

Un contributo alla validazione italiana della *Scala di Insicurezza di Carriera* per individui nei primi stati di carriera

Rita Chiesa e Audrey Ansay Antonio¹

Sommario

Lo studio presenta la validazione iniziale della *Scala di Insicurezza di Carriera* per individui nei primi stadi di carriera. La scala composta da 17 item comprende quattro dimensioni: opportunità di carriera; condizioni contrattuali di lavoro; ambiente di lavoro; formazione ed educazione professionale. I partecipanti sono 133 giovani tra i 18 e 30 anni (età media = 25; $DS = 3,48$). La struttura fattoriale a livello confermativo e l'analisi della consistenza interna hanno mostrato buoni indici. Inoltre, riguardo alla validità esterna, le dimensioni di insicurezza di carriera hanno confermato correlazioni negative con la soddisfazione per la carriera e la salute generale. I risultati forniscono evidenze incoraggianti circa la validità della scala, suggerendo la sua efficacia per la ricerca e l'intervento nel contesto italiano.

Parole chiave

Insicurezza di carriera, Giovani, Soddisfazione per la carriera, Salute generale, Opportunità di carriera, Condizioni contrattuali di lavoro, Ambiente di lavoro, Formazione e educazione professionale.

¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia «Renzo Canestrari», Università di Bologna, Italia.

A Contribution to the Validation of the *Career Insecurity Scale* for Individuals at Early Stages of Career

Rita Chiesa and Audrey Ansay Antonio¹

Abstract

The study presents the initial validation of the *Career Insecurity Scale* for individuals in the early stages of their careers. The 17-item scale includes four dimensions: Career opportunities; Contractual employment conditions; Employment environment; Professional education training. The sample included 133 young people aged 18 to 30 (average age = 25; $SD = 3,48$). Factorial structure of the scale at a confirmatory level, as well as its internal consistency, showed good indexes. Moreover, regarding external validity, career insecurity dimensions showed negative correlations with career satisfaction and general health. The results provide encouraging evidence about the validity of this scale, suggesting its effectiveness in research and intervention in the Italian context.

Keywords

Career insecurity, Young people, Career satisfaction, General health, Career Opportunities, Contractual employment conditions, Employment environment, Professional education training.

¹ Department of Psychology «Renzo Canestrari», University of Bologna, Italy.

Introduction

Nowadays, the world of work is more and more characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (the VUCA environment). This scenario requires people to manage unpredictable career trajectories. According to Trevor-Roberts (2006), the evolving nature of careers is influenced by three key factors: the changed nature of production, the rise of knowledge work and alternative employment arrangements. Globalization, driven by advances in communication technologies, has forced organizations to adapt by cutting costs and restructuring to stay competitive. Knowledge has become a critical competitive advantage for organizations, and individuals must continuously acquire adaptable skills to succeed. This focus on knowledge introduces uncertainties about what and how to learn effectively. Additionally, alternative employment arrangements, such as contingent labour, have reshaped careers. As a result, career paths are no longer clearly defined by organizations, and individuals must take personal responsibility for their careers, navigating increased insecurity related to their employer, career identity, and work-life integration.

Early career stages seem to be mostly affected by these changes and the consequent unpredictability of career development (i.e. Rydzik & Bal, 2023; Symeonaki et al., 2019). For instance, young adults are overrepresented among those in precarious jobs based on flexible employment contracts. This state may lead to career insecurity, which means «an individual's thoughts and worries that central content aspects of one's future career might possibly develop in an undesired manner» (Spurk et al., 2022, p. 257), with detrimental effects on life satisfaction and wellbeing. Career insecurity is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various aspects relevant to individuals' career growth. It refers to an individual's insecurity about the attainment of mid- to long-term career goals (Spurk et al., 2016). As Hillen et al. (2017) noted, the perception of uncertainty induces cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses.

Cognitive responses are appraisals, which are mostly negative self-attitude, such as lack of confidence, insecurity, powerlessness, self-doubt, and identity failure. The emotional responses cover a wide variety of states, such as feelings of helplessness, fearfulness, anxiousness, depression, loss, nervousness, unhappiness, emptiness, discouragement, and disturbance. In the validation study of their *Career Insecurity Scale*, Spurk et al. (2022) defined career insecurity as a potential stressor because it is related to the perception of controllability. However, they argued that different dimensions of career insecurity may impact differently with specific outcomes, such as wellbeing and career success. For instance, thoughts and worries that future career opportunities (e.g., promotions, managerial responsibility, on-the-job training and personal development) might develop in an undesired manner proved to be more strongly associated to career satisfaction than other dimensions of career insecurity.

