

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF STRUCTURES AND ACTIVE COPING

Jasmina Knežević<sup>1,\*</sup> and Miroslav Knežević<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Preschool Teacher and Sport Trainers High School  
Subotica, Serbia

<sup>2</sup>Medical Center, General Hospital  
Subotica, Serbia

DOI: 10.7906/indecs.14.2.13

Regular article

Received: 3 February 2016.

Accepted: 3 March 2016.

## ABSTRACT

In addition to cope with usual stressful circumstances at work, nowadays, it is important to examine what kind of mental capacities of medical staff are adaptive in respect of a new type of stress – job insecurity.

Special focus is put upon self structures as personality determinants and the role they have in coping.. The aim of the study was to determine the role of the self structures in active coping with job insecurity. It was supposed that the increasing integration of self structures leads to increasing use of active coping strategies. Perceived job insecurity was measured by The job insecurity perception scale (Knežević and Majstorović, 2013). The Ego Functioning Questionnaire (Majstorović, Legault and Green-Demers, 2008) was used to evaluate types of ego-functioning; coping were assessed by the Cybernetic coping scale (Edwards and Baglioni, 1993).

In order to test the hypothesis the multivariate regression analysis was developed with self-regulation as predictor and active coping strategy as a criterion. A significant model  $F(3, 306) = 26,73$ ,  $p < 0,001$ , was obtained with all the predictors selected as significant. The prediction directions were as expected - Integrated and Ego-investing self were positive predictors ( $\beta = 0,35$ ,  $p < 0,001$ , and  $\beta = 0,16$ ,  $p < 0,01$ , respectively), while the impersonal self singled out as a negative predictor ( $\beta = -0,13$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ). The results have shown that the development of self structures is valid predictor for the active coping of medical staff when facing with job insecurity.

## KEY WORDS

self structures, job insecurity, coping

## CLASSIFICATION

JEL: Z19

\*Corresponding author, *η*: [jmknezevic@gmail.com](mailto:jmknezevic@gmail.com), +381 69 161 0830,  
Blaska Rajica street 5/16, Subotica, Serbia

## **INTRODUCTION**

The work of medical staff is extremely stressful; it requires developed mental capacity to overcome everyday stress and to function adaptively in stressful circumstances. Nowadays, it is especially important to examine what kind of mental capacities of health care workers are adaptive in respect of a new type of daily intense stress what is stress caused by rising job insecurity.

## **JOB INSECURITY**

According to Vander Elst et al. [1] job insecurity is defined as frustration of basic psychological needs. Klandermans and van Vuuren [2] state that job insecurity can be seen as objective and subjective construct. Subjective job insecurity represents a psychological phenomenon which is primarily characterized by the experience of uncertainty connected to the employment future where there might be significant differences among the employees within the same organization [3].

The job insecurity is a threat that each individual perceives and responds differently when it reaches a critical level. A great number of situational and individual factors determine the threshold of threat and influence the readiness of an individual to perceive and react to the threat: a type of affective attachment [4], defensive self-respect [5], authenticity and consciousness [6], etc. The perception of job insecurity is also influenced by certain demographic and status variables. The researches have most commonly examined the connection to gender, age, education level, length of work experience and previous experiences with the job insecurity perception [7]. Hodgins and Knee [8] speak about the personality variables that influence the job insecurity observation – first of all, types of self structures and dispositional mood factors.

## **SELF STRUCTURES AND THREAT**

The self represents the personality instance which is responsible for the allocation of conative and cognitive resources which help the individual to establish, up to a specific degree, an integrated experience of the world and himself in it. Hodgins and Knee [8] represent the humanistic conceptualization of the self in accordance with the theory of self-determination, they point out that human beings possess an inherited organismic self, which consists of the main motivational apparatus and cognitive developmental dispositions. The developmental process is initiated by three basic psychological needs: the need for relatedness, competence and autonomy. However, the social surroundings can encourage or obstruct the natural tendency of the self to accomplish its potential completely. According to these authors, the quality of the ego functioning becomes directly dependent on how successfully the system integrates outer and inner experiences into existing structures. It also becomes dependent on the adaptability of structures in situations when they are faced with new upcoming experiences (primarily of a threatening character).

