Job insecurity fluctuations and support towards Italian precarious schoolteachers

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Abstract
Purpose – The negative consequences of job insecurity on the wellbeing of individuals are well known. However, the perceptions of job insecurity over time and how some factors such as social support may affect them have received limited attention. This study follows precarious schoolteachers for three weeks before the end of their contract to explore how their perceptions of job insecurity evolve over time.
Design/methodology/approach – The participants were 47 precarious schoolteachers who first completed a general questionnaire, then a diary survey on nine occasions over the course of the three weeks. Data was analysed with MPLUS 7.3.
Findings – The results suggest intra-individual differences regarding the way job insecurity was perceived over time. An additional discovery was that support provided by the school principal was negatively related to changes in job insecurity over time.
Research limitations/implications – The relatively small sample size, which includes only precarious schoolteachers, and the methodology complexity of the diary are limitations of this study.
Practical implications – This study highlights the subjective nature of the perceptions of job insecurity. It also shows the importance of the school principal's social support towards precarious schoolteachers; therefore, practitioners should propose interventions to enhance the quality of principal-teachers relationships.
Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature by investigating how perceptions of job insecurity evolve over time, and the role of social support.
Keywords job insecurity over time, social support, diary-study
Paper type Research Paper

Introduction
In 2015, the 6th European Working Conditions Survey concluded that nearly 16% of the participants were afraid of losing their jobs in the upcoming six months (Eurofound, 2017). Numerous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have shown the detrimental consequences of job insecurity on people's wellbeing (see for a review Cheng and Chan, 2008; De Witte et al., 2015; Keim et al., 2014) and different studies have compared job insecurity consequences and perceptions of job insecurity experienced by permanent and temporary employees. The outcomes of these studies show that temporary employees seem to have more favorable job attitudes, wellbeing outcomes and behaviors than permanent ones (De Cuyper and De Witte 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; De Witte and Näswall, 2003). Several reasons may explain these results: a) lower discrepancy between their level of expected and perceived job insecurity (De Cuyper, de Jong et al., 2008; Klein Hesselink and Van Vuuren 1999); b) their psychological contract is transactional, rather than relational, and it is not characterized by promises of job security (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2008); c) their promise-based exchange with the employer is narrower, but more easily fulfilled (de Jong et al., 2009). With regard to perceptions, temporary employees report higher

levels of job insecurity than permanent employees (Klandermans et al., 2010; Klein Hesselink and van Vuuren, 1999; van Vuuren et al., 2019). Despite this being a well-known fact, there is an apparent lack of empirical effort to investigate how job insecurity perceptions change over time (Ferrie et al., 2002). In this regard, by investigating weekly fluctuations in job insecurity in a sample of employees confronted with organization restructuring, Schreurs and colleagues (2012) have shown that it varies significantly within individuals over time. Furthermore, they found that during the weeks in which employees felt more insecure about their job, they performed worse. These results highlight the importance of investigating job insecurity fluctuations over time in order to help researchers and practitioners to identify increasing job insecurity risks and to implement actions to counteract it.

The study of temporal phenomena should not go without considering what predicts change (Roe, 2008). Therefore, examining how job insecurity changes over time should also include the identification of which factors may lead to different job insecurity trajectories (e.g. increase, decrease, or maintain). Social support in the work context is considered of particular importance when experiencing job insecurity (Lim, 1996, 1997) as it may enhance employees' perception of control and predictability over their work environment (Collie et al., 2012; De Witte, 2005; Probst, 2005). Hence, the current research examines the general assumption that perceived job insecurity changes over time and how it changes regarding the employees' perceptions of formal social support from colleagues and direct supervisors.

To address the general aim of this research, the employment situation of Italian precarious schoolteachers seems to be of particular interest, since in Italy, as in other E.U. countries (e.g., Portugal, Spain and Sweden; Müller et al., 2007), precarious schoolteachers, as well as many other employees, constantly face the threat and challenge of job transitions (Duarte, 2004; Griep et al., 2016; Savickas et al., 2009; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002).

Our research adds to the current literature on job insecurity and social support in three meaningful ways. First, by using a longitudinal measure of the perception of job insecurity, the study allows us to observe how job insecurity evolves over time (Ferrie et al., 2002). Second, the research adds a different theoretical perspective by investigating work-related social support as a job resource to help precarious schoolteachers address feelings of job insecurity (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). Finally, it investigates perceptions of job insecurity and social support in a population that is characterized by a low job secure employment situation and, therefore, needs the attention of researchers (Barbieri and Sestito, 2017; Richter et al., 2015).

Job insecurity: the case of Italian precarious schoolteachers

Job insecurity, i.e., employees' fear that they might lose their job and become unemployed (De Witte, 1999), is considered one of today's major psychological workplace risks (De Witte et al., 2015; Leka and Jain, 2010). Job insecurity is classified as a stressor (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2008) and a job demand (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014) that leads to negative consequences on the health and wellbeing of employees (De Witte et al., 2015) by driving a reduction of resources and threatening the capability of a person to sustain job demands (Giunchi et al., 2019).

