsibilities compared to non-leaders.

Findings. Perceived job insecurity climate was related to each of the three burnout measures investigated. Leadership responsibility moderated two of these relationships (i.e., regarding emotional and cognitive impairment, but not exhaustion). There was no main effect of perceived job insecurity climate on absenteeism or presenteeism. However, leadership responsibility moderated both relationships, indicating that they were positive and significant only for employees with leadership responsibility.

Originality. This study found that, as an individual stressor, perceived job insecurity climate is more detrimental to employees with leadership responsibility than to non-leaders.

Practical implications. Perceptions of widespread job insecurity engender strain among leaders, while simultaneously implying a heightened need for effective leadership.

Organizations and practitioners should take the present findings into consideration when

implementing preventive and restorative measures to address leaders' health and organizational competitiveness when job insecurity increases.

Article classification: research paper

Keywords: job insecurity, leadership, burnout, absenteeism, presenteeism, COVID-19

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 resulted in major and widespread uncertainty throughout the world of work (Collings et al., 2021). For most organizations, leaders, and workers, the pandemic increased pressures to adapt and readjust, and labor markets globally saw growing unemployment rates and high uncertainty regarding short- and long-term job security during the pandemic's first year (Blustein et al., 2020). Job insecurity, which is a well-established individual work-stressor related to the fear of job loss (Shoss, 2017), therefore became a topic of interest and gained renewed relevance in the early phase of the pandemic. In that connection, scholars documented high levels of job insecurity throughout 2020, as well as various negative consequences related to the subjective experience of this insecurity (see e.g., Jung et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). Concurrently, despite reports of continuous and unresolved uncertainty in working life during the pandemic's first year (The International Labour Organization, 2021), perceptions of job insecurity at the work climate level remained largely unaddressed throughout this period.

Researchers have argued that perceived job insecurity climate represents an independent work stressor (e.g., Låstad et al., 2018). In this study, we reiterate this notion, and further argue that as measured about one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, perceived job insecurity climate disproportionately affects employees in leadership positions. Specifically, we argue that times of widespread uncertainty imply personal and work-related resource threats related to heightened demands, complexity and responsibilities associated with the leader role (e.g., Collings et al., 2021; Dirani et al., 2020; Greenhalgh, 1983). Consequently, we posit that a perceived job insecurity climate represents a more potent source of work-related strain among leaders than among non-leaders, presently measured in the form of burnout symptoms, sickness absenteeism, and sickness presenteeism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perceived Job Insecurity Climate in the Pandemic Context

At the individual level, job insecurity is usually defined as “perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 468). It is thereby a function of perceived threats to job continuity and a perceived inability to resist or combat those threats, with detrimental outcomes for affected workers in terms of individual health, job satisfaction, performance, and commitment (e.g., Shoss, 2017; Sverke et al., 2002). While extensive research has been conducted on individual job insecurity over several decades, less is known about job insecurity climates, or “shared perceptions of powerlessness to maintain the continuity of threatened jobs in an organization” (Sora et al., 2009, p. 130). Using aggregated measures of job insecurity climate, a few studies have documented that shared job insecurity perceptions in work environments are detrimental, for example to work attitudes (Sora et al., 2013), safety outcomes (Jiang & Probst, 2016), and work engagement (Hsieh & Kao, 2022). At the same time, the research literature has given less attention to perceived job insecurity climate from the individual viewpoint. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one exception to this trend is that reported by Shoss *et al.* (2022), who found that individual perceptions of national job insecurity were related to experiences of poor government management of the pandemic. Another example is a study carried out prior to the pandemic by Låstad *et al.* (2018), who found that individually perceived job insecurity climate negatively affected subjective health among a sample of Swedish white-collar employees. Research on individual perceptions of job insecurity climate is nonetheless still scarce. Moreover, to our knowledge, no one has examined the potentially differential impact of such perceptions on leaders versus coworkers with respect to work-related health.

Such a perspective would be pertinent in a context characterized by generally high and widespread job insecurity (see Greenhalgh, 1983). The winter of 2021 was therefore an appropriate point in time to address perceived job insecurity climate. By then, almost one year

had passed since the first global lockdown responses aimed at limiting the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that had caused the pandemic. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), labor markets were still imbued with uncertainty regarding job security in January 2021, including in the US. Direct sources of job insecurity are thus likely to have been evident throughout the pandemic's first year. For example, formal information passed from an organization to its employees about potential layoffs and downsizing could denote such a threat. Informal information, such as rumors about downscaling or other threats to employment, may also have been likely. Such direct employment threats are commonly associated with both higher job insecurity levels and with work-related health outcomes, such as burnout and psychological well-being (Burke et al., 2015).