Beginning from the motivational orientation and the dominance of some of the personal self-regulation styles (the autonomous, the controlled and the impersonal). Hodgins and Knee [8] describe three types of the self: the integrated self, the ego-investing an impersonal self, which influence the perception and the processing of unpleasant experiences. The integrated self refers to the harmonized self system; it originates in individuals who got required social support in their efforts to satisfy completely their three basic psychological needs during their development. Individuals with an integrated self succeed in learning to value themselves and what they really are, to recognize the importance of their own authentic inner impulses and develop unconditional self-evaluation and self-respect. While conducting most of their

activities these individuals are intrinsically motivated; they have stable self-confidence, they enjoy social contacts and they are spontaneous in their reactions. Their self-system is open to changes and innovations and it is ready for research and for receiving contents experimentally from both, the inner and outer reality. With regard to other ego functioning types, the integrated self gives the opportunity for a more objective and more timely perception. Hodgins and Kneee [8] point out that the ego-investing self develops within circumstances where autonomy lacks support. When this happens, the internalized social pressure and limitations stimulate the development of self-evaluation based on a constructed (fake) image about oneself, which is founded on acquiring approval of others instead of authentic self-affirmation. As a result of this, individuals are energetically encouraged by extrinsic goals, like money, fame and power; they behave rigidly, their perception of reality is selective and they are eager to gain confirmation and acknowledgement for their actions and behavior. The impersonal self represents the lowest level of self-integration. This type of self appears during the individual's development and it includes personal experience in which three basic physiological needs were in a great way (critically) unsatisfied [8]. The vitality of these individuals is low and it points out to the common lack of motivation. These individuals display lack of intention in reacting, and when they show it, they have a wish to terminate the action as fast as possible; they get excited easily, they are often cluttered with information and overwhelmed by negative thoughts and feelings. As a consequence of this, these individuals withdraw from new experiences, they turn towards routines and repetitive activities and they get engaged in social auto-isolation in order to protect their own unstable functioning.

Given the situation of job insecurity requires effective self-regulatory processes that enable a high level of directivity of attention and regulation of cognitive effort, careful self-reflection, monitoring and evaluation of implemented efforts and action, it is supposed that only good self-regulatory processes and developed self structures exhibit the potential to successfully operate and to active cope in a stressful circumstance like job insecurity. In this direction, the aim of this study is to determine the role of the self structures in active coping with job insecurity. It was supposed that the increasing integration of self structures leads to increasing use of active coping strategies in situation of job insecurity.

## **METHOD**

### **SAMPLE**

The research has been conducted on a sample of 102 health workers: men (46; 45,1 %), and women (56; 54,9 %), from the three public hospitals in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Research was conducted in the period January-March 2013.

### **INSTRUMENTS**

*The Scale of the Perception of Job Insecurity (SPJI)* [9] was created according to similar scales [10]. The scale consists of 22 items, all of the items are expressed in Likert's scale of five degrees. The perception of job insecurity was conceptualized as the accessibility of the working role for the employees for the certain time in the future, and it is made of three qualitative dimensions: the feeling of helplessness (affective dimension), the strength of the threats (affective) and the valuation of the possible job loss (cognitive dimension).

*The Ego Functioning Questionnaire* [11] was designed to measure three types of self: Integrated self, Egoinvesting self and Impersonal [8]. The questionnaire consists of 30 items that measure different types of self (10 items for each type of the self). All items are expressed on the seven-point Likert scale.