Job insecurity is operationalized as a *'subjective'* perception (Van Vuuren, 1990), based on the individual's interpretation of a work situation (Giunchi et al., 2015, 2016; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002) and as an *'objective'* situation (De Witte and

Näswall, 2003; Klandermans and van Vuuren, 1999), distinguishable from job loss as it refers to an anticipation of unemployment, created by an actual threat of job loss, for instance the one presented by temporary employment (Pearce, 1998) or a change in a job situation (Klandermans and van Vuuren, 1999). Since perceptions of job insecurity derive from subjective appraisals and resources disposal (Giunchi et al., 2019; Hobfoll, 2002), people in the same situation can have diverging perceptions of job insecurity (Van Vuuren, 1990): inter-individual differences and contextual factors (Cheng and Chan, 2008) may contribute to explaining why some suffer more than others from job insecurity (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). Furthermore, in addition to subjective job insecurity Klandermans and colleagues (2010) added the differentiation between perceived probability and severity of job loss. They found that employees with a fixed contract who are objectively at risk of losing their job estimate the probability of losing their job relatively high, but the severity relatively low. This could further explain why temporary employees, even in the face of equal situations of objective job insecurity, show different degrees of subjective job insecurity.

Precarious schoolteachers are in an objectively insecure employment situation that is likely to imply subjective feelings of job insecurity. The precariousness of Italian schoolteachers is a complex phenomenon that over the years has become a structural problem and a physiological trait of the public education system (Barberi and Sestito, 2017). In Italy, the MIUR (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research) uses fixed-term teachers to ensure the effective delivery of the academic curriculum offered by schools. After having obtained a Master's degree, everyone who wants to become a schoolteacher in Italy must sit a public competition in order to access a national ranking list, which is used by schools to recruit schoolteachers on a temporary basis until they are hired permanently by the State, and there is a possibility of being permanently employed by the school. As long as their contract with the State is temporary, the school hires them on temporary basis. Therefore, even if they are precarious, they know that they will be most likely be employed temporarily the following year or permanently in the future (Grimaldi, 2013) and, during the summer months of unemployment, they are entitled to receive unemployment allowance. Nevertheless, formal confirmation of the next appointment does not arrive before the end of the school year and sometimes it comes after the subsequent school year has actually started. Therefore, the uncertainty and instability of the work situation that precarious teachers experience is likely to cause a state of chronic insecurity that may have negative consequences on their life as a whole and also on their possibility to plan for the future (Marzano et al., 2015).

Job insecurity is considered to be a "chronic stressor" when there is a change from a secure job situation to an insecure one or when there is prolonged exposure to an insecure job situation (Ferrie et al., 2002; Heaney et al., 1994). Several studies have investigated job insecurity over time as an antecedent of poorer health and wellbeing (see for a review De Witte et al., 2015). Nevertheless, in the precedent literature, job insecurity is analysed over a relatively long time period with follow-ups several months or years after the baseline measure; moreover, the analysis focuses on the consequences and fails to focus specifically on the perceptions of job insecurity and trajectories over time in themselves. In their meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies on job insecurity and its consequences, De Witte et al. (2015) concluded by encouraging the research in the field of job insecurity to develop studies designed at paying attention to time lags. In this regard, our study, by using a diary approach, aims to follow precarious schoolteachers' job insecurity trajectories on nine occasions

over a three-week period before their contract ends. This will allow us to observe and explain how perceptions of job insecurity change over time.

The end of a contract can be considered an important change for schoolteachers: it is not just the transition to unemployment, but it also represents the end of a teaching assignment in a specific school with job features they have grown accustomed to (workplace, work hours, colleagues etc.). Evidence from previous literature suggests that subjective job insecurity adapts to changes in objective insecurity over time, in a way that when objective insecurity increases, so does subjective job insecurity (van Vuuren, 1990; Klandermans and Van Vuuren, 1999). Following this reasoning and considering the end of a contract to be a personal change and a stressful transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995), job insecurity may increase when approaching the end of employment. Therefore, the end of a job becomes a reality and the addition of uncertainty that this moment of change brings to the already prolonged and chronic circumstance of job insecurity that Italian precarious schoolteachers experience leads us to assume that, over the last three weeks of their teaching assignment, as they edge closer to the end of their contract, they may report higher perceptions of job insecurity.

For all these reasons, we expect that change in job insecurity over time will display a positive linear trend as the end of the contract approaches:

Hypotheses 1: Change in individuals' perceptions of job insecurity will display a positive linear trend. The closer precarious schoolteachers are to the end of their contracts, the more job-insecure they will perceive themselves to be.