Additionally, indirect sources of job insecurity likely affected many, if not all, employees at this point in time. For instance, lockdown measures had consequences for office attendance and travel possibilities (see e.g., Gambau et al., 2021), likely triggering doubts about one's ability to carry out work duties and tasks. In addition, the pandemic created widespread uncertainty on many parameters, such as fear of contamination and possible virus mutations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020), and the development, efficiency, and safety of vaccines (Machingaidze & Wiysonge, 2021). Hence, as the pandemic approached the end of its first year, job insecurity probably remained high in many workplaces, with few, if any indicators of immediate relief.

Theoretical Development

As argued, there is reason to assume that job insecurity was widespread in US labor markets during the winter of 2021, possibly giving rise to a strong and salient job insecurity climate in many workplaces. In the present study, we contend that the perception of such climates represents a significant resource threat, and hence a stressor at the individual level.

Further, considering this notion from a leadership perspective, we argue that, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership responsibility moderates the relationship between perceived job insecurity climate and work-related strain due to resource deterioration related to the leader role.

Perceived Job Insecurity Climate as a Stressor

Perceived job insecurity climate refers to individual, subjective uncertainty about the general level of job insecurity in one's workplace and it has been established to be an individual-level stressor in previous studies (Guidetti et al., 2022; Låstad et al., 2018). Theoretically, it can be construed as such from a resource perspective. According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory, individuals strive to obtain and protect valued assets by drawing on internal and external resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011). Consequently, threats to individual resources constitute stressors that may become self-reinforcing unless additional resources can be invested to reduce or eliminate them (Halbesleben et al., 2014). This applies to perceived job insecurity climate for several reasons, most notably because of the strong sense of instability and unpredictability that is characteristic of widespread insecurity. Perceived job insecurity climate may, for example, include concerns related to the employer's ability to continue in business and remain competitive, in both the short- and the long-term. It also includes uncertainty about the job permanency of close colleagues, and, by extension, the continued existence and future composition of teams and other work units, all distinct resources often required to thrive and to master one's work tasks. Job insecurity climate has also been found to impair the quality of the work environment (Nikolova et al., 2018; Sora et al., 2013), which could further add to the sense of destabilization and impaired working conditions in an otherwise insecure context. Altogether, it is reasonable to regard perceived job insecurity climate as a stressor in general terms (e.g., Guidetti et al., 2022; Låstad et al.,

2018), and one that would be unusually salient in the pandemic context, which was imbued with uncertainty and instability at the societal level.

The COR theory construes resource threats as stressors that result in strain reactions, both due to the individual significance of personal resources and to their role in alleviating distress and preventing further resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011). This especially applies if any attempt to cope with the stressor fails, in which case continued exposure to a stressor often leads to negative cycles of escalating resource depletion (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In the work context, burnout is a strain-related outcome commonly documented in response to such resource depletion (e.g., Halbesleben, 2006; Westman et al., 2004). Schaufeli, Desart, and De Witte (2020, p. 4) described burnout as a “work-related state of exhaustion.” They differentiated between four dimensions of burnout, of which three comprise an inability to invest energy (i.e., exhaustion, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment), while the last is characterized by an unwillingness to invest energy (i.e., mental distance). In the present study, we posit that perceived job insecurity climate represents a stressor that is associated with the burnout subtypes representing an inability to invest energy, due to the stressor’s proposed impact on individual resources as measured about one year into the pandemic. Hence, drawing on the work of e.g., Låstad *et al.* (2018), and the rationale presented thus far, we propose that there will be a main effect of perceived job insecurity climate on work-related exhaustion, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment, as summarized in the following hypothesis:

H1. There will be a positive association between perceived job insecurity climate and strain in the form of work-related burnout symptoms (i.e., exhaustion, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment).