The coping concept in the article is placed within the framework of cybernetic theory of stress and coping formulated by Edwards [12] according to which coping is conceptualized as an attempt to reduce and eliminate negative effects of stress on psychological well – being of an individual. Following coping behaviours (five forms) were assessed by the *Cybernetic coping scale* [13]: (a) attempts to reduce symptoms, and to directly improve the psychological well-being (b) change in the situation – an active troubleshooting by trying to bring the situation in conjunction with personal preferences, (c) customization – customize personal preferences to fit the situation (d) overcome by devaluing the importance for the individual – importance that is generated from a disagreement between his desires and perceptions, and (e) avoiding – divert attention from the situation. According to Edwards [12], of these five coping strategies, the only active strategy is Change in the situation.

## METHOD OF DATA ANALYZING

The descriptive statistics, as one of the statistics analysis, and multiple regressive analyses were used. Table 1 shows the descriptive indicators of dependent variables in research.

**Table 1.** Descriptive indicators of dependent variables ( $N = 102$ ).

Performance	Achieved range	AS	SD	$\alpha$	The curvature distribution	The ellipticity distribution
Change in the situation (4)	4-16	11,59	2,65	0,79	0,24	0,48
Customization (4)	5-16	10,27	2,19	0,64	0,24	0,48
Devaluing (4)	4-15	8,48	2,94	0,86	0,24	0,48
Avoiding (4)	4-16	8,21	3,06	0,85	0,24	0,48
Reduce of symptoms (4)	4-16	10,29	2,82	0,82	0,24	0,48
Perceived job insecurity (21)	35-105	73,93	16,80	0,90	0,26	0,51
Integrated self (10)	26-70	50,54	9,50	0,83	0,24	0,48
Egoinvesting self (10)	22-66	43,49	10,18	0,81	0,24	0,48
Impersonal self (10)	10-51	25,58	11,10	0,89	0,24	0,48

After analysis, it is evident that from the normal distribution does not significantly differ not one variable (as seen from the index of curvature and kurtosis distribution, which are located within the values  $-1$  and  $+1$ ), and the reliability below the lower limit on eligibility ( $0,70$ ) has the subscale Customization on CCS instrument. Other scales have satisfactory reliability indices.

## RESULTS

To test this hypothesis the multivariate regression analysis was conducted with three types of self-regulation as predictors (Integrated self, Egoinvesting self and Impersonal self) and one active coping strategy (Change in the situation) as a criterion. When predicting the strategy Change in the situation a significant model  $F(3, 306) = 26,73, p < 0,001$ , is obtained with all the predictors selected as significant, as shown in Table 2.

The resulting prediction directions are as expected – Integrated and Egoinvesting self are positive predictors ( $\beta = 0,35, p < 0,001$ , and  $\beta = 0,16, p < 0,01$ , respectively), while the Impersonal self singled out as a negative predictor ( $\beta = -0,13, p < 0,05$ ) of Change in the situation.

Since the integrated self structures (Integrated and Egoinvesting self) encourage active coping and undeveloped (Impersonal self) are not associated with an active coping of medical staff in unstable employment situation, we can say that the formulated hypothesis is supported.

**Table 2.** The significance of the model and partial contributions of predictors in the prediction of Change in the situation.

Model	Predictors	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
$R^2 = 0,21$ ; $F = 26,73$ ; $p < 0,001$	Integrated self	0,349	6,182	0,000
	Egoinvesting self	0,159	2,779	0,006
	Impersonal self	-0,125	-2,380	0,018

## DISCUSSION

Results of multivariate regression suggest a statistically significant positive relationship between integrated self-regulation and the use of change in the situation and egoinvesting self-structures and the use of active coping strategies – change in the situation. impersonal self-regulation is a negative predictor of strategy change in the situation.

Different types of self structures generate different levels of self-confidence, vulnerability and tolerance towards threat (threshold of threat) conditioning by this the level of a person's defense and his openness to the current experience. The integrated self enables a completely authentic perception and processing of an unpleasant experience – such as it really is with full self-confidence directed towards overcoming of threat, while the highest level of defense (the impersonal self) leads to greatest reality distortions, withdrawal, avoidance and similar. These self structure characteristics determine the manner and level of activity in relation to the threat. It could be said that the development of self structures and increased integration of self-regulation encourages the active relationship towards stress in the situation of job insecurity and active coping with the intention of establishing control over the situation.