Social Support and Job Insecurity

Social support can be regarded as one of the main coping mechanisms (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) and job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) in the workplace. Forms of support are generally categorized as *emotional*: offering care, listening or advice; as *instrumental*: supplying assistance and helping in dealing with job demands (Billings and Moos, 1981; Näswall et al., 2005); or as *informative*: communicating with others and being part of a social network that can provide information and serve to decrease the ambiguity of a job situation (Jackson, 1992; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Näswall et al., 2005). Support received in a work context from colleagues and supervisors as a source of instrumental and informative support is considered to be particularly important in reducing occupational stress in circumstances of job insecurity (Swanson and Power, 2001). Therefore, this study considers exclusively work-related social support, from colleagues and from the school principal, that may enhance precarious schoolteachers' feeling of being in control of their job and may decrease their perceptions of job insecurity.

The literature has investigated social support according to the perspectives of moderating, intervening, antecedent, or independent variable in stress models (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). However, the perspective of social support as an antecedent has received less attention (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). Indeed, the direct effects model of social support is most commonly investigated in terms of the correlation between social support and strains; nevertheless, social support can also have a direct effect by acting directly on stressors (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994; Viswesvaran et al., 1999).

Various studies have suggested that social support can have a direct effect on the experience of both occupational sources of stress (stressors) and stress outcomes or strains (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994; Stansfield et al., 1998). It is intuitively appealing

to consider that support from other people should reduce the appraisal of occupational stressors. When experiencing a situation of job insecurity, it is likely that individuals who perceive to have strong support resources may be less likely to experience job insecurity. With regard to this, a meta-analysis of the role of social support in the stressor-strain relationship highlighted that the direction of the effects of social support on stressors was such that social support reduced the level of stressors experienced (Viswesvaran et al., 1999). In other words, the perception that others may provide sufficient social support resources could redefine the potential of threat of a stressful situation and boost one's ability to cope with it by appraising the situation as less threatening, hence reducing stress perceptions (Baqutayan, 2011).

So far, the literature on job insecurity has considered social support as a moderator in the negative relationship between job insecurity and wellbeing (Lim, 1996, 1997; Näswall et al., 2005). However, work-based support may be an important contextual resource for precarious schoolteachers (Näswall et al., 2005; Simbula, 2009) that may help in reducing their perceptions of job insecurity (Büssing, 1999). Moreover, Schlossberg's model of career transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) points out that, in an anticipated transition, represented in this case by the nearing of the end of the contract for precarious schoolteachers, among the four categories that determine how people experience and cope with the event, social support is a fundamental one (in addition to the situation, the self and the strategies).

Precarious and permanent schoolteachers have similar roles when performing their job, since temporary teachers are hired to replace permanent ones. Furthermore, precarious schoolteachers do not voluntarily choose the temporary employment and they seek to be permanently enrolled by the school. Therefore, even if they are temporary employees, they may have some relational expectations towards their employer, rather than just transactional ones (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2008), such as being supported by colleagues and the school principal. The perspective of social support as an antecedent of the stressor is considered best suited for studies that examine chronic or on-going stressors (Brown and Bifulco, 1985; Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). Considering that the job insecurity of Italian precarious schoolteachers is a chronic condition, in this study we decided to analyse if schoolteachers who perceived that they were supported by colleagues and the school principal reported less perceived job insecurity over time; thus, we considered baseline social support as an independent and fixed variable, a predictor of change in the perceptions of job insecurity. Such an assumption is not uncommon in longitudinal studies on job stress that frequently examine baseline predictors associated with criteria over time (Gelsema et al., 2006; Sundin et al., 2011).

Since in an objective situation of job insecurity, individuals' perceptions of the work context influences their experiences of job insecurity (Låstad et al., 2014), we expect that schoolteachers that feel supported by colleagues and by the school principal may perceive less job insecurity over time. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

Hypotheses 2a: Social support from colleagues negatively predicts change in individuals' perceptions of job insecurity over time. The more social support schoolteachers perceive to receive from their colleagues, the less their perceptions of job insecurity will increase towards the end of their contract.

Hypotheses 2b: Social support from the school principal negatively predicts change in individuals' perceptions of job insecurity over time. The more social

support schoolteachers perceive to receive from the school principal, the less their perceptions of job insecurity will increase towards the end of their contract.

Method

Procedure and Participants.
Precarious teachers were contacted throughout a snowball exercise. They were instructed to fill in a general questionnaire, in which they provided some demographic data and information on the general level of the measured variables. Then, one month before school ended, they were asked to fill in the diary three days per week for three consecutive working weeks, at the end of each day before going to bed. This resulted in nine measurements points for perceived job insecurity.

Out of 69 people contacted, a total of 53 teachers answered the general questionnaire (76,8% response rate). Then, 47 out of 53 respondents returned the diaries completed (88,6% response rate). The total sample included 43 females (91,5%) and 4 males (8,5%). Their mean age was 34.89 (*SD* = 8.43, min 22, max 54); 40,4% of participants were single, 55,3% were married or cohabited and 4,3% were separated or divorced; 70,2% did not have children.