Quite surprisingly, career insecurity received limited attention in literature. Consequently, there are a lack of measures assessing career insecurity, in general, and among younger workers specifically. In comparison to the widely explored concept of job insecurity, career insecurity is more future-oriented, as the uncertainty relates not to the current job situation but to future career development. In this sense, the construct is crucial in the early stages of a career, when individuals may have little previous or current job experience but typically show high engagement in career planning. Previous evidence suggests that some concerns, such as the risk of poor job quality, precarious employment and overqualification (i.e. Kalleberg, 2018; Tsai et al., 2017), and the lack of career advancement opportunities (i.e. Carlson & Rotondo, 2001; Conway, 2004) are particularly relevant for individuals in the early stages of their career.

The current study presents the initial validation of a *Career Insecurity Scale* for individuals in the early stages of their careers. The focus on this specific target group, which includes people with limited or no previous work experience, led us to select four dimensions of career insecurity, described in Table 1. Two dimensions are from the *Career Insecurity Scale* by Spurk et al. (2022), and the other two are from the *Career Anxiety Scale* by Tsai et al. (2017). We tested the factorial structure of the scale at a confirmatory level, as well as its internal consistency. Additionally, in terms of external validity, we explored the relationship between career insecurity and, respectively, career satisfaction and general health.

Table 1

Dimensions of *Career Insecurity Scale* in early career stages

Dimensions	Definition
Career opportunity (<i>Opportunità di carriera</i>) (Spurk et al., 2022)	Refers to thoughts and worries that future career opportunities (e.g., promotions, managerial responsibility, on-the-job training and personal development) might develop in an undesired manner
Contractual employment conditions (<i>Condizioni contrattuali di lavoro</i>) (Spurk et al., 2022)	Refers to thoughts and worries that the basic conditions (e.g., salary, working hours, duration of employment contract and other contractual conditions) under which future work will be performed might develop in an undesired manner
Employment environment (<i>Ambiente di lavoro</i>) (Tsai et al., 2017)	Refers to thoughts and worries about the future working environment and other employment-related information
Professional education training (<i>Formazione e educazione professionale</i>) (Tsai et al., 2017)	Refers to thoughts and worries related to one's professional training, including self-awareness of one's skills and the potential mismatch between one's career expectations and future career path

Method

Participants and Procedure

The majority of the study's participants ($N = 133$) were female (69%). The median age of the sample was 25 ($SD = 3.48$). Among the participants, 56% were currently studying, while the other participants reported to be working and/or job searching. Fifteen participants identified as not in education, employment, or training (NEET). All participants came from Italy with the majority of them originating from the Emilia-Romagna region (30%).

Procedures

Survey data were collected from June to July 2023 using the Qualtrics platform. The survey was promoted among psychology students at the University of Bologna, and through social networks. Only participants who provided their informed consent were included in the study.

Measures

Career Insecurity

Using the back-to-back translation procedure, we adapted the dimensions of career insecurity that are relevant to early career individuals, using the 4-item Career opportunities dimension and the 4-item Contractual employment conditions dimension from the *Multidimension Career Insecurity Scale* (Spurk et al., 2022) and the 5-item Employment Environment dimension and 4-item Professional Education Training dimension from the *Career Anxiety Scale* (Tsai et al., 2017). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) was used as the response scale. The item means and standard deviations are reported in the appendix.

General Health

The Italian version (Politi et al., 1994) of the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ; Goldberg, 1988) was used to measure general psychological health with a Likert response scale ranging from 0 (*Not at all*) to 3 (*More than usual*).

Career satisfaction

The Italian version (Sarchielli & Toderi, 2005) of Greenhaus et al.'s (1990) 5-item career satisfaction scale was used, with a Likert response scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Data Analyses

We used CFA to investigate the *Career Insecurity Scale* factor structure. We tested three alternative measurement models in line with the original validation study. The four-factor model included the foreseen dimensions: Career opportunity, Contractual employment conditions, Employment Environment, and Professional Education Training. Model fit indices were assessed based on the following threshold values: comparative fit index > .90 (good), Tucker-Lewis index > .90 (good), standardized root mean squared residual < .08 (acceptable), and root mean squared error of approximation < .08 (acceptable; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). We also performed a correlational analysis to analyse the external validity of the Career Insecurity Scale, testing its relationships with career satisfaction and general health (Grimm & Widaman, 2012).

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses were run to test the different measurement models. As shown in Table 2, the four-factor model had the best fit with the data.