Additionally, the impact of resource depletion on strain reactions may be observed on employee work attendance (Westman et al., 2004). Sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism comprise different, although related, measures of work attendance related to strain. Specifically, these constructs reflect two opposing behavioral reactions to illness, i.e., not going to work due to illness (absenteeism) and going to work despite it (presenteeism). From a COR perspective, sickness absenteeism may be seen as a behavioral reaction aimed at protecting remaining resources related to health, while presenteeism may represent an adaptive response aimed at securing resources related to work (Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020). Stressors such as emotional job demands, workload and job insecurity are therefore associated with increased levels of both absenteeism and presenteeism (e.g., Idris et al., 2023; van Woerkom et al., 2016). In line with this, we regard both sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism as plausible outcomes of perceived job insecurity climate, and propose the following as our second hypothesis:

H2. Perceived job insecurity climate will be associated with higher sickness absenteeism and presenteeism.

Leadership Responsibility as a Moderator

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the world of work has largely been addressed from an employee perspective (e.g., Newman et al., 2022). However, some scholars have also emphasized the particular challenges faced by organizational leaders, including the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of leader obligations during the disruptive first year of the pandemic, and the specific crisis management competencies required to handle it (Collings et al., 2021; Dirani et al., 2020). In the present study, we posit that widespread and salient uncertainty related to job security constituted a key part of the predicament facing leaders during the pandemic.

First, there is reason to assume that widespread job insecurity at work threatens resources directly related to leaders' responsibilities and role obligations. For example, it could spur concerns about losing valued employees for whom one is responsible. It may also trigger concern about detrimental effects on organizational effectiveness, productivity, and general competitiveness, which often fall within leaders' areas of responsibility. Hence, while uncertainty about the potential loss of colleagues and reduced performance may be experienced as a stressor by both leaders and non-leaders, its potency as a resource threat is arguably stronger in relation to the former.

Second, perceived job insecurity climate may also have represented a more significant source of actual resource loss among leaders during the pandemic's first year. For example, job insecurity has been found to trigger a deterioration in supervisory interactions (Kinnunen et al., 2000) and trust in leaders (Borg & Elizur, 1992), which comprise external resources essential in the execution of numerous leader tasks. Job insecurity has also been found to impair in-role performance (Costa & Neves, 2017), and lead to organizational deviance, counterproductive work behaviors, and moral disengagement (Huang et al., 2017), which are coworker behaviors and attitudes that are related to immediate as well as extended leadership obligations. Furthermore, job insecurity is a well-established precursor of adverse individual health effects (e.g., László et al., 2010). Employee health issues arising from subjective job insecurity can fuel expectations of the leader's role in alleviating distress among employees. This, in turn, can be even more challenging when job insecurity is severe (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995), such as during the early phase of the pandemic. Along the same lines, Collings *et al.* (2021) noted that the complicated conditions for exercising leadership responsibilities in the early phase of the pandemic to a large part were related to dealing with uncertainty and tensions.

As argued, there is ample reason to expect that the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic particularly entailed threats to and loss of resources among employees with leadership responsibilities. Therefore, and given the prolonged and uncontrollable nature of perceived job insecurity climate throughout this year, we hold that leaders would be more vulnerable to work-related strain responses as compared with non-leaders. We thus hypothesize that leadership responsibility moderates the association between perceived job insecurity climate and strain in the form of burnout symptoms, sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism, and summarize our third and fourth hypotheses as follows:

H3. The association between perceived job insecurity climate and burnout symptoms will be moderated by leadership responsibility, such that it is stronger for leaders than for non-leaders.

H4. The associations between perceived job insecurity climate and sickness absenteeism and presenteeism will be moderated by leadership responsibility, such that both relationships are stronger for leaders than for non-leaders.

Method

Sample and Procedure

We recruited the current sample via a service that gathers online panel data (Qualtrics), an increasingly common sampling approach that yields data of a quality equivalent to that of more conventional data collection strategies across various applied psychology disciplines (Walter et al., 2019). Specifically, Qualtrics reached out to US full-time workers who consented to participate in survey-based research while receiving a small compensation (approximately equal to USD 2.50). The present questionnaire contained measures of uncertainty, work environment factors, and stress, and was issued until we reached an agreed sample size of 1,400 respondents. We manually screened the data for

quality issues and deleted 26 responses due to little or no variation in the response pattern throughout the questionnaire. Qualtrics subsequently replaced these responses by distributing the survey to an additional sample of 26 individuals. After one final answer was deleted from the replacements, the final sample comprised 1,399 respondents. Due to the nature of this sampling procedure, information about non-respondents was not recorded. The sampling procedure ensured an equal gender ratio. The respondents' mean age was 58 years ($SD = 11$), and 47.4 % ($N = 663$) held leadership positions in their organizations.