Among teachers, 19,1% worked in private schools and 80,9% in public schools; 25,5% worked in a primary school (ISCED1), 25,5% in a middle school (ISCED2) and 48,9% in a secondary school (ISCED3) (UNESCO, 2011; Schneider, 2013); among teachers working in secondary school, 12,8% worked in technical schools, 4,3% in trade schools, 25,5% in high schools. Mean seniority on the job was 20,32 months (*SD* = 13.88).

Measures
Social support from colleagues. This was measured through the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ, Karasek, 1985), already used in previous studies in Italy (Baldasseroni et al., 2001). The scale comprised four items on a four-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). An example of an item was "People I work with are helpful in getting the job done". Cronbach's α in this study was .74.

Social support from the school principal. This was measured through the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ, Karasek, 1985), already used in previous studies in Italy (Baldasseroni et al., 2001). The scale comprised four items on a four-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). An example of an item was "The principal of my school provides me with helpful advice on how to do my work". Cronbach's α in this study was .84.

Daily perceived job insecurity. This was assessed through the four-point scale from De Witte's (2000) job insecurity measure, which had already been used in previous studies in Italy (Piccoli and De Witte, 2015). An example of a job insecurity item was "Today, I feel insecure about the future of my job". The items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). Cronbach's α in this study ranged from .86 to .94 (*M*=.91).

Data Analyses
Time-based diaries allow investigators to examine changes in levels of variables lengthwise (Bolger et al., 2003). In this study, we followed a latent growth modelling (LGM) approach where observed variables were used to model change in precarious schoolteachers' perceptions of job insecurity. Growth parameters were estimated

using a random slope (Type = Random) with Maximum Likelihood (ML) and 5.000 bootstrap estimates. Additionally, the Algorithm = Integration option in the Analysis command was also used to deconstruct the continuous latent variable covariance matrix and the observed variable residual covariance matrix into orthogonal components in order to improve the optimization of the latent growth model (Muthén and Muthén, 2012).

Since the end of the contract was approaching, it was supposed that feelings of job insecurity might increase linearly over time, thus change in job insecurity was modeled linearly (Ferrie et al., 2002) (refer to Figure 1). Data analyses regarding the assessment of change were performed through MPLUS 7.3 (Muthén and Muthén, 2012). To model linear change in job insecurity, the factor loadings for each variable at each time point were fixed at 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 for the day 1 to day 9 (Ins_Day1-Ins_Day9). Day one was fixed as the intercept (0) to represent the first measurement occasion. The change (i.e., time-structured inter and intra individual variability) in job insecurity was then modeled through a second-order intercept and slope. To test model fit, the AIC and BIC fit indices were considered. As suggested by Kenny (2015), the AIC and BIC fit indices are comparative measures of fit and so they are meaningful only when two different models are estimated. Lower values indicate a better fit, so the model with the lowest AIC and BIC is the best fitting model.

The intercept mean represents the average job insecurity perception of the sample on day one, while the variance of the intercept captures the amount of inter-individual difference in job insecurity perceptions on day one. The slope mean represents the average rate of change in job insecurity perceptions of the sample per day. A positive mean implies an increase and a negative mean a decrease over time. Finally, the variance of the slope represents intra-individual differences in the rate of change (Gross et al., 2013).

To test if the social support provided by colleagues and the social support provided by the school principal were related with job insecurity perceptions over time, each type of social support was entered separately in the model and regressed on the intercept and slope of job insecurity (refer to Figure 2).

Results

In the first part of the results section, we report the correlations between research variables, as well as the descriptive statistics regarding the analysis of change to determine if a) perceptions of job insecurity were significantly different between participants on day 1 (intercept) and over time (slope), and b) if the intercept and the slope were correlated since this would require that we controlled for the intercept when testing our hypotheses (Ployhart and Vandenberg, 2010).

The means, standard deviations and correlations for all study variables are presented in Table 1. Social support from colleagues does not correlate with job insecurity at any time point; however, social support from the school principal correlates negatively with job insecurity on day 1 (-0.31), day 4 (-0.38), day 5 (-0.36), day 7 (-0.44), day 8 (-0.45) and day 9 (-0.35). The results from the linear growth model of job insecurity (model fit: AIC 535.05, BIC 560.95 Adjusted BIC 517.04) indicate that the covariance between the job insecurity intercept and slope is not significant, $\sigma = 0.011$, $S.E = 0.012$, $p = .375$, 95%CI [-0.010; 0.030]. This means that job insecurity perceptions on day one do not affect perceptions of job insecurity over time. The results also suggest that the mean, $\mu = 3.39$, $S.E = 0.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.174; 3.648] and variance, $\sigma = 0.84$, $S.E = 0.19$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.559; 1.164] of

the intercept are positive and statistically significant. Therefore, there are significant inter-individual differences at the initial level of job insecurity.

