



The long arm of job insecurity: Its impact on career-specific parenting behaviors and youths' career self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Applying a multiple-mediator model, we examine the mediating effect of three types of career-specific parenting behaviors: lack of engagement, support, and interference, on the relationship between paternal job insecurity and youths' career self-efficacy. Data were collected from a sample of undergraduate students and their fathers. Results of the full sample analysis showed that paternal job insecurity was positively related to lack of engagement and negatively related to support. The relationship between paternal job insecurity and interference was not significant. Sub sample analysis showed that the relationship between paternal job insecurity and career self-efficacy was mediated by lack of engagement for sons and mediated by support for daughters.

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Introduction

The phrase, “the long arm of the job”, recognizes and highlights the influence of work experiences on the family (Crouter & McHale, 1993). The “long arm” impact of work also extends beyond the individual employees to affect their children (Porfeli, Wang, & Hartung, 2008). Crouter and McHale (1993) explained that employees' work characteristics influenced their children through parenting behaviors. Parents' work and employment experiences influence the acquisition of parenting values and opportunities to develop and hone their parenting skills. Work also affects employees' moods, which can be carried into the family domain and affect their interactions with family members. In this paper, we focused on the “long arm” effect of job insecurity, i.e., the impact of job insecurity that goes beyond the individuals to affect their children's career development.

Defined as individuals' “powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p.438), job insecurity is a work-related stressor that has a negative impact on employees (e.g., Lim, 1996, 1997; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). The “long arm” of job insecurity goes beyond the work domain to affect job insecure individuals' family members, especially their children. Research showed that parental job insecurity has a negative impact on children's mood, cognitive ability, school performance, world view, attitude toward money, work beliefs, attitudes, and motivation (Barling, Dupre, & Hepburn, 1998; Lim & Loo, 2003).

The present study contributes to and extends the research stream on job insecurity by examining the impact of fathers' job insecurity on parenting behaviors and youths' career self-efficacy. Youths' career development begins in the family context and parents play a very significant role during this process (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005). Social cognitive career theory argues

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that external factors, such as parental attitudes, parenting styles and family environment, influence youths' career self-efficacy level (Diemer, 2007). Hence, we expect that parental job insecurity will influence youths' career self-efficacy.

Previous research examining the impact of parental job insecurity on youths often focused on the crossover mechanism, an *interindividual* transmission process in which stress experienced by one person affects another person (Westman, Etzion, & Danon, 2001). Studies have shown that youths are able to perceive the job insecurity experienced by their parents and such perception influences youths' cognition, affect and behaviors (Barling et al., 1998; Lim & Loo, 2003). In this paper, we take a different approach by focusing on the mediating role of career-specific parenting behaviors.

Research has shown that youths' career development is influenced by parenting styles. However, previous research is limited in several ways. First, parenting behaviors are often examined independent of parents' work-related experience. Although there are studies that examined the relationship between job insecurity and youths' work outcomes (e.g., Barling, Zacharatos, & Hepburn, 1999) as well as the relationship between parenting behaviors and youths' career outcomes (e.g., Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006), few studies have linked parental job insecurity to youths' career development through the mechanism of parenting behaviors (Lim & Loo, 2003). Second, when examining parental influence on youths' career development, majority of studies focused on the impact of parent–children relationship or general parenting behavior on youths (e.g., Lim & Loo, 2003). The impact of career-specific parenting behaviors on youths' career development is less examined. Third, when studying the impact of career-specific parenting behaviors, researchers often focused on parental career support (e.g., Neblett & Cortina, 2006). Studies have seldom investigated the differential effects of various types of career-specific parenting behaviors on youths.

To fill these gaps in the current literature, we examined the role of career-specific parenting behaviors in the relationship between father's job insecurity and youths' career development. We hypothesized that three types of career-specific parenting behaviors, *lack of engagement*, *support* and *interference*, will mediate the relationship between paternal job insecurity and youths' career self-efficacy. Our study extends Dietrich and Kracke (2009) work. Dietrich and Kracke's (2009) scale was developed based on the theories that are deeply grounded on research conducted in the West and was tested among a group of youths in Germany. Although their study provided a useful categorization of career-specific parenting behaviors that can help us better understand the role of parents in youths' career development, to date, no research has been done to test the applicability of their framework outside a western context. Our study seeks to fill this void by examining the impact of parents' job insecurity and career-specific parenting behaviors on youths' career efficacy in a sample of youths and their parents in Singapore. Singapore is noteworthy in several aspects. First, the nation is highly competitive and high in uncertainty avoidance. In a study that compared cultural differences among 62 societies across the world, Singapore was ranked first in terms of future orientation, second in terms of performance orientation and third in terms of uncertainty avoidance (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004).

Second, influenced by Confucianist philosophy and values, Singaporeans are family-oriented and family relationships are highly valued (Li, Ngin, & Teo, 2007). It is common for parents to provide career guidance to youths because they have high expectations of their children, viewing such career advice as an effort to ensure that their children have a head start in life (Chan, Bowes, & Wyver, 2009). Youths are used to this parenting style. They usually respect parents' advice and take it seriously. Hence, instead of perceiving direct advice as interference, they perceive it as a form of support, a mechanism to reduce uncertainty.

Gender role expectations and practices in Singapore are also instructive. On one hand, based on meritocratic principles, equal opportunities are available for men and women. Men and women have almost the same literacy rate and average years of schooling. Female students and employees perform as well, if not better than, their male counterparts. On the other hand, the society is also influenced by traditional Chinese values that emphasize the traditional gender roles of men and women. Parents have different expectations of sons and daughters. For sons, professional proficiency and scholarly success are expected, while for daughters, finding a good spouse is more important (Tambyah, Tan, & Kau, 2009).

Because Singapore is a meritocratic society where men and women are provided fair opportunities for success, we develop the same hypotheses for both sons and daughters and tested our hypotheses in a full sample consisting of both sons and daughters. However, due to the influence of cultural values, some differences between sons and daughters may exist. Consequently, we conducted post-hoc analyses on subsamples of sons and daughters.

In this study, we focused only on the impact of fathers' job insecurity on their children's career self-efficacy for several reasons. First, as men are often the main breadwinners in families in Asian societies, fathers serve as role models and sources of career-related information for youths. Second, compared to women, men are more likely to experience spillover and bring work-related experience to the family domain (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Indeed, previous research has yielded mixed findings on fathers' influence on sons and daughters. Some found that fathers have more influence on sons' career development (e.g., Vondracek & Porfeli, 2003) while others suggested that paternal engagement parenting also affects daughters' career development (Hoffman, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 1992). Hence, the differential impact of fathers' work experiences on sons and daughters warrants further study (Bryant et al., 2006).

Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

The research model is shown in Fig. 1. First, we introduced the three types of career-specific parenting behaviors. Second, to establish the mediating hypotheses, we explained the relationship between paternal job insecurity and paternal career-specific parenting behaviors, as well as the relationship between paternal career-specific parenting behaviors and youths' career self-efficacy.

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