Ethics

The participants gave informed consent to participate in this study. The Ethical Committee for Medical Research in Eastern Norway reviewed the project before data collection and concluded that approval was not required. Moreover, the Norwegian Center for Research Data reviewed and approved the study concerning personal data protection.

Measures

Perceived job insecurity climate. We used a standardized inventory of four items (Låstad et al., 2015) to measure perceived job insecurity climate, such as “At my workplace, there is a general feeling of being let go.” Respondents evaluated each item on a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*fully disagree*) to 5 (*fully agree*) ($\alpha = .96$).

Burnout. We measured burnout using three scales from the Burnout Assessment Tool (Schaufeli et al., 2020), and all items were evaluated by respondents on a five-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Exhaustion was measured by eight items, such as “After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy” ($\alpha = .92$). Cognitive impairment was measured by five items, such as “When I’m working, I have trouble concentrating” ($\alpha = .94$). Emotional impairment was measured by five items, such as “I get upset or sad at work without knowing why” ($\alpha = .9$).

Sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism. We assessed sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism via two single-item measures, based on the single-item measure of presenteeism reported by Aronsson *et al.* (2000). Specifically, for absenteeism, we asked, “During the previous three months, how many days have you not worked due to sickness?” For presenteeism, we asked, “During the previous three months, how many days have you gone to work despite feeling that you really should have taken sick leave due to your state of health?” Respondents replied using a continuous scale from 0 to 90 for both measures.

Leadership responsibility. We measured leadership responsibility in a section of the questionnaire targeting the respondents’ employment, using the following single item: “Do you have leadership responsibilities?” Respondents replied using a no/yes answer (coded as 0 and 1).

Control variables. The control variables included individual level job insecurity, age, gender, and tenure. We included individual level job insecurity to ensure that potential findings were not attributable to subjective concerns about job continuity, and employed a standardized scale (Hellgren *et al.*, 1999) of three items (e.g., “I feel uneasy about losing my job in the near future”) to measure this construct ($\alpha = .91$). We included age, gender, and tenure as they have been found to represent moderators of the relationship between job insecurity and various outcomes in previous meta-analyses (Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte, 1999).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Prior to the hypothesis tests, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ascertain the distinctiveness of the measurement scales included in this study (i.e., job insecurity, perceived job insecurity climate, exhaustion, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment). The CFA was carried out with the statistical package JASP 0.16.1.0. The results ($X^2 = 930.661$, $df = 265$, $p < .001$) revealed that all key indices were within the recommended

values (Hu & Bentler, 1999), including a comparative fit index (CFI) of .971, and an RMSEA value of .049 (90 % CI = .046 – 0.53). We concluded that the measurement model was acceptable regarding statistical hypothesis tests based on the CFA. We also tested for multicollinearity in preliminary analyses using SPSS version 27 and found that the variance inflation levels were adequate (highest VIF value = 3.2).

Hypothesis Tests

We performed the hypothesis tests using the statistical package SPSS 27, and the PROCESS macro supplement, version 3.5. (Hayes, 2018). We first produced descriptive statistics and a table of bivariate correlations between all study variables (see Table 1). Next, H1 and H2 were tested using multiple linear regression analyses, while H3 and H4 were tested using model 1 from the PROCESS macro supplement. Perceived job insecurity climate was entered as an independent variable in all analyses, while leadership responsibility was entered as a moderator in the test of H3 and H4. We controlled for individual job insecurity, age, tenure, and gender in all analyses.

--- *Insert Table 1* ---

Results

H1 posited that there would be a positive association between perceived job insecurity climate and burnout and was tested using separate analyses for each of the burnout subscales. The results showed that perceived job insecurity climate was associated with exhaustion ($\Delta R^2 = .013, \beta = .16, p < .001$), cognitive impairment, ($\Delta R^2 = .012, \beta = .15, p < .001$), and emotional impairment ($\Delta R^2 = .021, \beta = .21, p < .001$), in support of H1. H2 posited that perceived job insecurity climate would be associated with higher sickness absenteeism and presenteeism levels. We tested H2 using separate analyses for each outcome. These analyses showed that perceived job insecurity climate was not associated with sickness absenteeism

($\Delta R^2 = .003$, $\beta = .08$, $p = .110$) or sickness presenteeism ($\Delta R^2 = .001$, $\beta = .03$, $p = .528$). H2 was therefore not supported.