Regarding the fluctuations of job insecurity over time, Hypothesis 1 predicted that job insecurity would increase over time, the closer the end of the contract was. The results show that the mean of the slope is not significant, $\mu = 0.004$, $S.E = 0.011$, $p = .671$, 95% CI [-0.016; 0.019]. This suggests that there are no inter-individual changes in job insecurity over time; thus job insecurity does not increase steadily towards the end of the contract. However, the variance of the slope is significant, $\sigma = 0.002$, $S.E = 0.001$, $p < .05$, 95%CI [0.001; 0.004], meaning that there are intra-individual differences in the rate of change of job insecurity over time. These differences are observed three times a week for three weeks on (see Figure 3).

Hypothesis 2a predicted that social support from colleagues could reduce perceptions of job insecurity over time. In the growth model of social support from colleagues and job insecurity over time, the model fit is higher, thus worse, than the simple growth model (AIC 536.50, BIC 566.10 and Adjusted BIC 515.04). The results further suggest that support provided by colleagues does not relate with schoolteachers' perceptions of job insecurity on day 1, $B = -.27$, $S.E = .31$, $p > .05$, 95% CI [-0.793; 0.230], and over time, $B = -.03$, $S.E = .02$, $p > .05$, 95% CI [-0.060; 0.007].

Hypothesis 2b predicted that social support from the school principal could reduce perceptions of job insecurity over time. In the growth model of social support provided by the school principal and job insecurity over time, the model fit is lower, thus better, than the simple growth model (AIC 528.57, BIC 558.17 and Adjusted BIC 507.99). The results further suggest that support from the school principal relates negatively with schoolteachers' perceptions of job insecurity on day one, $B = -.47$, $S.E = .24$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-0.862; -0.105], and over time, $B = -.05$, $S.E = .02$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-0.089; -0.013]. Although smaller, the results for the intercept, $B = -.44$, $S.E = .26$, $p < .09$, 95% CI [-0.855; -0.036], and the slope, $B = -.05$, $S.E = .03$, $p < .06$, 95% CI [-0.086; -0.007] are the same when controlling for support from colleagues (AIC 531.94, BIC 565.24 and Adjusted BIC 508.79).

Figure 4 summarizes these results.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to test how perceptions of job insecurity evolve over time and if social support could lower perceptions of job insecurity over time.

In this study, we followed precarious schoolteachers on nine occasions over the course of the last three weeks of their teaching assignment with the aim of observing their perceptions of job insecurity over time. Contrary to what was expected, schoolteachers' average perception of job insecurity did not steadily increase towards the end of their contracts (Hypothesis 1); thus, Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed. Still, there were individual differences in how it changed over time, showing fluctuations during a three-week period, three times a week, and indicating a more dynamic nature of job insecurity fluctuations over time. The Conservation of Resources Theory states that, to counteract a stressor, people activate the resources at their disposal. Resource activation depends, in turn, on the individual's pool of resources and their capability to retain and regain resources (COR Theory, Hobfoll, 2002). The perception of job insecurity on behalf of precarious schoolteachers may derive from the loss-gain resource dynamic that occurs during the week probably in conjunction with the rise of other job demands such as work overload, discipline problems, low student motivation (Skaalvick and Skaalvick, 2018) that goes with the difficulty to retain and

regain resources (Eurofound, 2019). This is in line with previous studies that have highlighted how perceptions of job insecurity and consequences may be more determined by other factors, among which the perception of control over the job situation, perceived employability, family responsibilities and need for security (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002), rather than exclusively by a temporary contract (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006; De Witte and Naswall, 2003). Furthermore, precariousness is a structural part and a physiological trait of the public education system (Grimaldi, 2013), which due to the shortage of open-hired teachers uses fixed-term teachers to ensure the effective delivery of the training program offered by schools. Therefore, precarious schoolteachers, who are aware of how the system operates, on the one end may not have high expectations in term of job security; on the other, they may rely on being called for the next appointment. This could mean that the timing of the precarious contract does not matter compared to other factors related to their perception of control and it could further explain why they do not perceive the end of the contract as a transition that increases their feelings of job insecurity.

The second hypotheses predicted that social support from colleagues (Hypothesis 2a) and from the school principal (Hypothesis 2b) might enhance schoolteachers' feeling of being in control and reduce their perceptions of job insecurity. Findings showed that support provided by colleagues did not relate with job insecurity over time; thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. However the support from the school principal was found to reduce precarious schoolteachers' perceptions of job insecurity in a way that when teachers reported feeling more supported by their school principal, they also reported lower levels of job insecurity over time (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994); thus Hypothesis 2b was confirmed. It is possible that the effects of social support differ according to occupational groups or types of stressors (Swanson and Power, 2001). Consistently with the importance of support in anticipated transitions (Schlossberg et al. 1995), the social support provided by the school principal, which may also be seen as an expectation that characterises the precarious schoolteachers psychological contract (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2008), seems to compensate for their job insecurity. The recent legislation in Italy, known as "Buona Scuola" (law n. 107/2015, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2015), has given school principals the power to select and recruit the new permanent teachers who best fit the most suitable curriculum and training project of their institute (Fusacchia and Luccisano, 2014). Accordingly, even if the moment in which the precarious teacher will be permanently appointed depends on their position on the national ranking list, by entertaining good relationships with the school principal, the precarious teacher could enhance their chances of being employed by the same school in the future. Furthermore, the support received from the school principal may be an important contextual resource that could help precarious teachers to manage job demands; thus, it could favor the sense of being in control of their present role in the school.