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis — Fit Indices Comparison

	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	90% CI
One-factor model	314.70	117	.84	.81	.08	.11	.10 to .13
Two-factor model	302.25	116	.85	.82	.08	.11	.10 to .13
Four-factor model	202.46	111	.93	.91	.07	.08	.06 to .10

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index. TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index. SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual. RMSEA = Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation. CI = Confidence Interval.

Figure 1 depicts the path diagram of the four-factor model with the standardized loadings for each factor.

In Table 3, the reported Cronbach’s alpha values for all factors indicated acceptable and good internal consistency. Furthermore, the overall Career Insecurity score showed excellent internal consistency. Concerning the correlation analyses, all factors of the *Career Insecurity scale* were found to significantly and negatively correlate to both Career Satisfaction and General Health. The Career Insecurity general score showed the same correlation values with Career Satisfaction and General Health. The Career Opportunities and

Contractual Employment Conditions dimensions resulted as more negatively related to Career Satisfaction than General Health. Contrarily, Professional Education Training was more strongly correlated with General Health than Career Satisfaction.

Figure 1
Path Diagram

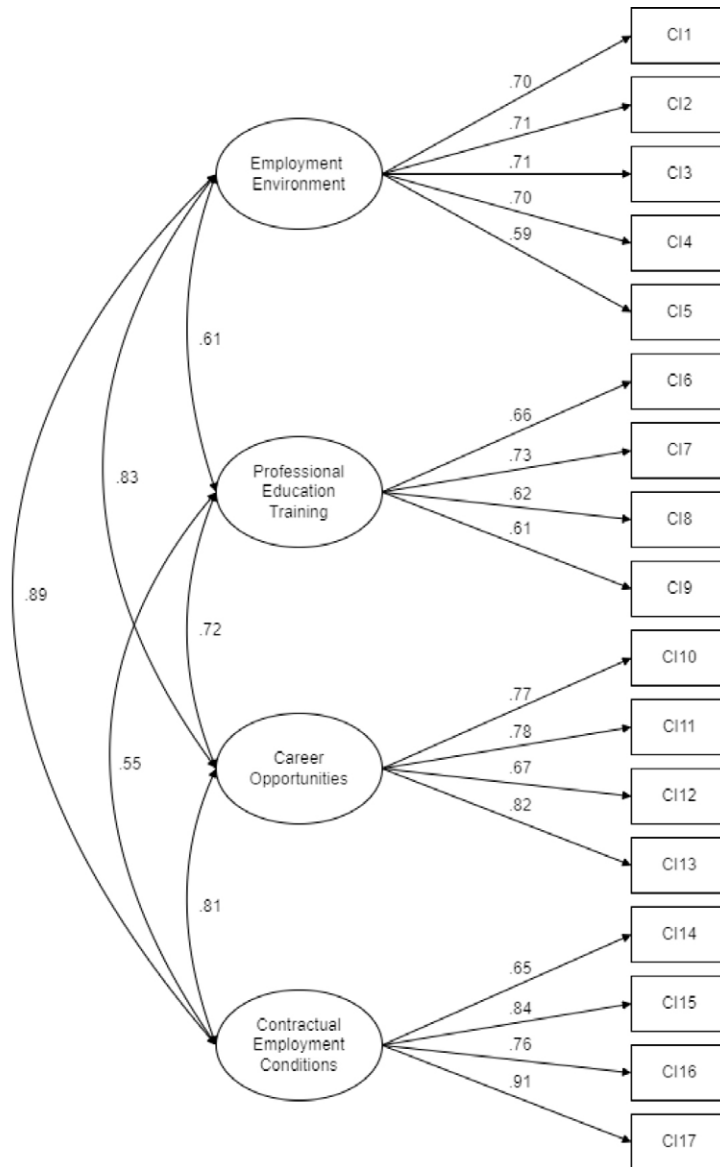


Table 3

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s alphas, and Correlations between the *Career Insecurity Scale*, *Career Satisfaction Scale*, and *General Health*

		M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Career Insecurity	3.18	0.80	.92						
2	Employment Environment	3.28	0.93	.84	.87**					
3	Professional Education Training	2.89	0.99	.75	.72**	.45**				
4	Career Opportunities	2.97	1.01	.85	.88**	.65**	.57**			
5	Contractual Employment Conditions	3.55	0.97	.87	.85**	.73**	.42**	.69**		
6	Career Satisfaction	2.51	0.95	.92	-.37**	-.26**	-.28**	-.36**	-.33**	
7	General Health	1.62	0.60	.88	-.34**	-.26**	-.40**	-.20*	-.26**	.30**