H3 posited that the association between perceived job insecurity climate and work-related burnout would be moderated by leadership responsibility. It was tested using separate analyses for each burnout subscale. First, concerning exhaustion, no significant interaction could be determined ($B = .05$, $p = .246$). Second, leadership responsibility was found to moderate the association between perceived job insecurity climate and cognitive impairment ($B = .08$, $R^2 = .004$, $p = .026$). Simple slope tests further showed that the association was non-significant for non-leaders ($B = .06$, $p = .077$), but positive and significant for employees with leadership responsibility ($B = .14$, $p < .001$). This interaction is graphically depicted in Figure 1. Third, leadership responsibility was also found to moderate the association between perceived job insecurity climate and emotional impairment ($B = .08$, $R^2 = .004$, $p = .02$). Simple slope tests indicated that the association was positive and significant both for employees without ($B = .09$, $p = .006$) and with ($B = .17$, $p < .001$) leadership responsibility. This interaction is graphically depicted in Figure 2. H3 was thus supported regarding two out of three burnout measures.

--- Insert Table 2, and Figures 1 and 2 ---

H4 posited that the association between perceived job insecurity climate and work attendance is moderated by leadership responsibility. Concerning sickness absenteeism, the results revealed a significant moderation effect in the hypothesized direction ($B = 3.4$, $R^2 = .03$, $p < .001$). Simple slope tests further revealed that the association between perceived job insecurity climate and sickness absenteeism was non-significant for employees without leadership responsibility ($B = -1.16$, $p = .0525$), while it was positive and significant for employees with leadership responsibility ($B = 2.24$, $p < .001$). This interaction is graphically

depicted in Figure 3. Finally, concerning sickness presenteeism, the results revealed a significant moderation effect in the hypothesized direction ($B = 4.05$, $R^2 = .02$, $p < .001$). Simple slope tests further revealed that the association between perceived job insecurity climate and sickness presenteeism was non-significant for employees without leadership responsibility ($B = -1.81$, $p = .068$), while it was positive and significant for employees with leadership responsibility ($B = 2.24$, $p = .016$). This interaction is graphically depicted in Figure 4. H4 was thus supported. The details concerning the tests of H3 and H4 are shown in Table 2.

--- Insert Figure 3, and Figure 4 ---

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that perceived job insecurity climate during the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with burnout symptoms and that this effect was stronger for employees with leadership responsibility on two out of three burnout measures (i.e., cognitive impairment and emotional impairment). Moreover, regarding health-related work attendance, perceived job insecurity climate was associated with absenteeism and presenteeism only among leaders. The finding that the job insecurity of others can be detrimental to individual employees replicates previous findings (Låstad et al., 2018). However, the finding that this effect is stronger among employees with leadership responsibilities is novel, providing important insights into the challenges and demands that leaders face when uncertainty prevails in the workplace. Considering the generally lower strain levels displayed by the leaders in our sample when levels of perceived job insecurity climate are low, the finding indicates a general “healthy leader effect” that is not only eroded, but reversed, when uncertainty about job security is widespread in the workplace. Concurrently, it should be noted that the interaction term only explained a limited amount of

the variance in the present outcomes, especially relating to the burnout measures. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

Theoretical Contributions

To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to investigate perceived job insecurity climate, and possibly the first to address the construct in combination with leadership responsibility. It thereby has implications for theory and research in both the leadership and job insecurity literature. First, this study highlights a source of leadership challenges that has not previously been identified, specifically by shedding light on the burdens on employees with leadership responsibility in times of widespread uncertainty. It does so by drawing on the COR theory (e.g., Hobfoll, 2011), specifically by emphasizing how widespread uncertainty can threaten individual resources differently depending on the organizational position of the perceiver. The study thereby supports the general idea that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly added to the complexity of the leadership role (Collings et al., 2021; Dirani et al., 2020), and suggests that this tendency particularly manifests in workplaces characterized by extensive job insecurity.