Limitations and further research
This study presents several limitations. First of all, its sample is relatively small, as is often the case in diary studies. This being said, when tracking changes over time, a large number of days but fewer participants are needed (Ohly et al., 2010).

Secondly, the sample of this study includes only precarious schoolteachers and does not take into account permanent teachers; thus, results cannot be generalised for schoolteacher populations. Further studies should also consider perceptions of job

insecurity over time in a sample of permanent teachers.

Furthermore, the diary method is methodologically complex as it requires high levels of commitment and dedication on behalf of participants. To address this, this diary study has privileged the investigation of few variables through the use of short scales, so that the diary questionnaire only takes a few minutes to be completed. This also means the risk of reporting less in-depth phenomenon for each measurement (Bolger et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, this study is the first to investigate how perceptions of job insecurity change over time in a sample of schoolteachers and these results can be useful to encourage research on this population which is sensitive to precariousness and job insecurity in countries other than Italy.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study contributes to the literature on job insecurity as it investigates the nature of the change in perceptions of job insecurity. The results of this study show that perceptions of job insecurity vary regardless of when the employment contract will end. Nevertheless, findings show intra-individual differences on how job insecurity is perceived over time. This means that the average level of change of a schoolteacher's perceptions of job insecurity is stable, despite there being significant differences in how each schoolteacher experiences job insecurity towards the end of the contract. These results contribute to sustaining the subjective nature of perceived job insecurity (van Vuuren, 1990), since precarious schoolteachers in the same objective situation of job insecurity differ in their subjective perceptions of job insecurity (Klandermans et al., 2010). Further studies should explore the loss-gain resource dynamic of perceptions of job insecurity by taking into account personal resources, for instance coping strategies (Richter et al., 2013), recovery experiences (Kinnunen et al., 2010) and environmental factors such as social support from family and friends (Lim, 1996) that may contribute to the dynamic change in the perceptions of job insecurity over time. In doing so, practitioners may develop interventions to foster people's resilience and capability to counteract job stressors in order to preserve their wellbeing.

The findings of this study showed that social support provided by the school principal is paramount for precarious teachers (Simbula, 2009). These results contribute to sustaining the direct relationship between social support and the stressor (Fenlason and Beehr, 1994; Viswesvaran et al., 1999). Moreover, they highlight that, for precarious teachers, the perception of being supported by the school principal redefines the potential for harm posed by their job situation, hence preventing their precarious situation from being appraised as highly stressful (Baqutayan, 2011). Practitioners should assess these results and suggest interventions both to enhance principal-teachers exchange relationships (Price and Moolenaar, 2015) and to increase the awareness of precarious schoolteachers of the new role that principals have in the recruitment process, in the light of the new Italian legislation.

Furthermore, schools should promote free refresher training courses to help precarious schoolteachers deal with their job situation. More specifically, there should be structural measures aimed at reducing precariousness in school teaching and targeted programs focused on helping precarious schoolteachers to deal with temporary employment and job loss. The role of continuous training for schoolteachers, both fixed-term and open-ended and, above all, for principals, is therefore fundamental. For the latter, it is important to point out the importance of training on managerial culture contents referring to the specific context of the school (they are the principals who can, in turn, build the conditions for continuous and

significant training of the teaching staff) and on leadership in the relationship with teachers (Ross and Gray, 2006).

Finally, in designing their interventions, practitioners may consider the *job crafting* perspective as a proactive strategy that could help schoolteachers to be more aware of the importance of resources for their wellbeing (Ingusci et al., 2016). Interventions may aim to promote a good relationship between schoolteachers and principals by teaching schoolteachers to manage the job resources in the relationship with principal (seeking for autonomy, feedbacks, training and support) in order to gain opportunities for professional development and enhance their employability. Since precarious schoolteachers have similar job characteristics to permanent teachers, they may benefit from the job-crafting perspective, as this could help them to become crafters of job resources, and therefore to foster their relationship with school principals. This process could help precarious schoolteachers in managing their concerns associated to the end of the contract with a sense of autonomy and control.