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Discussion

This study proposed an initial Italian validation of the *Career Insecurity Scale* for individuals at early stages of career. This scale is composed of items adapted from the Career Insecurity Scale by Spurk et al. (2022), and the *Career Anxiety Scale* by Tsai et al. (2017). We explored the factorial structure of the scale, its internal consistency and external validity (Grimm & Widaman, 2012). The results confirmed the four-factor structure of the scale. All dimensions and overall score of the scale had good or excellent internal consistency. Furthermore, the career insecurity factors showed negative relationships with career satisfaction and general health. Similarly to the findings of Spurk et al. (2022), our results demonstrated that some dimensions can be more associated with specific outcomes. Specifically, thoughts and worries about lack of career opportunities and poor contractual employment conditions tended to be more related to career satisfaction, while doubts about personal education and training seemed to be more associated with general health.

To conclude, the instrument contributes to the understanding of a construct that is becoming increasingly central to people’s career experiences. The findings showed encouraging psychometric properties of the *Career Insecurity Scale* for individuals at early stages of career in the Italian context. Further research on

larger samples is necessary to confirm the multidimensionality of the thoughts and worries of young people approaching the world of work. The potential negative effects of career insecurity on career satisfaction and general health call for career interventions aimed at preventing negative future anticipations and boosting individuals' capacity to cope with uncertainty and potential stress.

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APPENDIX

Item		M	SD
Employment Environment			
1	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura a causa di una potenziale recessione economica. <i>I worry about future employment because of a potential economic recession.</i>	3.22	1.15
2	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura a causa della competizione feroce nel mercato del lavoro. <i>I worry about future employment because of fierce competition in the job market.</i>	3.35	1.20
3	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura perché l'ambiente lavorativo futuro non è ottimale come ci si aspettava. <i>I worry about future employment because the future working environment is not as good as expected.</i>	3.39	1.21
4	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura perchè il mio salario probabilmente non sarà alto come vorrei. <i>I worry about future employment because my salary will probably not be as high as I wish.</i>	3.63	1.15
5	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura a causa dell'aumento di disoccupazione riportato dai mass media. <i>I worry about future employment because of the increasing unemployment rate reported by the mass media.</i>	2.81	1.22
Professional Education Training			
6	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura perché sono incerto/a della mia esperienza e dei miei interessi. <i>I worry about future employment because I am uncertain about my expertise and interests.</i>	3.02	1.37
7	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura perché probabilmente non troverò un lavoro che mi interessa. <i>I worry about future employment because I probably will not find a job that interests me.</i>	2.92	1.29
8	Mi preoccupo di non riuscire ad applicare nel mio lavoro quello che ho imparato. <i>I worry that I cannot apply what I have learned to my work.</i>	3.05	1.28

Item		M	SD
9	Mi preoccupo della mia occupazione futura perché non ho nessuna abilità professionale eccellente. <i>I worry about future employment because I do not have excellent professional skills.</i>	2,56	1,27
Career Opportunities			
10	Sono ansioso che nella mia futura carriera non possano sorgere possibilità di promozione. <i>I am anxious that in my future career no promotion possibilities could arise.</i>	3,08	1,24
11	Sono preoccupato che le opportunità di carriera nel mio campo professionale possano svilupparsi in modo sfavorevole. <i>I am worried that the career opportunities in my occupational field could develop unfavourably.</i>	3,05	1,26
12	Sono preoccupato di non avere opportunità di assumere responsabilità professionali in futuro. <i>I am worried that I might not get opportunities to take over occupational responsibilities in the future.</i>	2,72	1,16
13	È probabile che la mia carriera stabilita potrebbe non fornire le opportunità desiderate per un ulteriore sviluppo. <i>Chances are, my set career might not provide desired opportunities for further development.</i>	3,04	1,22
Contractual Employment Conditions			
14	Mi chiedo se il mio stipendio potrà corrispondere a quanto desidero. <i>I wonder if my salary could develop undesirably.</i>	3,86	1,04
15	Temo che l'inquadramento contrattuale del mio futuro lavoro sarà sfavorevole. <i>I am worried that the contractual framework of my future work will be unfavourable.</i>	3,29	1,15
16	Temo di dover svolgere il mio lavoro futuro in cattive condizioni (es. orario di lavoro, stipendio). <i>I fear that I might have to conduct my future work under worse conditions (e.g., working hours and salary).</i>	3,53	1,19
17	Mi chiedo se le mie future condizioni contrattuali di lavoro saranno cattive. <i>I wonder if my future contractual working conditions will be bad.</i>	3,53	1,16

Note. N = 133; M= mean; SD = Standard Deviation