Second, our results were broadly in line with the hypotheses outlined, except for the null findings regarding the main effects of perceived job insecurity climate on work attendance. Specifically, perceived job insecurity climate only predicted higher sickness absenteeism and presenteeism among leaders, indicating that leaders were especially sensitive to the work attendance outcomes investigated in this study. In line with this interpretation, sickness absenteeism has previously been found to decrease with higher hierarchical positions (Bierla et al., 2013), implying that leaders are generally less absent than non-leaders. Stressors that disproportionally affect leaders, such as perceived job insecurity climate, may therefore affect absenteeism more strongly among leaders by eroding the protective resources that

higher hierarchical positions suggest. Sickness presenteeism, on the other hand, is generally more prevalent when responsibilities increase (Bierla et al., 2013; Gosselin et al., 2013). When leaders experience an obligation to attend work due to leadership responsibilities, presenteeism levels may therefore increase because leaders are, and feel, needed at work. Consequently, the higher levels of presenteeism among leaders may reflect an adaptive behavioral response (e.g., Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020), related to securing and protecting work-related resources.

Third, the present study demonstrates that perceived job insecurity climate is worthy of scientific scrutiny at the individual level (see also Låstad *et al.*, 2018). This adds to the wider literature on job insecurity and indicates that subjective perceptions are a mechanism for the individual consequences of widespread insecurity in the workplace when controlling for the subjective fear of job loss. More generally, as a contribution to the job insecurity literature, this is one of few studies to have addressed job insecurity at a time when it in all likelihood was unusually prevalent and salient. This stands in contrast to much of the extant research, which has been criticized for examining job insecurity and its outcomes in contexts characterized by generally low insecurity levels (Vander Elst et al., 2018).

Practical Implications

First, the present findings underscore the need to combat individual job insecurity, since perceived job insecurity climates originate from the subjective job insecurity of employees. In contexts where the key sources of job insecurity are outside the control of the organization, as in the present context, plain and intelligible information and the prevention of misinformation and rumors would be advisable. Second, organizations should be aware of the strain associated with perceived job insecurity climate among employees with leadership responsibilities. As shown in the present study, this has consequences for leaders' health and

may therefore be detrimental to the organization itself (cf., Quick et al., 2007). To address this issue, organizations should consider implementing interventions aimed at alleviating distress and offering guidance and support to leaders in times of uncertainty. In addition, many organizations suffering from widespread job insecurity likely face concerns relating to issues such as production and general competitiveness. Hence, large-scale job insecurity crises may be associated with an increased need for leadership, suggesting that interventions may also be required at the organizational level. For example, it may be necessary to allocate additional resources to leadership tasks to ensure that any urgent leadership needs are met.

The practical implications outlined here are pertinent as we approach the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations are still combating the uncertainty triggered by this crisis, underscoring the continuing relevance of effective short-term interventions. However, the implications may also gain renewed significance in future scenarios characterized by widespread job insecurity. Whether organization-specific in origin—for example, due to downsizing—or triggered by more comprehensive events—such as financial crises, political instability, social change, or changes at sector or industry levels, future job insecurity crises are not unlikely.

Limitations and Future Directions

Certain limitations should be noted in regard to the present study. First, due to our sampling procedure, we could not determine the response rate or ascertain the sample's representativeness of the US workforce. Although a recent meta-analysis found online panels to yield data validity equivalent to that of conventional sampling (Walter et al., 2019), our results should be viewed in light of this. Second, the cross-sectional nature of our design prevents us from making causal inferences. At the same time, we should add that, in terms of testing our study's hypotheses within the US labor market during the pandemic, prospective

data would include a risk of the analyses being affected by various national and global circumstances. These could include vaccine development, lockdown and reopening initiatives, and financial aid packages at the sector level. Third, the use of single-source data is another possible limitation, although using subjective perceptions of individual job insecurity as a control variable should buffer against unwanted biases such as “gloomy perception” effects and response sets related to the impact of perceived job insecurity climate. Fourth, since the measurement was carried out at a time when remote work was widespread, the measures of sickness absenteeism and presenteeism might have been affected by generally reduced physical work attendance. Although the wording of the measures did not exclude the possibility of reporting absenteeism and presenteeism from a remote work setting, this characteristic of the research context should be considered. Finally, our measure of leadership responsibility did not include a definition of this concept. While we believe that the item captures both leadership roles and obligations, a more nuanced measure or one based on an established definition could have added to the study’s contribution.