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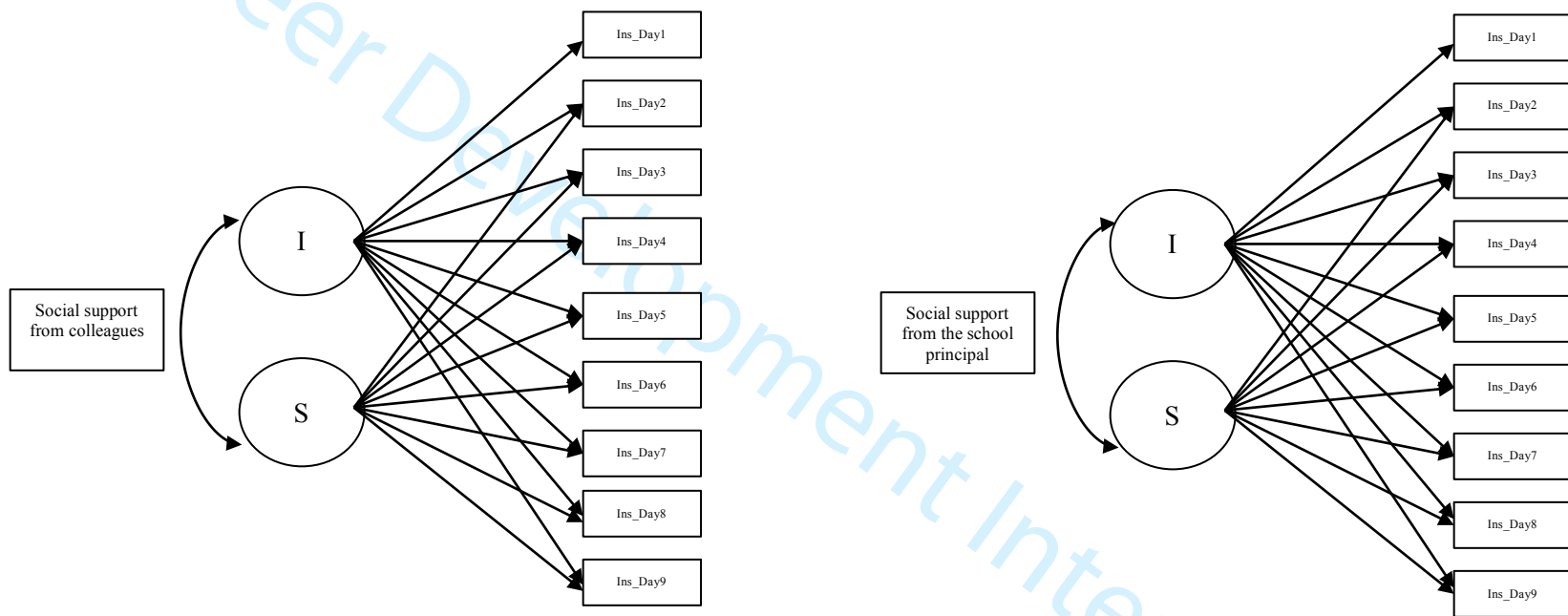
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Figure 1. Hypothesized model: positive linear trend in job insecurity as the end of the contract approaches.
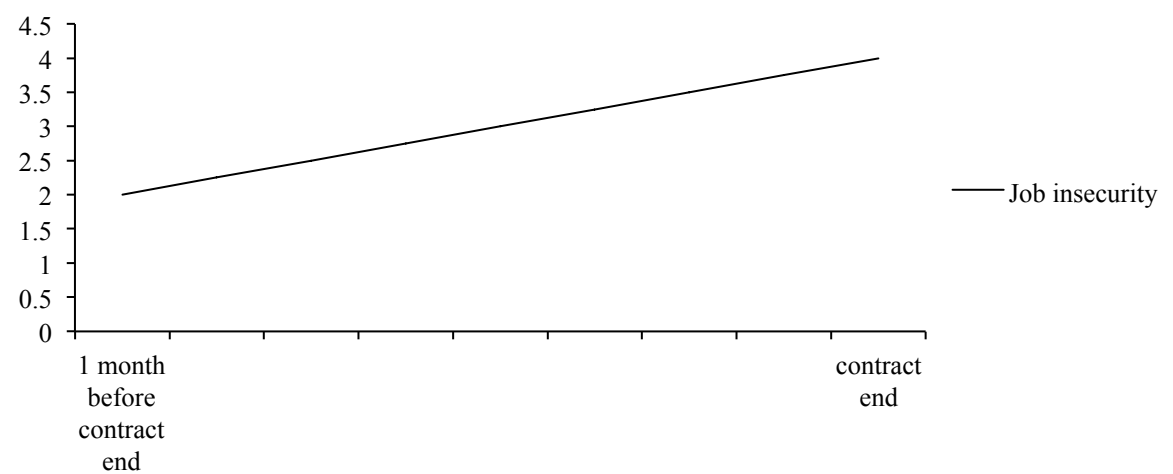
Figure 2. Hypothesized model with social support.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between social support and daily job insecurity.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Social support from colleagues	2.82	.50	-										
2. Social support from the school principal	2.58	.56	.35*	-									
3. Ins_Day1	3.50	.97	-.07	-.31*	-								
4. Ins_Day2	3.43	.97	-.15	-.24	.81**	-							
5. Ins_Day3	3.33	1.04	-.19	-.29	.81**	.94**	-						
6. Ins_Day4	3.39	1.09	-.18	-.38*	.87**	.78**	.87**	-					
7. Ins_Day5	3.44	1.06	-.14	-.36*	.84**	.70**	.80**	.96**	-				
8. Ins_Day6	3.38	.98	-.08	-.17	.65**	.88**	.93**	.73**	.75**	-			
9. Ins_Day7	3.43	.97	-.08	-.44**	.84**	.73**	.78**	.92**	.95**	.71**	-		
10. Ins_Day8	3.39	1.04	-.05	-.45**	.81**	.74**	.78**	.89**	.91**	.71**	.95**	-	
11. Ins_Day9	3.50	.96	-.19	-.35*	.82**	.70**	.78**	.92**	.94**	.71**	.94**	.96**	-

Notes: *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$.