Taking into account the differences in the quality and quantity of self structures and self-regulatory processes, as well as the type of motivational orientation that lies at their basis, it can be assumed that integrated self in a situation of job instability will be directed towards action that implies the realization of personal target of authentic value. Implementation of the strategy change in the situation will be aimed at trying to minimize the risks associated with job instability, and the threat generated by job insecurity will be transformed in a challenge that calls for direct action. In contrast to the integrated self, egoinvesting self does not provide a good structure target, nor a sense of personal ownership and has no capacity for strategic planning, and is reactive, not proactive by character. Due to a lower quality of self-regulatory process, egoinvesting self-regulation lacks basic information and goals within specific, operational self-process, and relies on social comparison that is used for the evaluation of outcomes. Active coping implemented by egoinvesting self structures will be directed towards restoring impaired psychological well-being and repairing damage of the self caused by job insecurity. Therefore, both types of self-developed structures shall encourage active coping – change in the situation – active coping of integrated self will be directly aimed towards the preservation of work and reduction of the risks associated with the job instability, active coping of egoinvesting self will be indirectly aimed at restoring the psychological well-being of the individual in a situation of job insecurity.

The other research results also show that good quality of self regulation is a positive predictor, and poor quality of self structures is negative predictors of the problem-focused coping strategies [14]. Also, it was confirmed that the self-developed structure is positively associated with active forms of overcoming [15]. Identified regulation which is base of

integrated self allows a person to be persistent in achieving the goals that are important to her in the long run; it encourages the person to be persistent and to foster activities that are not her actual interest, but which are important in achieving her goal [14], it is associated with positive outcomes in an academic setting, such as, commitment, psychological adjustment to school, perseverance and concentration [15]. In similar way, Blascovich and Tomaka [16] point out that negative excitement that accompanies response to the threat – which is characteristic of the impersonal and partly for egoinvesting self, reduces the capacity for coping.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to determine the role of the self structures in active coping with job insecurity. The results have shown that the increasing integration of self structures leads to increasing use of active coping strategy – change in the situation.

The most integrated self structure (integrated self) show the potential for the highest level of active coping with the situation of unstable job. These structures have the ability to directly confront the stressor – for them, job instability is the challenge. The less integrated self structures (egoinvesting self) indicate the potential for a lower level of active coping – they have the ability to confront the stressor indirectly through rebuilding the damage that occurred at the level of personality in a stressful transaction with unstable job.

The research results increase the insight in the phenomenon of job instability and offer a basis for creating organizational interventions aimed at strengthening resilience of medical staff to stress caused by the perception of job insecurity. Knowing the role of self structures as personality determinants in coping with the job insecurity threat it is possible to create organizational interventions directed towards the resilience of the employees. Taking into account that support from social surroundings influences the nature of the self structures [8], by supporting the social context, conditions will be created for the self to develop openness towards experience and to realize an autonomous regulation of behavior. In other words, the support from the social surroundings will influence the nature of the self functioning so that it will direct it and make it more or less open to new life experiences, or more or less self-determined and active in behavior regulation.