Future research based on our study could include replications of our results using both cross-sectional and prospective data. The latter would be especially relevant when assessing potential long-term effects of perceived job insecurity climate. Researchers could also address the issue of other risk factors relating to perceived job insecurity climate and strain. In addition to the vulnerable position of employees with leadership responsibilities, other personnel, for example those with a short length of service, temporary employment, or low levels of self-perceived employability, may also be at risk. Finally, future studies could build further on the notion that perceptions of climate constructs can denote individual-level stressors. For example, perceived conflict- or fairness climate may reasonably trigger strain responses, possibly with substantial individual and organizational implications.

Conclusion

The impact of perceived job insecurity climate during COVID-19 is stronger for leaders than for non-leaders regarding burnout symptoms, and its impact on sickness absenteeism and sickness presenteeism only affects employees with leadership responsibility. These tendencies likely reflect the significance of perceived job insecurity climate as a threat to individual and work-related resources, particularly related to the leader role and to the complex and demanding conditions for leadership responsibilities during the disruptive first year of the pandemic. Insights gained from this study should be considered by organizations, organizational practitioners, and others concerned with health and well-being among workers and leaders when preparing for the aftermath of COVID-19, as well as future scenarios involving elevated and widespread job insecurity.

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Table 1. *Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all included variables*

	M (SD) / %	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Perceived job insecurity climate	2.2 (1.1)	-									
2. Leadership responsibility	47.7 %	.05 [†]	-								
3. Exhaustion	2.4 (0.8)	.41***	.01	-							
4. Cognitive impairment	1.8 (0.7)	.39***	-.01	.68***	-						
5. Emotional impairment	1.7 (0.7)	.4***	.04	.65***	.7***	-					
6. Absenteeism	2.5 (10.4)	.18***	.09**	.18***	.24***	.28***	-				
7. Presenteeism	5 (16.3)	.11***	.08**	.17***	.15***	.18***	.42***	-			
8. Subjective job insecurity	2.1 (1.1)	.7***	-.01	.45***	.43***	.43***	.22***	.13***	-		
9. Age	58.1 (11)	-.15***	-.06*	-.23***	-.22***	-.2***	-.16***	-.11***	-.12***	-	
10. Sex (male/female)	49.9/50.1 %	-.01	.19***	-.17***	-.06*	-.06*	-.02	-.01	-.01	.12***	-
11. Tenure	16.6 (11.2)	-.04	.13***	-.07**	-.08**	-.04	.03	.02	-.13***	.3***	.07**

[†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note. Leadership responsibility is coded 0 (no leadership responsibility) and 1 (leadership responsibility), while sex is coded 0 (female) and 1 (male).

Table 2. Leadership responsibility and perceived job insecurity climate as predictors of burnout symptoms, absenteeism and presenteeism

	Exhaustion		Cognitive impairment		Emotional impairment		Absenteeism		Presenteeism	
	Effect	SE	Effect	SE	Effect	SE	Effect	SE	Effect	SE
	Age	-0.01***	0.00	-0.01***	0.00	-0.01***	0.00	-0.16***	0.04	-0.13*
Gender	-0.26***	0.04	-0.05	0.04	-0.05	0.04	0.08	0.76	-0.5	1.26
Tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09*	0.04	0.09	0.06
Individual job insecurity	0.23***	0.03	0.2***	0.03	0.18***	0.02	1.56***	0.47	1.7*	0.78
Leader responsibility	-0.03	0.09	-0.21*	0.09	-0.16 [†]	0.09	-5.57***	1.64	-6.37*	2.72
Perceived JI climate	0.09**	0.03	0.06 [†]	0.03	0.09**	0.03	-1.16 [†]	0.6	-1.81 [†]	0.99
Leader responsibility*PJIC	0.05	0.04	0.08*	0.04	0.08*	0.04	3.4***	0.67	4.05***	1.12
Simple slopes										
Leadership responsibility										
No			0.06 [†]	0.03	0.09*	0.03	-1.16 [†]	0.6	-1.81 [†]	0.99
Yes			0.14***	0.03	0.17***	0.06	2.24***	0.56	2.24*	0.93
R^2	.29***		.24***		.25***		.12***		.05***	

[†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Note. JI = Job insecurity, PJIC = Perceived job insecurity climate. Note 2. Simple slopes were only calculated for significant interactions.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Perceived job insecurity climate and cognitive impairment as moderated by leadership responsibility

Figure 2. Perceived job insecurity climate and emotional impairment as moderated by leadership responsibility

Figure 3. Perceived job insecurity climate and absenteeism as moderated by leadership responsibility

Figure 4. Perceived job insecurity climate and presenteeism as moderated by leadership responsibility