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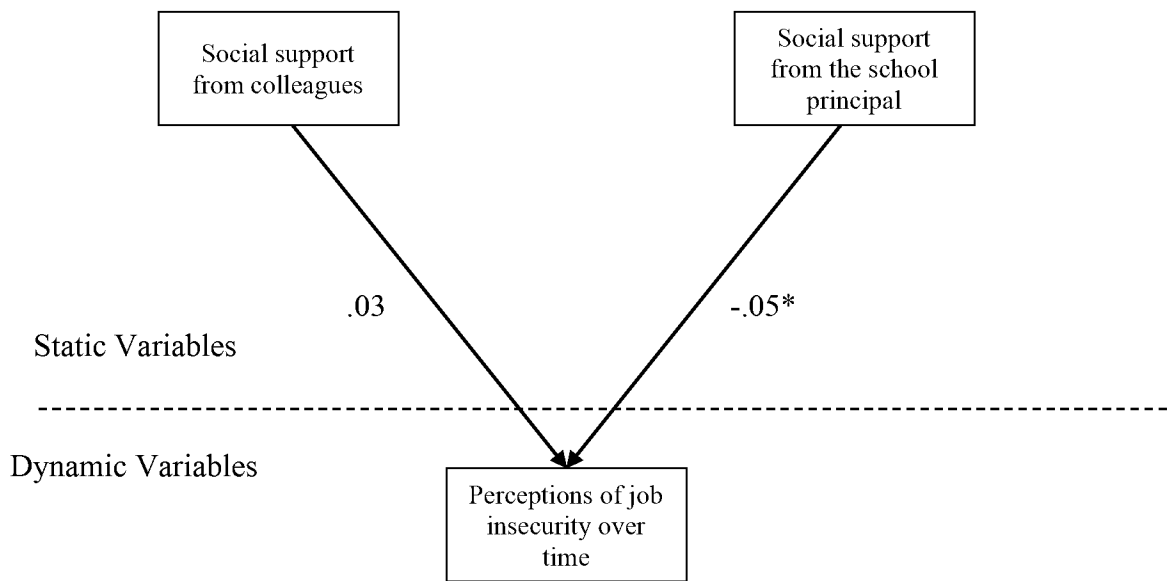
Figure 3. Fluctuations of perceptions of job insecurity over three weeks period. Coloured lines regard the slope for each participant; the black line regards the average slope.
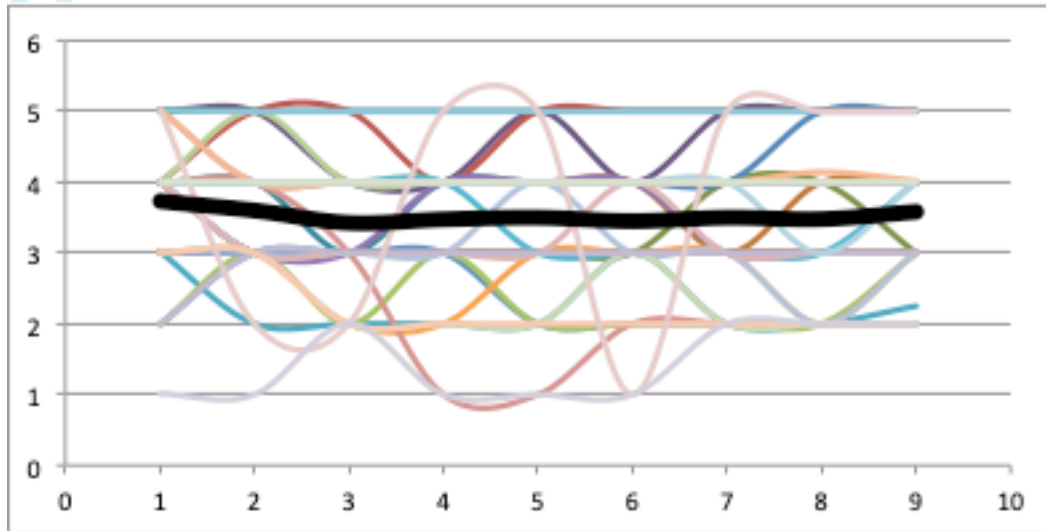
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Figure 4. Hypothesized model: Effects of social support from colleagues and from the school principal on perceptions of job insecurity over time.

Social support from colleagues

Social support from the school principal

.03

-.05*

Static Variables

Dynamic Variables

Perceptions of job insecurity over time

Notes: *$p<0.05$.