Limitation of research are connected with the structure of the coping process. Due to the fact that job insecurity represents an intense chronic stress with coping mechanisms that vary through the stressful transaction, individual assessment is related to a (separate) specific stressful episode and a coping mechanism that is currently used in this episode. In the study of stress is very important which part of the process is "caught" by research; optimal situation would mean that all research subjects correspond / estimate the same stressful episode in the experience of job instability and the stress of the same degree (magnitude). One way of overcoming the difficulties of this kind is certainly the application of a longitudinal research design in the research.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Vander Elst, T.; Van den Broeck, A.; De Witte, H. and De Cuyper, N.: *The mediating role of frustration of psychological needs in the relationship between job insecurity and work-related well-being*.  
Work & Stress **26**(3), 252-271, 2012,  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.703900>,
- [2] Klandermans, B. and van Vuuren, T.: *Job Insecurity*.  
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology **8**(2), Introduction, 1999,

- [3] Kinnunen, U.; Mauno, S.; Nätti, J. and Happonen, M.: *Perceived job insecurity: A longitudinal study among Finish employees*. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology **8**(2), 243-260, 1999, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/135943299398348>,
- [4] Hart, J.; Shaver, P.R. and Goldenberg, J.L.: *Attachment, self-esteem, worldviews, and terror management: Evidence for a tripartite security system*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **88**(6), 999-1013, 2005, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.6.999>,
- [5] Jordan, C.H. et al.: *Secure and defensive high self-esteem*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **85**(5), 969-978, 2003, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.969>,
- [6] Lakey, C.E.; Kernis, M.H.; Heppner, W.L. and Lance, C.E.: *Individual differences in authenticity and mindfulness as predictors of verbal defensiveness*. Journal of Research in Personality **42**(1), 230-238, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.05.002>,
- [7] Kinnunen, U.; Mauno, S.; Nätti, J. and Happonen, M.: *Organizational antecedents and outcomes of job insecurity: a longitudinal study in three organizations in Finland*. Journal of Organizational Behavior **21**(4), 443-459, 2000, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1379\(200006\)21:4%3C443::AID-JOB24%3E3.0.CO;2-N](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(200006)21:4%3C443::AID-JOB24%3E3.0.CO;2-N),
- [8] Hodgins, S.H. and Knee, R.C.: *The integrating self and conscious experience*. In: Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M., eds.: *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. The University of Rochester Press, Rochester, pp.87-100, 2002,
- [9] Knežević, J. and Majstorović, N.: *Measuring the perception of instability of employment: construction and validation of scales perception of instability of employment*. In Serbian. manuscript, Faculty of Philosophy – University of Novi Sad. Novi Sad, 2013,
- [10] Isaksson, K.; Hellgren, J. and Pettersson, P.: *Structural transformation in Swedish retail trade: Follow-up of a reorganisation and layoff in KF/KDAB*. In Swedish. Reports No. 97/1998, Department of Psychology – Stockholm University, Stockholm, 1998,
- [11] Majstorović, N.; Legault, L. and Green-Demers, I.: *Measuring Selfhood according to Self-Determination Theory: Construction and Validation of the Ego Functioning Questionnaire (EFQ)*. Psihologija **41**(2), 213-235, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2298/PSI0802213M>,
- [12] Edwards, J.R.: *A cybernetic theory of stress, coping, and well-being in organizations*. Academy of Management Review **17**, 238-274, 1992,
- [13] Edwards, J.R. and Baglioni, A.J. Jr.: *The measurement of coping with stress: Construct validity of the Ways of Coping Checklist and the Cybernetic Coping Scale*. Work & Stress **7**(1), 17-31, 1993, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02678379308257047>,
- [14] Doron, J.; Stephan, Y.; Maiano, C.; and Le Scanff, C.: *Motivational Predictors of Coping With Academic Examination*. The Journal of Social Psychology **151**(1), 87-104, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224540903366768>,
- [15] Knee, C.R. and Zuckerman, M.: *A nondefensive personality: Autonomy and control as moderators of defensive coping and self-handicapping*. Journal of Research in Personality **32**(2), 115-130, 1998, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1997.2207>,
- [16] Reeve, J.: *Self determination theory applied to educational settings*. In: Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M., eds.: *Handbook of self-determination research*. University of Rochester Press, Rochester, pp.183-203, 2002,
- [17] Blascovich, J. and Tomaka, J.: *The biopsychosocial model of arousal regulation*. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology **28**, 1-51, 1996, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60235-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60235-X).